

# St Mary's House, Twyford

HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT / June 2011

**Buckinghamshire  
Archaeological  
Society**



**SURVEY:**  
Members of the  
BAS Historic  
Buildings Group

**REPORT:**  
Peter Marsden  
and Marian Miller

Report number  
BAS/2011-01

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Compiled by Peter Marsden and Marian Miller following a measured survey by members of the Historic Buildings Group of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society. This is report number BAS/2011-01.



Figure 1: The east front of St Mary's House

## **1 THE SITE**

### **1.1 Geographical location**

St Mary's House is on the northern edge of the village of Twyford in north-west Buckinghamshire, adjoining the churchyard of the Parish Church of the Assumption (see Figure 2 on the following page). Its postal address is St Mary's House, Church Street, Twyford, Buckingham MK18 4ET. Its UK National Grid Reference is SP 66547 26693.

### **1.2 Historic context**

St Mary's House is listed Grade II.<sup>1</sup> Until 1951 the building was owned by Lincoln College, Oxford, which had held the rectorship of the parish since 1475. At various times St Mary's House had served as its vicarage, but the college sold the building in 1951, since when it has been a private house. The building is recorded in the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record (record number HER 0220).

The village of Twyford dates at least from Anglo-Saxon times, with a significant entry in Domesday Book (1086).<sup>2</sup> The nearby Parish Church of the Assumption has a Norman doorway and is listed Grade I. An archaeological field survey<sup>3</sup> has indicated that the church and St Mary's House stand together in the former manorial centre of the medieval village of Twyford.

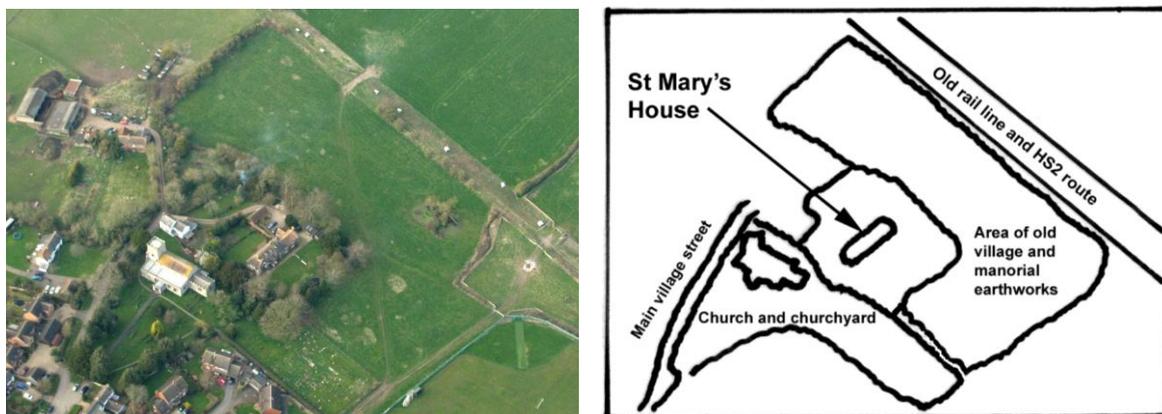


Figure 2: Aerial view of the north end of Twyford village around St Mary's House, with a key to the main features.

## **2 THE BUILDING SURVEY**

A measured survey was carried out at St Mary's House on 5 and 28 April 2011 by five members of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society's Historic Buildings Group (BAS)<sup>4</sup> in order to gather information about the house and its associated buildings. This was part of a wider survey of the village of Twyford by BAS members in advance of a government proposal to construct a high-speed railway line (described in short as 'HS2'), whose planned route would run to the north of the village - approximately 80 metres from St Mary's House.<sup>5</sup>

This report aims to provide a Level 3 analytical record of the building as defined by English Heritage.<sup>6</sup> However, due to the need to meet the consultation deadline and submission requirements set by the UK government and HS2 Limited, its analysis is presented in summary form. The intention is that a more detailed analysis will follow.<sup>7</sup>

## **3 SUMMARY**

The survey established a full construction sequence for the building, which has developed from two medieval open halls of the 15th century. Evidence within the fabric of the building enables it to tell its own story, one of change and adaptation over a period of around 500 years. A field survey also established that St Mary's House stands within the medieval manorial centre of the village, dating in all likelihood back to Domesday Book in 1086 and perhaps further.

