

# The Tower

Squerries Estate Westerham



## THE TOWER.

### INTRODUCTION

The tower that stands in fairly remote woodland on a spur of high ground to the south of Westerham Kent has been known to local folk for a very long time and although it is not actually on a public footpath is near enough to one to be easily visited. Because of this and its very pleasant rural setting it has been the subject of many photographs, paintings, sketches and postcards. It has been called variously a folly, a prospect tower, a belvedere, a hunting lodge and even a mediaeval watch-tower but in spite of its popularity very little seems to be known about either its age or its purpose. This study was conducted to establish the true story of the tower.

The first part of this study was to visit the tower and with the permission of the estate owner Mr John Warde make a measured ground plan, this was carried out in 2009 and at the same time a series of photographs were taken of the inside features of the tower. It was not possible to see any of the exterior of the tower as it is completely covered in a dense growth of ivy.



Ivy Covered Tower in 2009

A survey was carried out in the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone to see if any documentary evidence could be found and in addition a collection was made of any images showing the tower.

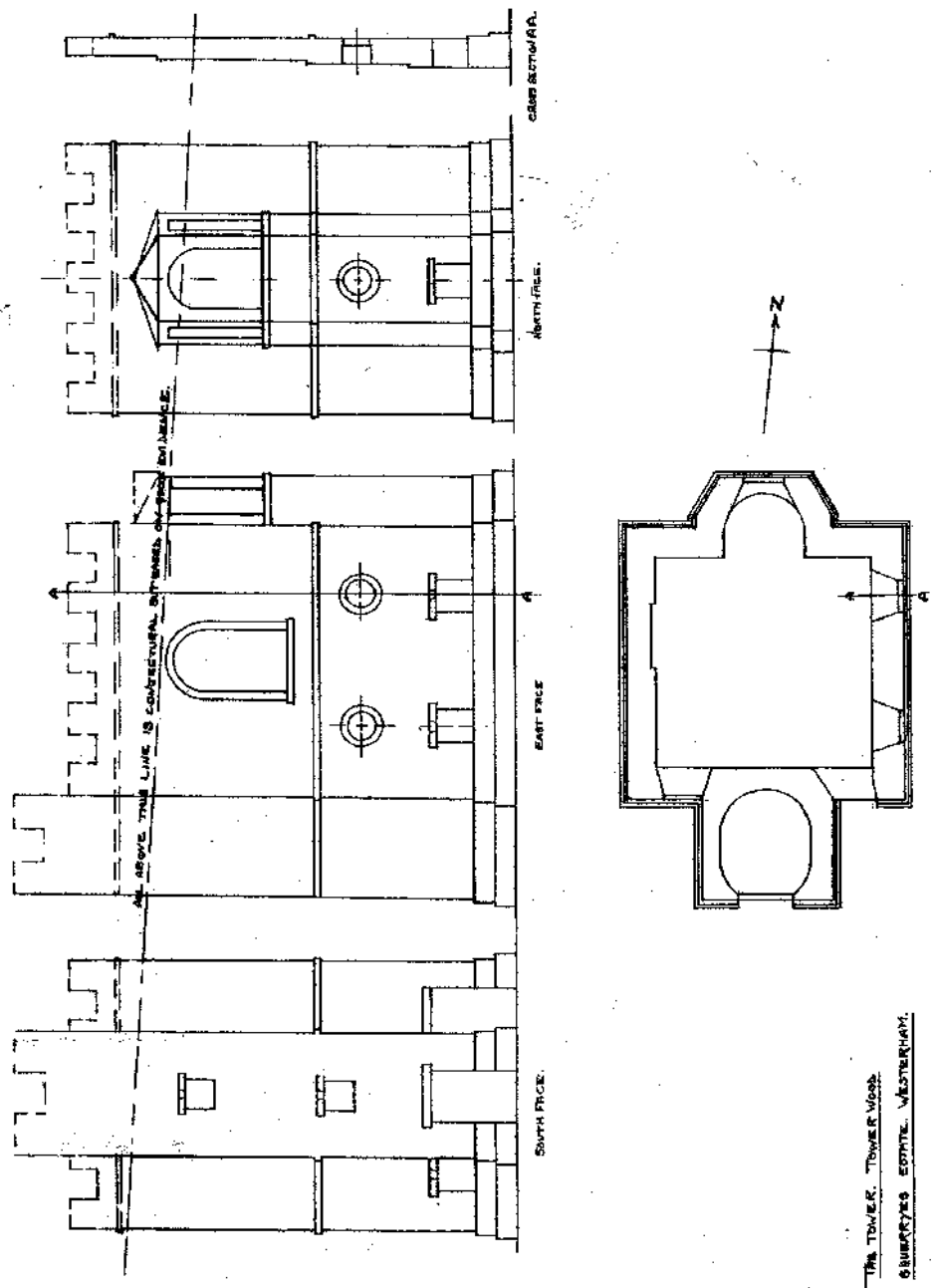
Small samples of rock were taken from the different architectural features of the tower and these were submitted to the Oxford University Museum for analysis.

