# THE ‘NORMAN HALL’, HORTON COURT, GLOUCESTERSHIRE: A RE-INTERPRETATION

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*The ‘Norman Hall’ at Horton Court in Gloucestershire is an early and unusually complete stone building, distinguished, in particular, by a pair of fine entrance doorways. It has previously been identified as a rare example of a 12th-century aisle-less domestic hall. Drawing on recent research work for the National Trust, a new study has been undertaken, examining both the building fabric and historical evidence. It is concluded that it was originally built not as a hall, but as a free-standing private chapel, to serve the adjoining prebendal manor house. The implications of this new identification are considered for the interpretation of contemporary houses and chapels.*

INTRODUCTION

The ‘Norman Hall’ at Horton Court poses problems for our interpretation of Romanesque architecture. The building does not fit readily into our understanding of the development of domestic architecture in the late 12th and 13th centuries. It is, however, a notable survival of a largely complete, early stone building with clear evidence for its plan, and the form and position of the original windows and doors. The present paper seeks to re-examine the sequence of the development of the building, particularly of the medieval phases, and suggest a new interpretation.

The hall – the building is referred to below as a hall without prejudice to its character – stands somewhat anomalously close to the entrance of the parish church. It lies between it and the main entrance door of the late 14th- or early 15th-century and later manor house (Figs 1–3). The fine quality of the mouldings of its doorways on both sides has suggested to a number of scholars that it was the predecessor to the later manorial buildings which it adjoins.

The Norman Hall was noted in passing by Turner and Parker in their pioneering work on English medieval domestic architecture, though it was omitted from the first volume of their study which included 12th-century buildings, where it might have found a place. Instead, it received a mention in the volume on 15th- and 16th-century buildings, where it was briefly considered alongside the later remains at Horton.[[1]](#footnote-1) The hall was dated there to *temp.* Henry I, perhaps an error for a more plausible attribution of *temp.* Henry II, and certainly the latter was given in a lecture to the Royal Archaeological Institute by Parker shortly after.[[2]](#footnote-2) Parker noted that the ‘low end’ of the building to the west of the entrance had been floored over as if to provide a chamber or bedroom above and a parlour below. At the time he was writing, in the mid-19th century, the whole building had an inserted floor and the earlier doorway to the first floor had been blocked, although the newel staircase remained. It was substantially in this state when drawn by the antiquarian and architect, John Buckler or his son, John Chessell Buckler – the styles of the two are very similar. One or the other sketched a narrow vice in the south-west corner of the building, though the doorway at its base may have still have been open at that stage.[[3]](#footnote-3)

A plan and brief description of the building was published as a result of a further visit of the Royal Archaeological Institute in 1930.[[4]](#footnote-4) More recent understanding of the building is due to the work of Margaret Wood who included Horton in her survey of Norman domestic architecture, dating it to *c.*1140. She specifically dismissed the idea that it might be a chapel, arguing that those who considered it such displayed ‘a certain timidity to recognise a Norman house as such’.[[5]](#footnote-5) She concluded that it was ‘an aisleless ground-floor hall, and was probably the prebendal manor-house’.[[6]](#footnote-6) The conservation of the buildings of Horton Court by the National Trust, who now own the building, provided the opportunity for a rather more thorough study A report was commissioned from Jane and Tony Harcourt, which was the first systematic examination of the fabric of the building, and marked a very substantial step forward in its interpretation.[[7]](#footnote-7) Their descriptive and analytical survey was supplemented by dendrochronology to provide precise dates for building works. The present study draws upon their work. We have re-analysed the standing fabric of the Norman Hall in a new survey which has been supported by a laser scan of the structure and the production of orthographic elevations. We have also reappraised the historic records of the building.

Recent understanding of the Norman Hall is summarized in the National Trust leaflet for the site.[[8]](#footnote-8) It describes it as ‘the main structure of the oldest rectory in England’, but continues rather more cautiously to say that ‘it substantially resembles the few surviving ‘manor’ houses of late Norman date’. The anonymous writer notes that the original builders may have put a room at either end of the Hall. The room at one end was served by a spiral stairway in the south-west end, while any room, perhaps detached, at the other would have been a kitchen or domestic rooms. A rather different interpretation is offered below.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO 1547