Together the two surveys revealed St Mary's House as a heritage asset not only of value to the local community and to the county of Buckinghamshire, but also of potential significance nationally. Because the proposed HS2 rail line is intended to pass within 80 metres, the survey recommends active measures to protect both St Mary's House and its historic context within Twyford.

## 4 FINDINGS

### 4.1 Building description

St Mary's House today is a single 23-metre range facing east and set at right angles to the church. Its walls are timber-framed to the south and brick-clad to the north, with a main tiled roof hipped at both ends around a massive central chimney stack. Attached to the north of this is a lower building with tiled roof and a stone-built gable end.

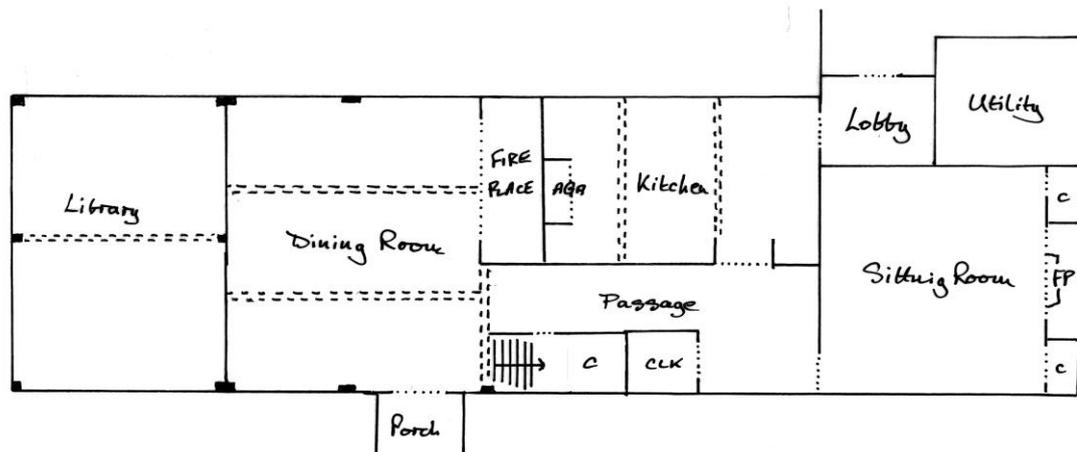


Figure 3: Ground-floor plan of St Mary's House, May 2011.

Inside the building considerable timber framing is visible in the main living rooms and the roof structure is fully accessible. While 'modernisation' was clearly carried out during the 17th and 18th centuries, apart from kitchen and bathrooms more recent work has aimed to preserve the historic fabric of the building.

### 4.2 The medieval open hall

At the heart of St Mary's House is a three-bay medieval open hall. Externally its walls display close-studding and decorative S-shaped braces. Inside it has two arch-braced trusses and six pairs of massive curved wind-braces.

When built this would have been an impressive building, open to the roof and with a central hearth – as evidenced by smoke-blackening in the roof (see Figure 7 for its plan).



Figure 4: The arch of an open-hall truss, visible in the attic.



Figure 5: Post of open-hall truss, visible on the first floor, and (right) the form of the arch-braced trusses.

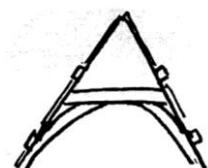




Figure 6: The second medieval hall (left) and (right centre) the corner posts of the two frames, side-by-side.

### 4.3 The second open hall

Immediately abutting the main hall, to the south and facing the church, is a second medieval open hall (Figures 6 and 8), whose frame, in contrast to that of the main hall, is more workmanlike, with wider panels and little if any decoration in its roof structure.

Although this second hall abuts directly on to the main hall range, the two frames are independent of each other. Alterations to its frame show that this second hall was originally erected elsewhere, then dismantled, moved to its present position and shortened to match the width of the main hall.

This 'south wing' would have been used as a 'solar', providing private space away from the public open hall. Being on the south side, facing the church, it would not have been a kitchen – and in fact double and single chamfers on a cross-beam now in the modern kitchen provide evidence that the medieval service wing was to the north of the main hall, away from the church (see Figure 9).