In order to fully appreciate exactly what the tower consisted of it was necessary to draw up a set of scale plans showing all those features that could be seen both in the building itself and also what could be deduced from any images. Due to the fragile state of the tower it was not possible to make any measurements above ground level so everything above that level had to be deduced from counting brick courses on photographs, fortunately all the reveals and fireplace are brick built which made this task fairly easy.



Brick reveals.

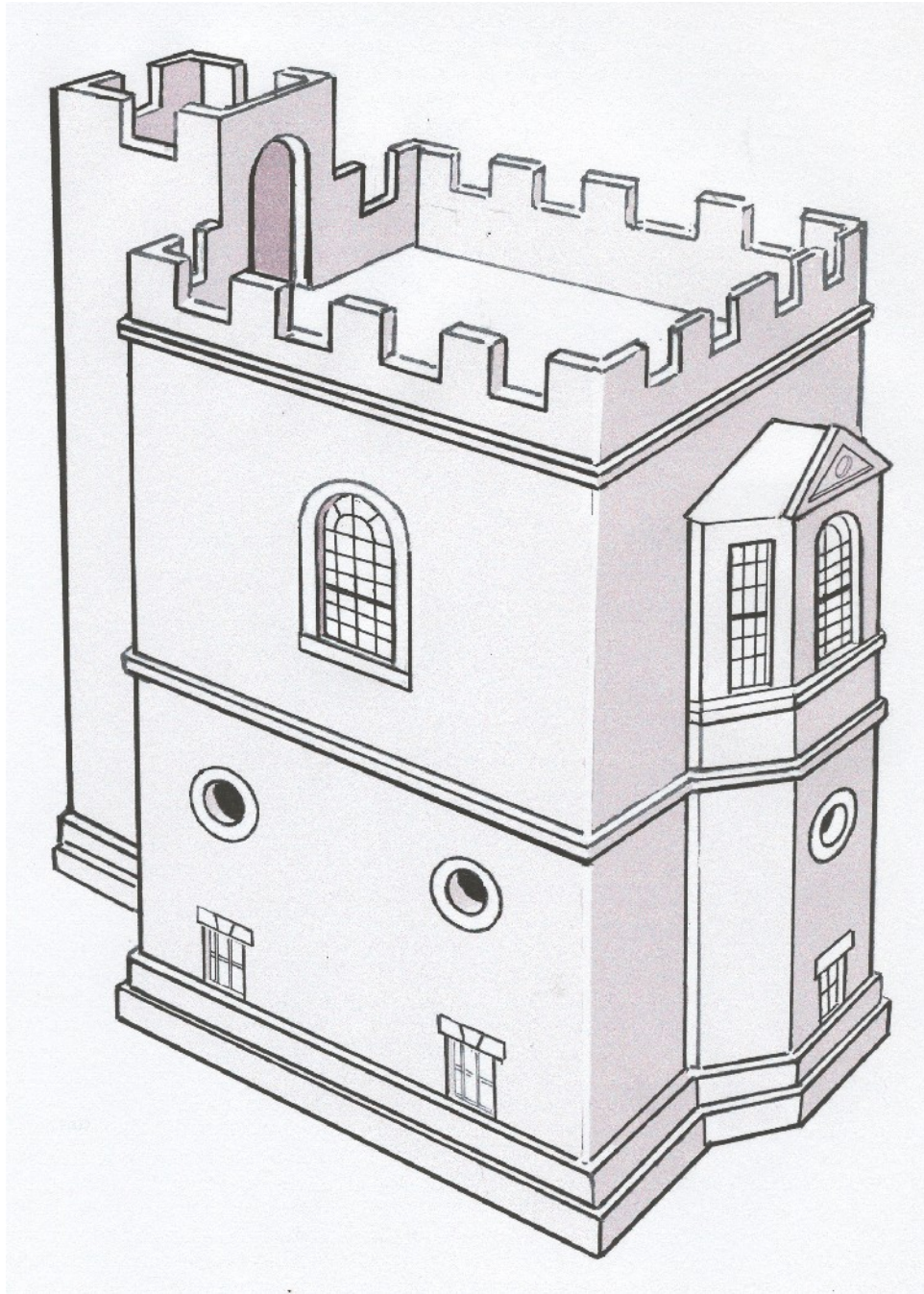
The first thing that became apparent when drawings were made was the total symmetry of the building. The ground plan is completely symmetrical being equally spaced either side of a north-south centre line. Each window is balanced by an identical window on the opposite wall even to the extent of there being dummy windows on the west side of the ground floor where the position of the fireplace makes real windows impossible. In order to accommodate the round windows on the west side the chimney, which is in the thickness of the wall, is steeply curved round the window embrasure.