Horton manor was granted *c*. 1115 to Salisbury cathedral by Agnes de Bellofago (Beaufou), daughter of Ralph de Bellofago and wife of Henry de Ria, and by Henry her son.[[9]](#footnote-9) She was related to William de Bellofago, the late 11th-century bishop of Thetford and to Richard, archdeacon of Suffolk and later bishop of Avranches. The family had connections with the ecclesiastic elite, and the purpose of the donation was evidently to provide for a further relation.[[10]](#footnote-10) Gilbert de Bellofago was holding the prebend of Horton by 1149 and yet another relation, Robert de Bellofago, held it in 1155x61.[[11]](#footnote-11) He was still alive in 1193.[[12]](#footnote-12) Horton was annexed to the bishopric in 1219.[[13]](#footnote-13) This broke the link for the time being between the family and the estate. Something rather similar happened to the church of Bishops Canning and the estate of Horton – not Horton in Gloucestershire, but evidently Horton in Bishops Cannings (Wilts.) – which had been held by Robert de Bellofago and was annexed to the common fund after his death.[[14]](#footnote-14) It is not clear at which of the Hortons the bishop of Salisbury issued deeds in 1230/31, 1242 and 1250.[[15]](#footnote-15) The estate of the Gloucestershire Horton was re-established as a separate prebend in 1254 when it was exchanged by the bishop for the manor of Potterne (Wilts.) which was more valuable.[[16]](#footnote-16) The temporalities, which included four carucates of land, were taxed in 1291/2 at £8 11*s.* 4*d.*, while the spiritualities paid to Salisbury cathedral were taxed at £6 16*s.* 8*d.* This represented a tenth of the income from these sources.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The manor was held by a series of prebendaries in the later 13th and 14th centuries, but the holders in the 15th century are most relevant for the present purposes. The prebend was reserved to the pope in 1397, who provided it to Henry Beaufort who was perhaps a descendent of the family of the original grantor. When Beaufort was granted the bishopric of Lincoln in 1399, Nicholas Daniel was appointed to the estate and continued to hold it until his death in 1424. Subsequent prebendaries in the early 15th century included John Burton who was collated in 1424 and held the prebend until his death by 1431.[[18]](#footnote-18) The most important figure with regard to the buildings at Horton was William Knight (1475/6–1547) who held the prebend of Horton from 1516 to 1541. He was a pluralist, holding Horton simultaneously with prebends of Lincoln, St Paul’s and Bangor cathedrals, and relinquished them all only when appointed bishop of Bath and Wells in 1541. Given his many livings and his diplomatic career, which often took him abroad, it is surprising that he seems to have devoted so much attention to Horton.[[19]](#footnote-19) He not only remodelled the house, but also added a loggia in the garden, all in advanced Renaissance style.

THE LATE 12TH-CENTURY BUILDING

**Description**

The ‘Norman Hall’ forms an independent wing at the north-west corner of Horton Court, an extensive and multi-period building of later date. Immediately to the north lies the parish church, with a distance of only 5m separating it from the hall. The building is rectangular with an internal width of 5.0m and a length of 9.5m, and is oriented west-east, parallel to the church (Fig. 1). Although there have been various later alterations, the hall remains remarkably intact, with good evidence for its original form, except at the east end. There are two fine round-arched doorways of matching type, set opposite each other in the north and south walls (Fig 4a, b). Only the north wall retains its original windows, but there is clear evidence inside for the 12th-century windows to the west and south walls. The interior initially formed a single volume (see below), though a partial first floor was inserted in the 13th to 15th century, extended across the whole building in the 18th century and removed in the early 20th. The walls are generally built of limestone rubble, with dressings of fine-grained limestone.

The south side forms the main entrance front from the house. The doorway is now approached by a short set of steps due to later terracing of the site, the ground sloping southwards away from the church (Figs 2, 5). The entrance doorway, together with its matching counterpart to the north, is the finest feature of the building. The doorway is round-arched and of two orders, all of very finely executed masonry. The outer order is of sophisticated and very distinctive design. It has keeled shafts with moulded bases and trumpet scalloped capitals (Fig. 6). The trumpets rise from an astragal moulding and are also keeled, with two scallops on the front and side faces. The scallops are flat-fronted, with a small beaded edge moulding. The impost block above is cavetto-moulded, with a quirk above, the front faces to the south doorway (though not the north) having been cut back flush at a later date. The round-arched head has a single row of chevrons, angled outwards at 45°. The chevrons have a keeled moulding, and are set between two small roll-mouldings. The hood mould (like the impost blocks) has been cut back flush over the south doorway, but survives to the north, with a shallow cavetto moulding. The inner order has a plain round arch of regular voussoirs, with a rounded quadrant moulding and quirk, the jambs cut back for a later door frame. The priest’s door in the 15th-century parish church lies immediately opposite the south doorway of the ‘Norman Hall’. The north doorway of the hall is of exactly the same design, the only difference being that its original height was 100mm shorter (now emphasized by a raised ground level). Apart from minor damage and erosion, both doorways survive in remarkably intact condition, with no later replacement stonework.

The main walling of the south front is of irregularly coursed stone rubble. Set into this rubble stone over the doorway is a former weathering for a porch roof, later cut back flush, and also truncated on the left side by an inserted opening, now blocked (Fig. 5). It is unclear if the weathering is an insertion, though the work is well-executed if the porch was a later addition. Running along the base of the wall, at the original ground level, are sections of the original plinth, of dressed stone with a small chamfer. At the south-west corner is a feature of particular interest: an attached shaft with keeled moulding, set within a recessed corner. The quoins and shaft are of well-dressed ashlar, with very fine joints. The shaft has an eroded moulding at the base and is truncated halfway up the wall, the whole upper corner having been rebuilt later in association with the creation of a vice stair. The blocked narrow doorway between the south-west corner and the entrance door was inserted to serve this stair. The doorway surround is plain and square, with a two-centred arched head. The rebate and pintle hinges shows that the door, unexpectedly, opened outwards. Inside, the vice stair has been removed and the doorway area at ground floor re-faced with rubble, but a stone door jamb remains at first-floor level to the west gable, its skewed angle indicating that it led out of the lost vice. The former stair is shown on a surviving survey sketch made by Buckler (Fig 6).[[20]](#footnote-20)

Set high up above the blocked stair doorway is a small round-arched window. The head, cut from a single stone, and several jambs are of the same form as the two original windows in the north wall, but the opening has been truncated and re-set at a higher level, no doubt to accommodate the inserted stair. A roll-moulded bottom jamb stone survives inside to indicate the original location of this window. To the east of the entrance door, there are now two stone-mullioned windows to the ground floor and two more to the first floor. These stone windows were inserted in 1884, replacing previous sash windows.[[21]](#footnote-21) Inside, the location of one original 12th-century window can be seen, with a roll-moulded bottom jamb, and a short section of vertical straight jointing indicates the likely position of a second window.