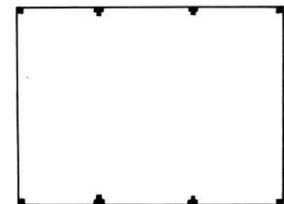


Figure 7: Plan of the medieval hall (phase 1)

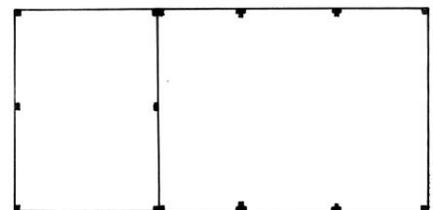


Figure 8: The addition of the second hall, to its south (Phase 2).

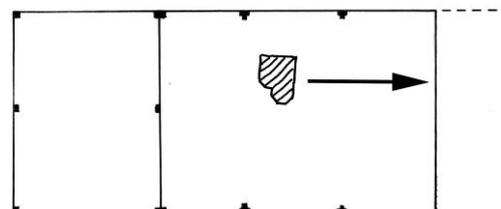


Figure 9: Double and single chamfers on a cross-beam (outlined) indicate the site of the medieval service wing (phase 2B).



Figure 10: Oak framing inside the 'solar'

#### 4.4 The construction sequence

Both halls were most likely first built in the 15th century. Tentative dendrochronology evidence has suggested a date in the mid-16th – but this is based on a single timber from the main hall.

Both halls were given inserted floors in the 16th century, with a massive central stone-built chimney stack added to the main hall (see figures 11 and 12). Evidence suggests that the similar stone chimney stack at the northern end of the building resulted from a rebuilding of the medieval kitchen at the same time.

The heavy studded 18-panelled front door also dates from the 16th century. The main hall has a late 16th-century staircase with pointed finials and moulded balusters, but this was said to have been rescued from the demolition of another house in the village in the mid-19th century.

The northern half of the present building appears built of brick, in the established decorative pattern for the county of alternating blue burnt headers and red stretchers. However this is deceptive: what we see is in fact a brick shell cladding over an original timber-framed building.

This 'service wing' was remodelled several times. Originally it would have been single-storey incorporating kitchen, buttery, pantry and other rooms. However the section closest to the main hall was rebuilt in two storeys in the late 16th or early 17th century (Figure 13), and successive remodellings can be traced in the northern end of the house over the following centuries, no doubt in response to changes in domestic technology (figure 14).

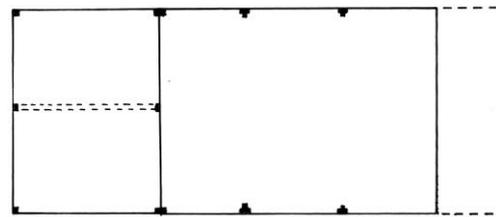


Figure 11: A floor is added to the South Wing in the 16th century (phase 3).

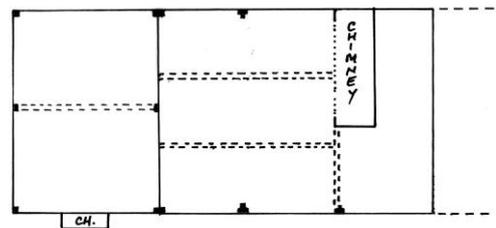


Figure 12: Then, also in the 16th century, upper rooms are added to the main hall, and fireplaces with chimneys (phase 4).

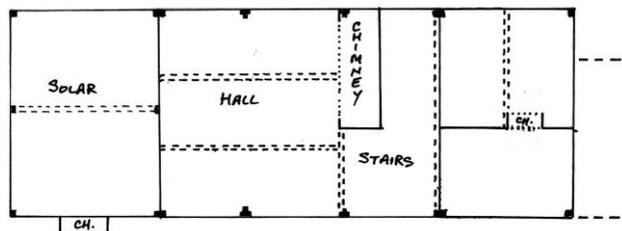


Figure 13: Part of the service wing is rebuilt in two storeys, in the late 16th or early 17th century (phase 5).