Scale drawing of tower.

After the scale drawing was made it was possible to make a schematic to show how the tower would have looked when first built.





How the tower may have looked when first built.

#### DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The amount of documentary evidence we found is very limited.

1. The earliest reference to the tower that we found is in 'A New Guide to Tunbridge Wells' by John Colbran and edited by James Phippen that was published in 1840, has this to say on page 375. 'There is a place in this village (Westerham) called "Tower Wood" near Hosey Common, which was built by the then lord of the manor, John Warde Esq. (lately deceased) for the purpose of obtaining an un-interrupted view of St Paul's, London, but the attempt

proved a complete failure, and the tower has been for some time in a ruinous condition, portions of the walls are still standing.'

What is interesting about this account is that it makes it clear that the Wardes who purchased the estate in 1731 built the tower. The other point is about its orientation, which will be considered later.

2. In 1975 the tower was 'listed' Grade II by English Heritage. Surprisingly they have little information about the tower but this is what their records say, 'Folly tower, c18 building with some classical detail. Roofless and ruinous. Square tower with projecting square entrance section on south side and full eight-canted bay on north. Galleted rubble masonry in rough courses. Plinth and 1<sup>st</sup> floor band. 2 storeys and basement, parapet top. Door and 2 square windows with keystones in front. East and West walls have tall round arched windows on first floor and 2 round windows below, that on left of West front now only a gaping hole. Similar hole and traces of door in North Bay. Inside splayed window reveals lined in red brick. Some interior plasterwork.'

I was told that any files that they may have had on the building have been destroyed, as with the number of buildings in their care they are not able to hold all files.

3. In 1999 Aurum Press Ltd published a book called Follies Grottos and Garden Buildings. It was written by Gwyn Headley and Wim Meulenkemp and they had this to say about the tower. 'Kent's final folly is the belvedere at Squerryes Court, Westerham. Frustratingly little is known about this roofless, ruinous building, romantically associated with Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, but it would appear to have been built in the 18th century as a prospect tower or hunting lodge. Oddly enough it is built of rubble masonry instead of the ubiquitous north Kent flint and brick, which shows it to have been designed as a building of some consequence. It had two floors and a basement-there are still remnants of plasterwork-and it may have been built by John Warde 'as a shelter from which to watch the training gallops', although this may be mistaken for a small gazebo, equally ruinous.'

It is not really surprising that the tower is built of rubble masonry, as on Hosey Common only half a mile away there are a large number of 'caves' where Kentish Rag rubble was excavated for building purposes over a very long period. In a letter that I received from Gwyn Headley he mentioned that there is another small building, a gazebo, on the estate that was built at about the same time as the tower and which exhibits Serlio features, this is particularly interesting as the tower also exhibits Serlio features. (See below)

4. A note written by Donald Downes, a gentleman who has lived in Westerham all his life and who is best known for his lectures and demonstrations of fly fishing but who is also keenly interested in the history of the town wrote the following note on the tower. 'The tower also associated with Henry VIII has a curious orientation-its centre axis is almost exactly sited on the church spire which could argue a conscious relationship. The upper floor could only be reached from a circular staircase with external access only at ground floor and

on all the upper walls show the remains of holes in grid pattern. I wonder if it could have been a dovecote. The architectural style could be early renaissance. Could it have been a monastic building just before the dissolution of the monasteries? Although often called a folly or hunting lodge I would settle for a dovecote.'