The west gable is covered with cement render externally, but a small area of render was removed recently, showing that the walling is of rubble set in clay mortar, not ashlar (Fig. 2).[[22]](#footnote-22) A later buttress has been added at the north-west corner, and the west face here is covered by render, so it is not possible to say whether this corner had an attached shaft like that to the south-west. The gable has a large mullioned and transomed window, inserted as part of the 1884 alterations. Inside, the splayed window reveals incorporate the roll-moulded jambs of the original 12th-century window, re-set at some earlier date (Fig. 8). The original location of the window, a little narrower than the current opening, is indicated by the survival *in situ*, once again, of the roll-moulded bottom jambs.

The north wall survives in very complete state. The fine north doorway matches that to the south, as described above. To the east of the doorway are two original windows, set quite high up in the wall. The round-arched heads are cut from a single block of stone, with plain chamfering that continues down the jambs. The windows have no other decoration or moulding, their plain treatment contrasting to that of the doorway. Internally, the windows have splayed reveals with roll-moulding to the round arch and jambs, all intact except for the sills, which have been built up where the first floor was inserted (Fig. 9). The north wall has ashlar facing externally, an unexpected feature given the use of rubble stone elsewhere. The ashlar facing has rather irregularly sized blocks, with some tapering courses and a discontinuity over the doorway. Unlike the finely-finished stone dressings elsewhere, most of the ashlar is more crudely finished, with rough diagonal dressing marks (Fig. 10). It seems that this facing, although original 12th-century work, incorporates re-used material, rather than being all newly-cut like the main dressings. Three buttresses have been added at some stage to the north wall, perhaps to reflect the buttresses on the adjoining church. A stone over the doorway with the arms of Robert Neville, Bishop of Salisbury (1427–37) may have been inserted at the same time. The east buttress unfortunately obscures the north-east corner, so the original treatment of the east end here is unclear. The south-east corner has similarly been obscured by the west range of the main house, which abuts here, including the insertion of ashlar linings for a doorway.

Turning to the interior, the wholesale removal of plasterwork during later restoration work has revealed various features. A moulded string-course, hacked back flush to the north and south walls, but surviving to the west wall, ran around the building at the base of the windows (Figs 8, 9). It had a small roll moulding below and a larger roll moulding above, with a projection of around 100mm. The upper roll has had a later square seating cut into the top of it. The string course was carried up and over the south doorway as a hood-mould, though it stopped either side of the slightly lower north doorway. Both the north and south doorways have segmental inner arches with well-cut voussoirs and square jambs. The taller south doorway also has a relieving arch above, of rubble voussoirs (Fig. 5). An important piece of evidence is that the original stone jambs of both doorways show an absence of the draw-bar sockets which are typical of early residential buildings. In both cases, the door jambs have been cut out later to allow the insertion of a drop door-bar. The west gable window was evidently rather different to the windows in the north and south walls. It was wider, with an internal width of *c.*1300mm compared to *c*.900mm for the side walls, and also considerably taller. The re-set jambs also show that the roll-moulding did not run continuously around the window head. The roll-moulding here has a stop-end, so although the detail has been hacked back, it is evident there was a capital or impost block. It seems likely that this wider window had a central mullion and sub-arches.

Unfortunately, as on the exterior, the original arrangement inside the building at the east end is unclear. The east gable appears to have been rebuilt, with no evidence of bonding at the internal corners. A recess at high level in the north-east corner, possibly a putlog hole, incorporates a piece of roll-moulded stone, evidently re-used 12th-century fabric. A large chimneybreast was inserted in 1849 when a churchwardens’ room was created on the ground floor.[[23]](#footnote-23) This was re-worked in the 1920s, when the existing massive granite fireplace was imported.[[24]](#footnote-24) The roof structure (Fig. 3) is a later replacement, though the Harcourts, who had high-level access for their inspection, noted that it is smoke-blackened.[[25]](#footnote-25) This indicates that the building served at some stage as an open hall, though whether that use was original is considered further below.

**Interpretation and date of the original building**

The plans and an internal elevationsof the original building are shown at Figs 7, 12A. The two fine doorways led into a single tall, rectangular space. Rather than entering the building at the west end, the doors are set opposite each other and one bay to the east. The principal entrance to the south side was rather taller, perhaps with a porch from the beginning. The south side was also distinguished by an attached shaft, rising the full height of the south-west corner. The north side may not have received this decoration, but was the only wall with full ashlar facing, so was clearly considered important. The windows were all placed at high level, set directly above a moulded internal string course. Two narrow windows in the north wall were matched by two to the south, and another to the south-west. The west gable had a wider and taller window of two lights, indicating that it lit a large, open space. The roof hence probably had common rafter trusses of open form (probably with soulaces or scissor-bracing). The wholesale rebuilding of the east gable suggests the original building continued further east.