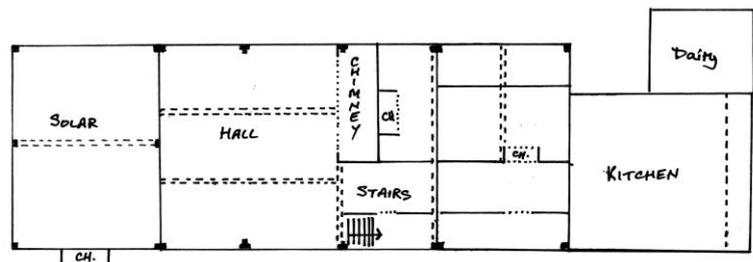


Figure 14: A new staircase is added in 19th century, brought from another 16th-century building, and the kitchen wing upgraded (phase 6).

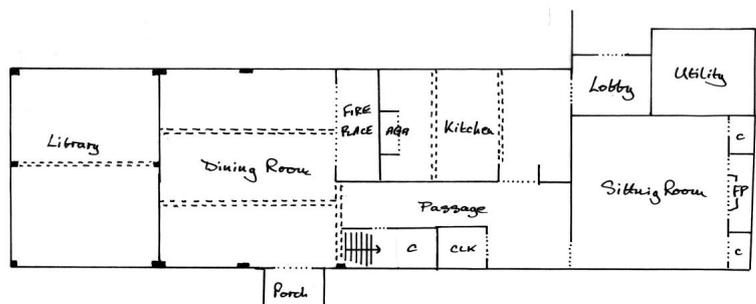


Figure 15: Finally the service rooms are reorganised, with the old kitchen converted into a sitting room and, in the 20th century, the newly positioned kitchen is fully modernised (phase 7).

A refurbishment of St Mary's House by Lincoln College in 1874-5 included 'modernisation' of the original kitchen to provide a more elegant 19th-century sitting room (see figure 15), also replacing the roof and hiding behind new plaster the details of its older timber frame – which may date back to the original medieval kitchen (figure 16).

At the other end of the building essential work was carried out 1988-9 by its present owners to stabilise the two open-hall oak frames, where subsidence in the south wing had widened the gap between the two frames to 8 inches in places. This work also restored to St Mary's House much of its original timberwork, inside and out.



**Figure 16: The northern stone gable end and chimney stack - a 16th-century rebuild which may hide a remnant of the medieval kitchen.**

## **5 Documentary evidence**

St Mary's House was surveyed by the Historical Monuments Commission in 1912 and there are photographs of the building from this period (see figure 17). However the majority of surviving documents relating to the property will be in the archives of Lincoln College, Oxford, which owned the property from 1475 until its sale in 1951.

Unfortunately the college building that houses its archives was undergoing building maintenance work at the time this survey was conducted, so the archives themselves were temporarily closed to researchers. In these circumstances the deadline set by the government for the 'Consultation' period on the HS2 high-speed rail project meant that this report had to be completed before access to the college archives became possible.

One of our recommendations, however, is that this documentary research should be done when the archives re-open – see section 7 below.

**Figure 17:  
St Mary's  
House in 1912,  
at the time of  
the Historic  
Monuments  
Report, with  
its timber  
framing hidden  
by tiles.**



## **6 The historic value of St Mary's House**

### **6.1 The manorial centre**

A field survey of the area around St Mary's House by former Buckinghamshire county archaeologist Michael Farley in March 2011 found a well-defined enclosure surrounded by ditch and bank. Lying close by the church, these most likely outline the medieval manorial

centre of Twyford, enclosing the present St Mary's House, while other lesser earthworks and a holloway indicate the site of a later-abandoned section of the medieval village.

These earthworks, though unexcavated, therefore show that the historical significance of St Mary's House extends beyond the 400 or more years of the present building. Domesday Book records that in 1086 Twyford was a single manor held by Ralph de Fougeres. St Mary's House stands within its site.

This area of earthworks runs right up to the fence that is the southern edge of the dismantled Great Central Railway line – the line to be followed by the planned HS2 high-speed rail line (see Figure 2 on page 2 above).