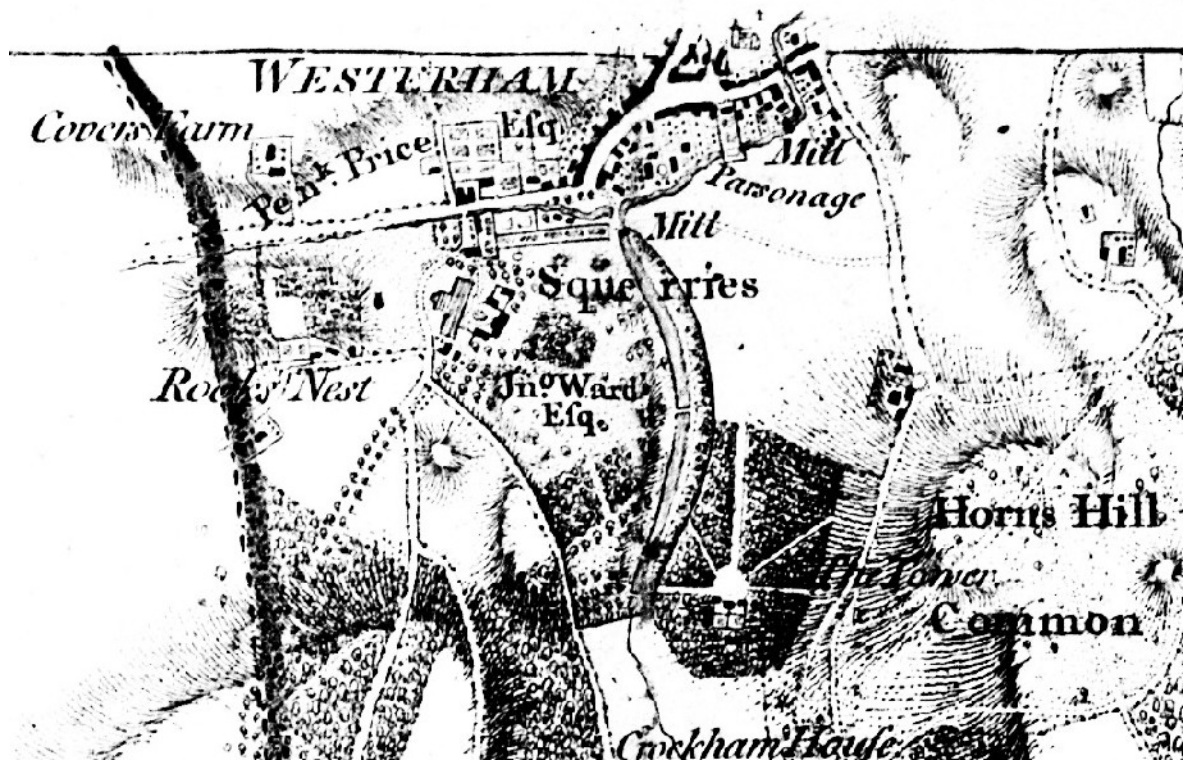
While he would appear to be wrong about the date and purpose of the tower he is certainly correct about the alignment and he is the only person to have noticed that the upper floor could only be reached from the spiral staircase in the staircase tower on the south side and the grid of square holes on the top floor which incidentally are holes for wooden blocks to attach panelling. Maureen Oakley, another Westerham historian, who passed Donald's note to me also mentions that the spire of Westerham church has been reduced in height, if that is so it would certainly have made the church more readily visible from the tower if it was reduced after the tower was built.

5. Probably the most useful piece of documentary evidence came from Mr John Warde in the form of the transcript of a letter written by Mary Warde and although it is undated it refers to a well-known historical event that allows it to be confidently dated to 1741. Mary was writing to her cousin, also Mary in Yorkshire. Letter 9. (An incomplete letter to Miss Warde of Yorkshire from Miss Warde of Kent no date but probably the summer of 1740 (sic), 'Aunt Bristow has recently died and the success at Cartagena is mentioned) 'You pay Squerries a great compliment, to let it Employ any of your Thoughts so long after you had seen it, if it had the honour of pleasing you then, I daresay it would do it more now, my Papa is now making great improvements, he is laying the water before the House and into the Park and removing the Cascade out of the Kitchen Garden to face a very handsome Gate way he has just built, you know the tower, it appeared in great Splendour a Fortnight ago, Papa entertained his Country Neighbours on Admiral Vernons Success at Catagena. The Battlements were illuminated, and Squibs and Serpents thrown from them among the Crowd which gave them great delights and we were told had a mighty good effect at a Distance, on the Parterre, before the Building they fired a Pile of Faggots Everybody had a Supper that could get into the House, and the Populace had two Hogsheads of Strong Beer we were reckoned about 700 People, and the Evening being fine it was very agreeable.'

This letter is valuable for a number of reasons. We now know that the tower was in existence and in use in 1741. We know that it had battlements and that it was possible to get on to them to throw fireworks down to the ground. We know there was a parterre in front of the tower and we also know the type of activities that took place there.

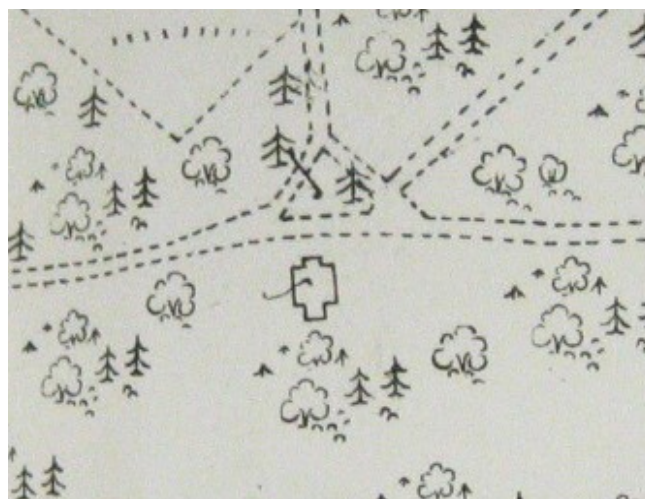
The next documents to be studied were maps. The earliest map at a scale that would show individual buildings was Andrews and Drury of 1769. This is to a scale of two inches to one mile and clearly shows the tower with its parterre gardens, rides and possibly two associated buildings. The whole collection is labelled 'The Tower'.