The doorways and the attached shaft to the south-west corner provide the best guide to the date of the building. No original timber has been identified which would allow tree-ring dating. Some authors assigned an early date to the building: Wood judged it *c*.1140, a date followed by Verey in the first edition of Pevsner’s *Buildings of England.[[26]](#footnote-26)* More recent sources have judged the date to be rather later. In the third edition of Pevsner (1999), Brooks gives a date of ‘quite late C12’.[[27]](#footnote-27) The keel moulding on the doorways and attached shaft provides a useful dating feature. Morris noted that keel mouldings were adopted under Cistercian influence in northern England from the 1160s.[[28]](#footnote-28) Closer regional comparables have been identified by Thurlby, with keeled shafts at the Lady Chapel of Glastonbury Abbey, built in 1184-86, and in the western part of the nave of Worcester Cathedral, dated c.1175-85. [[29]](#footnote-29) Both of these also have chevron ornament projecting at a 45° angle, as at Horton. The trumpet scallop capitals of the doorways are also very useful for dating. Such capitals are generally assigned to the 1170s or 1180s, but the keeling detail suggests a slightly later date. There is a remarkably similar trumpet scallop capital with keeling in the Great Hall of Berkeley Castle (Gloucestershire), only around ten miles away. The capital forms the head of a nook-shaft to a surviving window reveal of the Norman hall, and is dated to c.1190-1200 on the website of the Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland.[[30]](#footnote-30) The exceptionally refined trumpet scallop capitals at Burmington Manor (Warwickshire), combining stone with timber, have recently been tree-ring dated to 1194/5,[[31]](#footnote-31) while the consistent use of round arches points to a date before 1200. Taken as a whole, the evidence points to a date for Horton of c.1180-1200.

**Discussion**

The central question of interpretation is whether the structure was originally a hall or an ecclesiastical building. As the accepted name, the ‘Norman Hall’, itself indicates, the general presumption has been that it was a domestic hall. The current authors were themselves drawn into the study of the building as part of their wider research on domestic architecture of the 12th and 13th centuries, because it was a lesser-known example of an early hall.[[32]](#footnote-32) However, as the study progressed, difficulties with the orthodox view emerged.

The first indication that the building does not fit the normal pattern for early halls is simply a matter of size. Surviving stone-built halls of the later 12th or early 13th century all have a much larger floor area than Horton. The hall of Oakham Castle, smaller than many others, is over five times larger than Horton.[[33]](#footnote-33) Burmington, an unusually small example, is nearly twice as large. The lesser timber-built halls, such as Fyfield Hall or Temple Balsall are also over twice as big. Even the modest Westwick Cottage (Hertfordshire) has a hall rather larger than Horton.[[34]](#footnote-34) These, of course, are all aisled halls, so a greater width is more readily achieved. Unaisled halls of this early date, however, are very rare. Only two potential comparables have been traced, Appleton Manor (Oxfordshire) and Nassington Prebendal Manor (Northamptonshire). Both have a much wider span than Horton and are nearly twice its size. Given the high quality of its masonry and evident status, Horton would be exceptionally small for a high-status hall. There are domestic buildings of well-built masonry from the period of comparable size, but these are two-storeyed, free-standing chamber blocks, such as those at the manor houses of Boothby Pagnell (Lincolnshire) or Hemingford Grey (Cambridgeshire), not halls.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The location of the opposed doorways, set in one bay from the gable end, would also be unusual for an early hall, though normal for a church or chapel.[[36]](#footnote-36) The standard position for the entrance door in contemporary halls is next to the end wall, with doors leading to the service rooms beyond the gable end. An off-set entrance door, with a service bay located within the end of the hall, is a rather later development. In any case, the end bay at Horton was ill-designed for service use; it is very short, with no separate entrance door or low-level lighting. Other contemporary halls have service doors leading to attached service rooms in the gable wall, but Horton has no such provision. The location of the hall, with one lateral wall directly against the churchyard, is also very awkward for a hall, even if built for an ecclesiastical owner. Burmington Manor does abut the churchyard, but has independent access towards one end of the lateral wall.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The windows at Horton are all set at a high level in the wall, above the internal string course – rather higher than expected for a hall, though normal for a church or chapel, and for monastic buildings of the period, such as the refectories at Dover Priory and Minster Priory.[[38]](#footnote-38) A moulded internal string course, rising up over a doorway, is itself a feature often seen in churches, but not in halls. The aisle-less form itself, with tall walls, is also very unusual for a stone-built hall, with only two comparable examples as noted above. Furthermore, recent study has brought into question whether even these two examples were originally built with tall walls. Much of the external walling of Appleton Manor has been rebuilt, and Nassington Prebendal Manor seems to have been built originally with walls of single-storey height.[[39]](#footnote-39) A particular detail, noted above, is that neither of the entrance doorways had any original provision for draw-bars. This means of barring the door from the inside is a standard feature of all early residential buildings, but was of course not a requirement for churches or detached chapels.

