

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

A Note On Hidcote House

by S. G. Hamilton
1901, Vol. 24, 156-158

© The Society and the Author(s)

A NOTE ON HIDCOTE HOUSE.

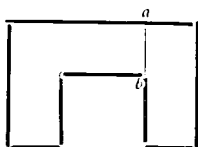
By S. G. HAMILTON.

Hidcote House was built in 1663 by Francis Keyte, a brother, if I am not mistaken, of Sir John Keyte, the first Baronet "of Ebrington," as he called himself. Francis Keyte married Alice, daughter of Sir William Spencer, of Yarnton, near Oxford, whose manor-house is a conspicuous object from Yarnton Station, on the Great Western Railway. I suspect that Francis Keyte borrowed the characteristic form of his gables from his father-in-law's house.

The house was not originally of the L-shape, which it now has. There was another wing, thus: and the wall *a b*, which is now the end of the house, may be seen to be poorly and roughly put together. Indeed, it has given me a good deal of trouble by cracking and bulging. The second wing is clearly shown on an old estate map in my possession of about the date 1749.

It was about that date that the house with the small estate belonging to it passed into my family by purchase from the Dightons. Francis Keyte left two daughters only: as for the elder, I would refer you for her career to Wood, *Life and Times* [ed. Clark, vol. ii., p. 25]; the younger, Alice, married Richard Dighton, in whose family the property remained till about 1750, as I have stated. Since that time, if not before, it has been merely a farm-house.

When I first remember the house, the hall was divided up into several chambers, used as store cellars for beer and cider, the windows having been blocked up, probably under



the pressure of the window-tax. The partitions were cleared away, and the windows re-glazed by my mother, about 1880. At that time the fine old stone fireplace was discovered and opened; it had been bricked up and plastered over, and was not known to exist. I cannot say that I like the tiles which were then laid to replace a hopelessly broken blue-stone pavement. But I do not think that there is any other instance of what Mr. Guy Dawber calls merciless modernisation, except the weather vane with the Keyte crest in it, which I am rather amused to see he refers to as though it were ancient. It is true that it replaces an old one, which was blown down in 1877, but that was quite plain; the Keyte crest was inserted on the strength of a tradition that it had originally figured there. I wonder, on the other hand, he did not notice the coat of arms of Francis Keyte over the hall door,—Keyte impaling Spencer.

The tradition is that the demolished wing contained the best rooms in the house; this seems to me not improbable, as those would naturally be left which would be most suitable for a farm-house. Probably the wing was not pulled down until it was found that the occupants of the house made no use of it.

When the demolition took place I cannot say. A map of 1812 shows the house *without* the wing. Consequently I cannot believe the story of an old man at Hidcote, who died last year at the age of 95, that he had been employed in the work of pulling it down himself; but it is likely enough that his father had been so employed, and that, as often happens, the son had inherited and appropriated the father's reminiscences. At any rate, it must have taken place between 1750 and 1812.

I do not think it is correct to say that "in *one* of the bedrooms the panelling remains *in situ*." There is a great deal more panelling than that; and with possibly the exception of "the one on the ground floor divided up with small panels," all that there is of it is "*in situ*." But of course the subsequent construction of passages—I do not know at

what period—has spoiled the effect of the panelling in the different rooms, which, in the original plan of the house, evidently all opened one into the other. Consequently you get a room panelled on three sides, and you find the fourth side, also panelled, on the other side of the passage. Here you find the panel continuous round a , b , c , d , but the wall $e f$ has none.