Andrews and Drury map. 1767.

In 1778 Hasted produced a map to a scale of one inch to one mile this shows the tower and the radiating rides but nothing more. Mudge's map of 1819 to a similar scale again just shows the tower with its radiating rides. Greenwood's map of 1821 shows what may be interpreted as the tower with its radiating rides. A tithe map of 1845 shows nothing at all in Tower Wood. A 25 inch Ordnance Survey map of 1909 clearly shows the tower and its radiating rides but even at this enhanced scale there is no sign of any gardens or other buildings.



25 inch OS map 1897.



From the evidence of the maps it would seem that the tower and its associated parterre, gardens and rides was in good order in 1769 but by 1821 the tower was out of use. And this is confirmed by Colbran's book of 1840.

## IMAGES

A collection was made of images of the tower, as mentioned above, the tower has always attracted photographers and artists. Photographs varied from family snaps to professionally taken pictures to be used as postcards. Mr V New, a local artist, made a very fine set of drawings in 1970. These are accurately to scale and show great detail. Mrs Annie Anscombe made a painting of the tower which though simple, still shows useful information.



Ida Black sitting at the base of the tower 1923. Combley family album.



North front of the tower in 1953. Peter Finch family album.



Postcard c 1970.



Postcard c 1920.

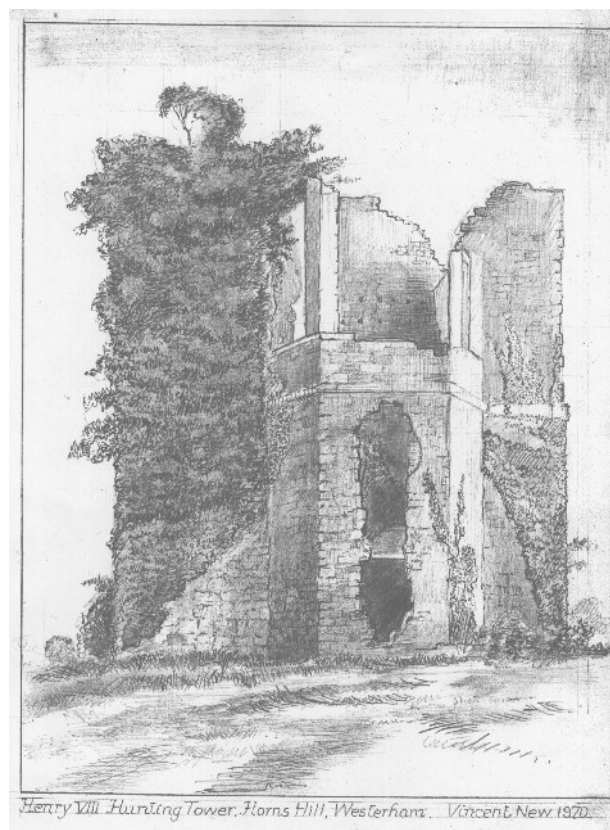


The tower in 1977

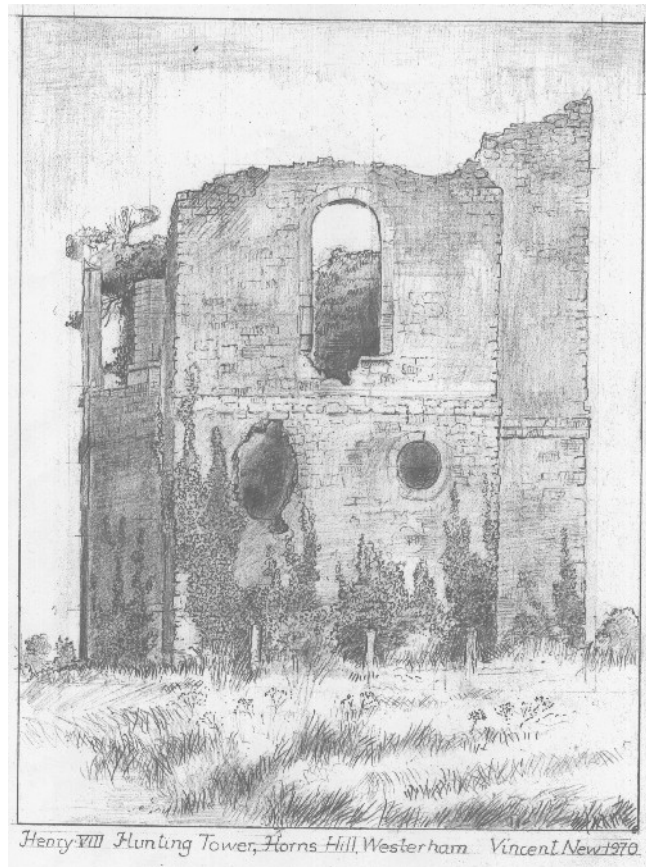




South side of the tower by Mr V New 1970.