The final difficulty with interpretation of the building as a hall is its relationship to the development of the rest of the prebendal manor house. The complex sequence of phases here has been recently disentangled by Jane and John Harcourt, assisted by a programme of tree-ring dating.[[40]](#footnote-40) Apart from the Norman Hall, the earliest surviving part of the house is a rectangular block some distance to the south-east of the Hall, forming part of the current south range and thought to date from the 14th or early 15th century (Fig. 13). It is oriented west-east and was named ‘Hall 2’ by the Harcourts. The next development, probably in 1492, was the addition of the west range, a two-storey block oriented north-south, which extended up to the south-east corner of the Norman Hall. The skewed orientation of this block suggests that it was the first building to link the main house to the Norman Hall, though without connecting doorways (unless via the lost east end of the Norman Hall). The next major phase of work was undertaken in 1519–21 by Dr William Knight (Fig. 14). The north range was added, abutting the east gable of the Norman Hall, together with the east range and extensions to the south range. This sequence of development is not at all what one would expect if the Norman Hall were the original hall. Early halls normally act as the central nucleus, around which other blocks are built up; the example of Nassington Prebendal Manor with its excavated remains and standing fabric demonstrate this well.[[41]](#footnote-41) Instead, at Horton the house was gradually extended to connect to the Norman Hall. Even after it was fully connected to the main house in the early 16th century, the Norman Hall remained an isolated wing, with no evidence for attached buildings to its south or west. The development pattern suggests the original house was located to the south-east, with the Norman Hall a free-standing, independent building.

Many of the original features of the Norman Hall would thus be unusual in a domestic hall, and much more suitable for a church or chapel. The building is of course appropriately oriented west-east. The most convincing explanation for the loss of the east end is that it once extended further to form a chancel, as would be expected for a church or chapel. Built initially as an independent structure, at the south edge of the churchyard and a short distance from the main house, the Norman Hall was eventually absorbed into the main building, with the chancel demolished and a new east gable wall built. Having concluded that the Norman Hall had indeed been built as a church or chapel, the authors then discovered that John Blair had undertaken an analysis of the Norman Hall many years earlier, in 1993, and had come to the same conclusion. Blair succinctly summed up the argument in the draft for an unpublished article. Having outlined the lack of early halls with comparable features, he concluded:

‘The clear and obvious analogies for the Horton building are indeed with the minor parish churches and chapels of 12th-century England: the size, proportions, details and door and window positions can be paralleled in scores if not hundreds of cases.’[[42]](#footnote-42)

A further and decisive piece of evidence has subsequently come to light which indicates an ecclesiastical use. As noted above, John Buckler or his son visited the site and made several drawings. On the drawing which has his measured survey sketch plan of the Norman Hall,[[43]](#footnote-43) Buckler includes the following transcription, with lettering in Lombardic capitals of medieval type, evidently a careful copy of an original inscription in the Hall:

SANCTA IN CARITATE PERFECTA CONFIRMAT NOS TRINITAS

These words are found in a very specific source, the Sarum Customary.[[44]](#footnote-44) The Customary was compiled to provide the clergy at Salisbury Cathedral with a set of instructions for the liturgy. The words form part of a blessing to be used on the feast of All Saints in the New Customary, which was in use from the mid-13th century onwards.[[45]](#footnote-45) The text is also found in the Old Customary, written for the liturgy in the earlier cathedral at Old Sarum, before the relocation to Salisbury.[[46]](#footnote-46) The Customary would have been an important document in the lives of all the medieval prebendaries of Salisbury who held Horton. It seems that Buckler must have faithfully copied a medieval inscription which survived in the Norman Hall into the 19th century. The direct liturgical character of the lost inscription again points towards the earlier use of the building as ecclesiastical, rather than domestic, since it is most unlikely to have had a place in a secular setting. The Lombardic capitals indicated in Buckler’s drawing suggest a date for the inscription within their main period of currency, from the third quarter of the 13th century to the middle of the 14th century.[[47]](#footnote-47)

An interesting comparable to Horton is the ‘Norman Hall’ which stands opposite to the church in the village of Sutton Courtenay (now Oxfordshire). Like Horton, it had been thought to be a domestic hall, but detailed study of the building and documentary evidence by Christopher Currie has indicated that it was much more likely to have been built as a chapel.[[48]](#footnote-48) Dating from *c*.1200–1220, it is of similar form to Horton, a rectangular building with tall walls and a narrow span of *c*.5.2m (Fig. 15). However, both gables survive, with an internal length of *c*.14.8m, considerably longer than the truncated Horton. It has an impressive entrance doorway with a moulded round arch and attached shafts to the jambs. Like Horton, the doorway is set one bay along from the west gable. There is also a north doorway, less elaborate than the main entrance, and set a little further west. The south front has evidence for one lancet window to the west of the doorway and three to the east. The lancets are set high up in the wall as at Horton, but are narrower. The north wall had a wider window, perhaps of two lights, set between two lancets. The west gable has a lancet of similar narrow width, but much taller. The central section of the east gable has been altered, so the evidence for original windows has been lost. The east end presumably formed the chancel, though it is not differentiated from the nave. Documentary evidence indicates that the early main manor house site was located around 200m to the south-west, which was split off in the late 13th or early 14th century as the manor-house of a sub-manor, and ‘Norman Hall’ then became the centre of the main manor. Currie concluded that the ‘Norman Hall’ was built as a chapel for the original manor, and converted to domestic use around 1300. To explain the considerable distance between the original manor and the chapel, Currie thought the chapel ‘may have been intended for use by the tenants of the manor rather than for purely domestic purposes’. The location of the chapel at Sutton Courtenay is certainly odd, though it is 55m west of the church and across the street, rather than immediately adjoining it, as at Horton. Sutton Courtenay’s ‘Norman Hall’, like that at Horton, has a later roof with smoke-blackening from its use as an open hall, followed by the insertion of a first floor.