## **6.2 The power and influence of Lincoln College**

The advowson of the church passed in 1475 to Lincoln College, Oxford, 'provided that a vicarage was ordained and a competent provision made yearly for the poor of the parish'. At various times during its history St Mary's House has served as that vicarage, and was part of the college's Buckinghamshire estates until 1951.

Over the past 500 years various Oxford colleges have held large estates in Buckinghamshire, and elsewhere in the country. For this reason the relationship between St Mary's House and Lincoln College, viewed through surviving documents, is likely to offer an opportunity to understand the source, power and influence of one of the major religious, political and economic forces that has shaped our society, not just at county level but nationally.

## **6.3 St Mary's House as a heritage asset**

As a building, St Mary's House itself is a significant historical asset. Although some areas – such as infill panels within the timber framing – have been much restored, recent work has been done with a sensitive understanding of the building's historic value and with the aim of preserving rather than modernising its historic fabric.

As a result, the building itself is able to tell its own story, demonstrating the process of historical change over the past five centuries. But this is not just a matter of changing building construction technology. As part of Twyford's manorial and ecclesiastical centre, St Mary's House is a significant part of the changing social, economic and ecclesiastical history of both the village and the county over the past 1000 years.

In our view St Mary's House demonstrates to a significant extent all four of the heritage values set out by English Heritage: evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal.

## **7: Recommendations**

- 7.1 **Listing:** In our view this survey demonstrates that St Mary's House is of greater historic significance and value than is implied by its present Listing Grade II. The raising of this to Grade II\* should be given serious consideration.
- 7.2 **Twyford's manorial centre:** The fields surrounding St Mary's House contain earthworks which outline the manorial centre and village of medieval Twyford. We believe that our study of the village demonstrates that there is sufficient special architectural and historic interest to warrant designation of a Conservation Area to include St Mary's House, the

Church of the Assumption, the earthworks and other buildings along the main village street. A fuller archaeological investigation should also be considered.

- 7.3 The impact of HS2: The planned high-speed rail line is intended to run only 80 metres from St Mary's House and directly along the northern edge of the manorial complex that surrounds it. At this point it will be on embankments and viaducts up to 4.4 metres above present ground level, with its power gantries considerably higher.

The HS2 proposals, as they are currently framed, have the potential to cause significant adverse impact on the Grade I listed parish church, the Grade II listed St Mary's House and the medieval earthworks – as well as the setting of these and other heritage assets in the village. We do not believe that this potential for harm, or the significance of the assets likely to be affected, has been sufficiently recognised in the HS2 Appraisal of Sustainability.

If the HS2 project goes ahead along its currently planned line, damage to the historic environment in Twyford appears unavoidable. The preferred method of mitigation to reduce noise and visual intrusion by the rail line is a high bank and tree-planting. If these were to be inserted between the new line and the village of Twyford, this mitigation work would itself destroy the earthworks of the manorial centre.

For these reasons serious consideration should be given to the diversion of the proposed HS2 line to a more northerly route, sufficiently far from Twyford and St Mary's House that the necessary mitigation measures may not damage the historic environment that they might otherwise be designed to protect.

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## THANKS

- To Gary and Lynn Eastman, the present owners of St Mary's House, for enabling this survey, for contributing to it their unique understanding and appreciation of their building, and for their hospitality to the survey team.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BAS	Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society.
EH	English Heritage
HS2	The UK's second proposed High-Speed rail line, initially between London and Birmingham.

## REFERENCES

1. English Heritage (EH) List Entry Number 1288292.
2. See **Domesday Book Buckinghamshire**, folio 151, column c, entry 37,1.
3. BAS Report BAS/2011-02.
5. The survey was carried out by Peter Marsden, Marian Miller, Stewart Moir, Val Moir and Andrew Muir.
5. For a detailed map of the proposed route of the line as it passes Twyford, see the UK Department for Transport website at <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/library/maps/map-13>
6. See **Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice** (English Heritage 2006) page 14.
7. The detailed and measured observations, evidence and analysis on which this report is based have been deposited in the BAS Library and Archives, Buckinghamshire County Museum, Church Street, Aylesbury, Bucks HP20 2QP, where they may be consulted. Their classification code is BAS/2011-01/Notes.