North face of the tower by Mr V New 1970.



West face of the tower by Mr V New 1970.



A painting of the tower by Mrs Annie Anscombe. (Date unknown)

## ROCK SAMPLES

Most of the stone used in the construction of the tower is from the 'Lower Greensand' beds. These beds outcrop in a band below the North Downs from west of Reigate in Surrey to Hythe in Kent. The bulk of the tower is built of randomly coursed Kentish Rag rubble, a yellowish sandstone and almost certainly obtained from the Hosey mines barely half a mile away. The size of these blocks rarely exceeds twenty two inches long and in fact most pieces are considerably smaller. The front of the building



by contrast is laid in carefully coursed rectangular blocks of a whitish stone. These are approximately ten inches high and twelve inches long by six inches thick and are most probably from the Reigate underground quarries which are in the 'Upper Greensand' which outcrops between Brockham in the west to Godstone in the east but centred on Reigate. The Reigate quarries were worked from pre Norman times and the stone was used in several high status buildings such as the Tower of London and Hampton Court. All the mortar between the stones is galleted.



Galleted blocks on the front wall.



Post card c 1910 showing squared blocks and rubble masonry.

The lintels with their keystones over the doors and ground floor windows are a freestone also from the Hythe beds as are the circular windows on the first floor. It was not possible to obtain samples of the stone used in the large windows on the second floor but this is clearly good quality freestone.

## THE BUILDING

There is a plinth in two stages below the ground floor windows and a stringcourse at the level of the second floor. The small square windows on the ground floor and the doorways all have keystones.



Square window with keystone. (Damaged sill)

There are two dummy windows outside on the west ground floor these are where the fireplace is on the inside.



Dummy Window.

The round windows on the first floor are square edged and have no rebates for glazing.



Round window inside with brick reveals.

The large windows on the second floor are also square edged with no rebates any wooden frames must have been inside the stone frames.

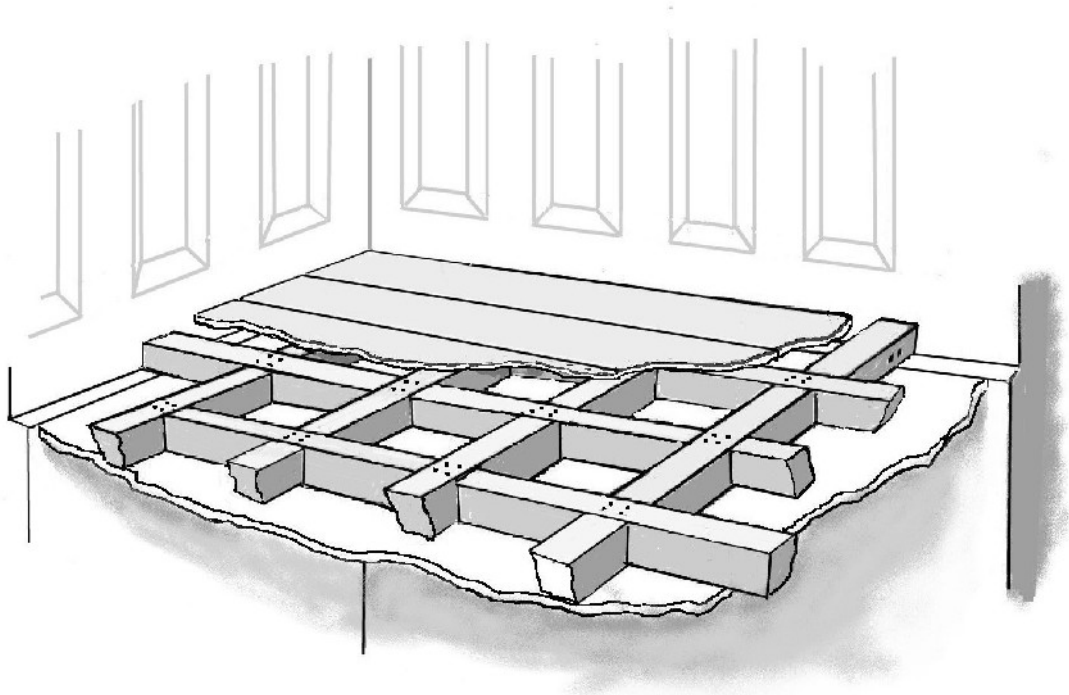
Probably the most unusual feature of the tower is the fact that there are no slots in the walls to take the ends of bresumers to carry floor joists, instead at the first, second and roof level there is a three inch wide ledge that goes all round the inside of the building to take a Serlio type floor or roof.



Ledge for Serlio floor on first and second levels.