The evidence at Horton thus points strongly towards ecclesiastical use, but was it a church or a chapel? The existing church was rebuilt in the 15th century, incorporating a 14th-century arcade to the north aisle. The only earlier features are the re-cut Norman font bowl and a pillar piscina in the chancel, but both have probably been re-located. It is therefore conceivable that the Norman Hall was built as the 12th-century church. However, as the Harcourts have argued, this seems unlikely.[[49]](#footnote-49) The church sits on a hill-top platform, with the raised churchyard extending to west, north and east. The Norman Hall is located on sloping ground at the southern edge of the churchyard. The natural location for the original church would surely have been the existing site, on the main hill-top platform, not below it. The north side of the Norman Hall, with its ashlar facing and fine doorway, was also clearly built as a principal elevation, for which the most obvious explanation is that it faced the original church, with which it would have been compared. Finally, the Norman Hall would have been modest in size for a church, with the nave measuring internally only 9.5m long and 5.0m wide. Even allowing for the unaisled form of many parish churches of the late 12th century, this is somewhat small.[[50]](#footnote-50) There were, however, other equally diminutive parish churches of this period, such as Winterborne Tomson (Dorset) measuring 10.4 by 4.8m internally, not including the apse.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Medieval chapels may be very broadly divided into three types – domestic chapels serving the houses of manorial lords and other wealthy individuals, chapels of ease remote from the parish church and cult chapels serving a particular religious purpose.[[52]](#footnote-52) The second of these is clearly not relevant here, if the argument above is correct. It seems more likely from its position that Horton was a manorial chapel. It is, however, worth investigating first the possibility that this might have been a cult chapel. Sailholme in Wainfleet (Lincs.) was founded in the late 12th century to serve a new settlement there remote from the parish church.[[53]](#footnote-53) It had become ruinous in the late 14th century when its fortunes were revived by the image of St Edmund, which was said to have worked miracles for local people. Even parish churches might have cult chapels within their graveyard, such as that dedicated to St Mary situated in the churchyard of Camborne (Cornwall).[[54]](#footnote-54) There was a chapel within the churchyard at Eastry in Kent, adjoining the church, by the early 15th century, and others in the same county at Mersham and Minster in Sheppey.[[55]](#footnote-55) The first of these, at least, seems to have been a cult chapel as there was as a separate manorial chapel.

Even so, on the balance of probabilities it is more likely that the chapel at Horton was a manorial foundation rather than a cult chapel. From the 12th century onwards it was common for manorial lords to have their own chapels, though the earliest examples generally survive only in castles or other major buildings.[[56]](#footnote-56) The quality of the masonry on the north side, albeit reused, and of the north and south doorways, suggest that this was a prestigious building. Its construction must have been supported by abundant funds. Private chapels of the later medieval period also tended to be built as part of the main house, rather than as free-standing buildings. The ‘Norman Hall’ at Sutton Courtenay, however, provides a comparable example of an early free-standing chapel built for a manor house. The location of the chapel at Horton, placed so close to the church, is unusual but again not exceptional. A contract for a funerary chapel for the deceased lord of Southchurch (Essex) dating to 1293 is one example of such a building in the graveyard.[[57]](#footnote-57) In the case of Horton, the fact that the advowson of the parish church was probably in the hands of the prebendary must have eased any problems that the foundation of his chapel might have caused.[[58]](#footnote-58) The fine north doorway would certainly have provided convenient direct access to the church for Horton’s prebendary. The original, smaller parish church might have been located a little further off, though the presence of a north aisle and lack of a south aisle suggest the original building, while it may not have extended so far to the east, was not further to the north. In original form, the east end of Horton’s chapel probably extended as a square-ended chancel, as apsidal chancels had been superseded by the mid-12th century.[[59]](#footnote-59)

LATER DEVELOPMENT TO 1547

The first alteration that can be identified to the Norman Hall after its initial construction is the enlargement of the west window (Fig. 12B). A visitor in 1833, prior to the alterations of 1849, recorded that ‘A Gothic window terminated the west end of the chapel, with beautiful tracery’.[[60]](#footnote-60) It seems likely this alteration, which included widening the window and re-setting the 12th-century moulded jambs, occurred before the insertion of the gallery, which would have rather spoiled the effect of the new tracery. The gallery, with its stone vice stair, would have been added when the building was still a chapel, probably in the 14th or early 15th century. It may have been accompanied by the addition of the three buttresses to the north wall, the work perhaps dated by the stone over the north doorway with the arms of Robert Neville who was Bishop of Salisbury in 1427–37. The gallery seems a rather awkward addition, but was presumably for use of the prebendary, and his immediate retinue. Private galleries within manorial chapels were introduced in the 13th century and became very popular in the later medieval period.[[61]](#footnote-61) Such galleries were, however, normally entered at first-floor level from the private apartments. The staircase, with its unusual external doorway, indicates that Horton’s chapel was still a separate, free-standing block.