Sebastiano Serlio was a 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian architect who published a series of books on architecture and one of his ideas was to produce a floor that would span a space with timbers considerably shorter than the span involved. A side benefit of his idea was that it gave a ceiling that was completely free of any projecting beams so that the whole area of the ceiling could be decorated with one large painting. Whether Serlio's floors were adopted so that short, inexpensive timbers could be used or whether it was so that the ceiling could be decorated will probably never be known but it is surely significant that Serlio's architectural ideas can be identified in the little gazebo on the hill opposite Squerries Court.



A model of Serlio's floor.

The only fireplace is on the west wall of the ground floor and had a brick hood that was built out from the wall and which extended up into the first floor.

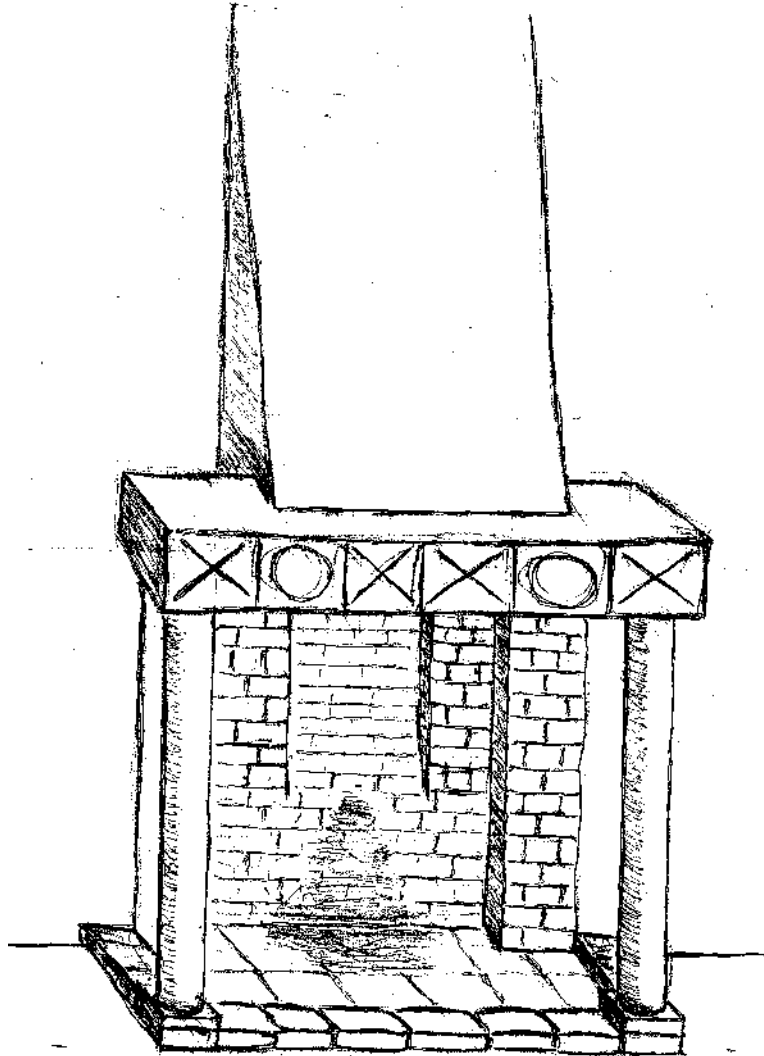




Remains of the hood.



Remains of the fireplace



What the fireplace may have looked like.

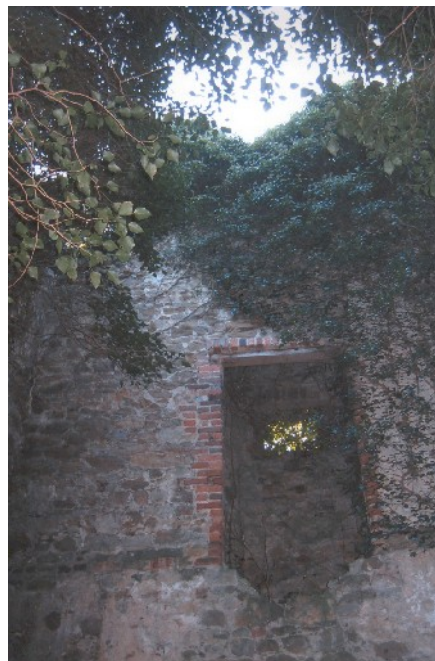
The chimney was built into the thickness of the wall and curved round one of the circular windows on the first floor.