The roof structure was replaced in the early to mid-15th century. It has common rafters with long, tenoned arch-braces rising to a collar. The collar purlin is tenoned into two principal rafter trusses, with applied roll-mouldings to its soffit.[[62]](#footnote-62) The collars are stop-chamfered around the collar purlin, indicating that the whole assembly, though somewhat altered, is original. The structure is very similar to the roofs of the nave and north aisle of the church, which was rebuilt in fully-developed Perpendicular style in this period, pointing towards a date after 1400.

At some stage in the later medieval period, the chapel was converted for use as an open hall, as indicated by heavy soot deposits on some of the roof timbers.[[63]](#footnote-63) The original chancel at the east end of the chapel was probably demolished as part of this conversion, and a new east gable built (Fig. 12C). The Harcourts have suggested that an open hall in the south range (‘Hall 2’) was altered to form a two-storey building in the late 15th century, probably around the same time as the two-storeyed west range was added in *c*.1492. Although open halls were beginning to be superseded by this time, it seems likely that this proved the spur for the conversion of the chapel to a hall. Like the chapel, however, the new open hall was not fully connected to the main house, and remained somewhat peripheral, suggesting occasional rather than daily use. The gallery, though awkwardly arranged, might have continued in use to serve the hall. The alterations of 1519–21 by William Knight at last saw the hall connected to the main house (Figs 12D, 15). Knight’s work to the rest of the house was extensive and included Renaissance decoration of very advanced design for its date, so it seems the open hall was deliberately kept untouched, perhaps already recognizing its antique character.

DEVELOPMENT AFTER 1547

In 1547 the prebend was dissolved and granted to Edward, duke of Somerset and, on his forfeiture, given to Clement Paston.[[64]](#footnote-64) The estate was briefly reclaimed in 1553 by David Broke, the last prebendary, but regranted to Paston after Broke’s death the following year. The subsequent history has been discussed by Langston and by Fendley, and may be briefly summarized. On Clement’s death in 1598, Horton was bequeathed to his nephew, Edward Paston, a recusant, who subsequently leased out the house. In 1643 the house and living were sequestered on account of the Paston’s religion and the house continued to be leased. The Pastons appear to have resumed residency at Horton by 1705 and this broadly coincides with the insertion of a floor to allow the formation of a Catholic chapel on the first floor of the Norman Hall, perhaps in 1708 (Fig. 12D).[[65]](#footnote-65)

At this time the two Norman windows in the north wall were blocked up (as shown by Buckler), and the chapel was lit principally by the west window, with its ‘beautiful tracery’.[[66]](#footnote-66) A doorway was inserted on the first floor, described by Hodges as a priest’s door, leading past the altar at the east end into a tiny room, perhaps serving as a sacristy and confessional, then into a passage connecting to the house.[[67]](#footnote-67) The main access to the chapel must have been the vice stair at the west end.

The manor was sold in 1782 to Thomas Brooke, who had served as steward for Horton. There ceased to be a resident chaplain, but its use as a chapel persisted, being served by visiting priests.[[68]](#footnote-68) The Norman Hall seems to have been largely shut up and neglected by the early nineteenth century, as witnessed by a visiting Catholic priest in 1833.[[69]](#footnote-69) There may, however, have been some use of the first floor for storage, as a loading hatch (now blocked) was inserted rather crudely over the front door. In 1849, the first floor was converted to a schoolroom, a function it served until 1860 (Fig. 12E). The west window was replaced by a doorway, giving access up wooden stairs from the churchyard. The vice stair was removed, which involved the rebuilding of the upper south-west corner and truncation of the attached shaft. The ground floor was altered to form a churchwardens’ room, lit by windows in the south wall, with a fireplace inserted against the east gable. In 1884, the building was restored by the distinguished architect F. C. Penrose for the new owner, Admiral Frederick Richards. On the first floor, the Norman windows were unblocked, new stone windows were inserted to the south and west, and the medieval roof was revealed. The ground floor became a butler’s pantry, with new stone windows to the south wall. Finally, in 1920–24, the first floor was removed and the building took on once again the guise of an open hall, albeit with a massive, imported fireplace at one end. The Norman Hall had become once again a single, full-height space, though its original use as a chapel was now forgotten.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been argued here that the ‘Norman Hall’ was constructed in the late 12th century as a manorial chapel adjoining the parish church. The manor house itself was presumably located on the site later occupied by the 14th- or early 15th-century building. During the course of the 14th or early 15th century a gallery was inserted at the west end of the chapel which was reached through a rather narrow doorway and up tight stairs. An inscription or possibly a mural text was added to the interior of the chapel taking its text from the Sarum Customary. Buttresses were added on the south side and a new roof constructed, works which might have taken place during the episcopate of Robert Neville (1427–37). It was presumably at some point after this that the chapel was converted to an open hall. However, a hall in this position must have always been secondary to the main hall in the manor house. It may have been connected with the farm (or lease) of the manor and used either by the farmer (leasee) or, perhaps more likely given the quality of the roof and the arms attached to the wall, by the prebendary on the occasional visit to his estate. Its later use as a Roman Catholic chapel, storage building and school house justified its continuing maintenance until it began to attract antiquarian interest in the mid-19th century.

This study of the Norman Hall began by seeking to place it within our understanding of late Romanesque domestic buildings. The identification of it as a chapel has removed it from that context and has helped to clarify our understanding of the form of houses in the late 12th century. We have argued elsewhere that the late medieval domestic plan, which comprised services, hall and chamber, was present certainly before 1200 and, in part, a century earlier.[[70]](#footnote-70) The integration of the services – the buttery and pantry – into the hall block appears to have taken place by the late 12th century, at for example Oakham Castle and Clarendon Palace, as well as in the modifications at Scolland’s Hall in Richmond Castle.[[71]](#footnote-71) However, it is notable that no services were appended to the earlier phase of Scolland’s Hall dating to the 1080s, nor were there integrated services in the hall of Eynsford Castle (Kent) which was constructed in the late eleventh or early 12th century.[[72]](#footnote-72) By contrast, the construction of contiguous chambers was common in the early 12th century and before, although equally detached chamber blocks were also being constructed, as noted above.[[73]](#footnote-73) Integrated chambers are found at Scolland’s and Eynsford, where the halls were already set on the first floor and access could be readily provided to an adjoining room.

This summary of the developing plan of domestic buildings is relevant here because parallels between the form of houses and churches and have often been noted.[[74]](#footnote-74) Indeed, it is those similarities which have allowed the mistaken identification of the Norman Hall as a domestic building. While it is clear that churches were not modelled on contemporary domestic buildings, nor were houses built as an imitation of sacred ones, the relationship between the two must have been apparent. Both had a separation between a public space (hall, nave) and a reserved one (chamber, chancel) beyond it. In both, the public space was entered at one end furthest from the reserved space and in secular and sacred buildings of the 12th century there were often two entrances facing each other in the lateral walls.[[75]](#footnote-75) It would be a mistake to go beyond this and exaggerate the similarities. They were separate building types for quite different functions. The features which distinguish the Norman Hall from contemporary houses have been discussed above. With the study of this building, the features which characterize the various building types have come more sharply into focus.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the National Trust who both facilitated our work at Horton Court and provided us with documents relating to it. We would like in particular to thank Demelza Williams and Martin Papworth. The former provided us with copies of the Buckler drawings in the British Library which were of particular importance in interpreting the building. Prof. John Blair was kind enough to send us his notes on the Norman Hall and encouraged us in our interpretation. Prof. Malcolm Thurlby kindly gave advice on the dating of the mouldings around the doors. Dr Christopher Currie and John Blair kindly gave permission for the reproduction of the plan of Sutton Courtenay, and the former kindly commented on the text. We are grateful to Robert Ovens for assistance with some of the drawings.

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ILLUSTRATION CAPTIONS

Fig. 1. Plan of the Norman Hall in relationship to Horton Court house and Horton parish church (based on recent survey with details from architectural plans from the National Trust).

Fig. 2. A view of Horton Court looking north-east, showing Horton church (left), the Norman Hall (centre left) and the later buildings of Horton Court (centre right and right).

Fig. 3. Ground and first-floor plans of the Norman Hall as existing.

Fig. 4. The (a, left) north and (b, right) south doors of the Norman Hall.

Fig. 5. Orthophoto of south side exterior.

Fig. 6. Detail of the shaft, capital and impost on the east jamb of the north doorway of the Norman Hall.

Fig. 7. Orthophoto of south side interior of the Norman Hall with interpretation (below) of the original form.

Fig. 8. Photograph of the west end of the Norman Hall.

Fig. 9. Photograph of the interior of the window on the centre of the north wall of the Norman Hall.

Fig. 10. Photograph of the exterior of the north wall of the Norman Hall.

Fig. 11 Photograph of the interior of east end of the Norman Hall.

Fig. 12 Phase plan of the Norman Hall and adjoining buildings.

Fig. 13 The building phases of Horton Court up to the late 15th century (Nick Hill and Robert Ovens, after Harcourt and Harcourt)

Fig. 14 The building phases of Horton Court up to the early sixteenth century (Nick Hill and Robert Ovens, after Harcourt and Harcourt).

Fig. 15 Plan of the ‘Norman Hall’, Sutton Courtenay (drawn by John Blair and reproduced with permission from Currie, ‘Larger medieval houses’).

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68. Fendley ‘The Pastons of Horton’, 510–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Harcourt and Harcourt, ‘The Development of Horton Court’, 70; Fendley ‘The Pastons of Horton’, 513. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Hill and Gardiner, ‘The English medieval first-floor hall: part 2’, 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Hill. ‘Hall and chambers’, 184–5; M. Gardiner, ‘Buttery and pantry, and their antecedents: idea and architecture in the English medieval house’, in *Medieval Domesticity: House, Housing and Household*, ed. M. Kowaleski and P.J. Goldberg (Cambridge, 2008), 49; Hill and Gardiner, ‘The English medieval first-floor hall: part 1’, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Hill and Gardiner, ‘The English medieval first-floor hall: part 2’, 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Blair 1993, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. E.g. K. Giles, *The Archaeology of Social Identity: Guildhalls in York, c. 1350–1630* (Oxford, 2000), 62–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. P.S. Barnwell, ‘The laity, the clergy and the divine presence: the use of space in smaller churches of the eleventh and twelfth centuries’, *Jnl. of the Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.* 157 (2004), 41–60. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)