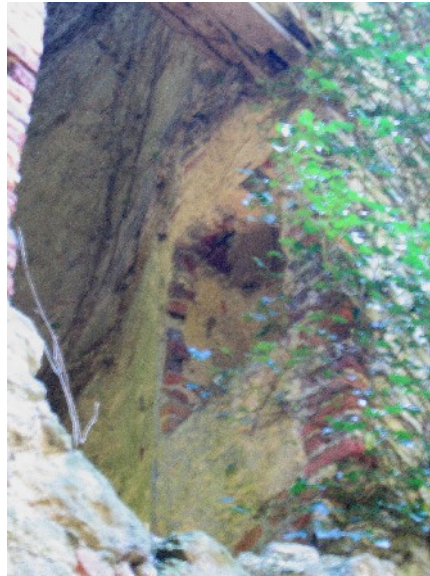
The chimney built into the thickness of the wall.

It is likely that the chimney exited through one of the battlements.

On the south side of the main tower is a small square tower that contained a spiral staircase. This stair was the only means to access the second floor through a door that had large niches or cupboards built into the thickness of the walls.



Door to second floor from staircase tower.



Niche cupboard in doorway to second floor.

The staircase, lit by two small square windows was wooden with one clockwise spiral, the treads had a maximum depth of 15 inches and a rise of 8 inches. There are holes in the walls to take the ends of the timbers that supported the stairs. At the side of the staircase just inside the entrance door is a vertical groove in the wall plaster that would appear to be where there was a door to an under stair cupboard. It is probable that a continuation of this staircase lead up to the battlements. The only stairway to access the first floor must have been inside the ground floor although no signs of it can now be seen.

## BRICK WORK

All the doors and windows have brick reveals, also the whole of the fireplace is brick built. Bricks have gradually increased in thickness since their introduction in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. At that time they were little more than one inch thick, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century they had reached a thickness of three inches. At two and five eights inches the tower bricks fall into the lower bracket of thickness for the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in fact there is a fair bit of variation in the bricks of the tower, the thinnest being barely two inches. These thin bricks also tend to be longer at around nine inches while the thicker bricks are about eight and a half inches long. All the bricks are hand made and have no frogs. The style of brick laying is also rather random but does tend to be Flemish bond although there is never really a long enough run for any particular bond to become properly established.

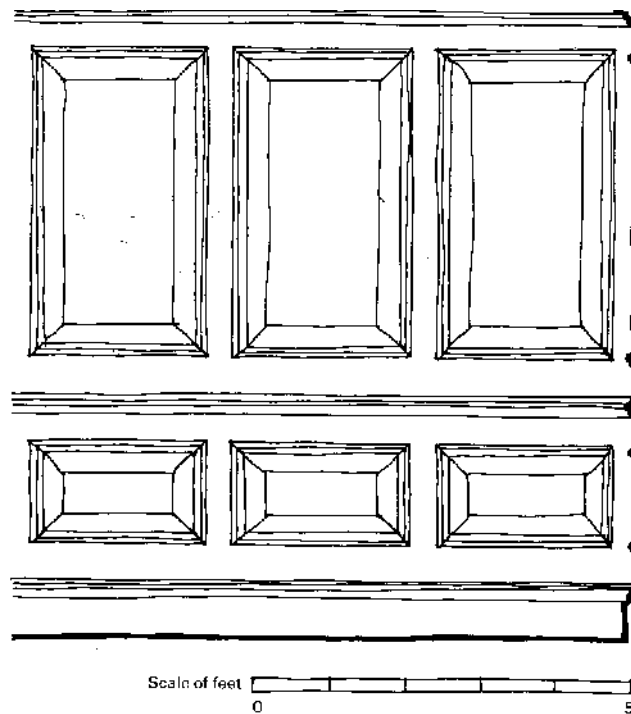
## WALL LINING

The inside walls of the ground floor and the first floor were both plastered and fairly large areas of this plaster still remain in situ. The second floor by contrast was panelled. Although no panelling remains, the holes for the fixing blocks that were used to attach the panelling to the wall can still be clearly seen. These holes are about three inches square and probably of a similar depth. They are on a regular grid of about one foot six inch centres. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century panelling tended to be of pine, painted and with fairly refined mouldings.





Holes for blocks to attach panelling.



18<sup>th</sup> century panelling.

## WINDOWS

The windows openings on the ground floor and in the staircase tower are all two feet six square and have stone lintels with keystones. The masonry in the thickness of the walls is carried on rough timbers.

All the first floor windows are round and have an opening of approximately thirty inches diameter. The frames are of stone and are made up of six unequal segments about four inches thick. Again the masonry in the thickness of the walls is carried on rough timbers.



Round window with rough timber lintels

The windows of the second floor are altogether much more splendid than those on the lower floors. In the west wall the window still retains its semicircular head and stone frame, it is set in a deep recess that continues down to the floor, It almost certainly originally had a double hung sash window. The window in the east wall is identical but much less complete. The window in the north wall is a bay window but is much destroyed. It is likely that originally it had a round head with pediment over it and was also a double hung sash. Wootton's painting of 1735 in which the tower appears very tiny in the distance shows just such an arrangement.



Enlargement of Wootton's painting of 1735.

## FLOORS

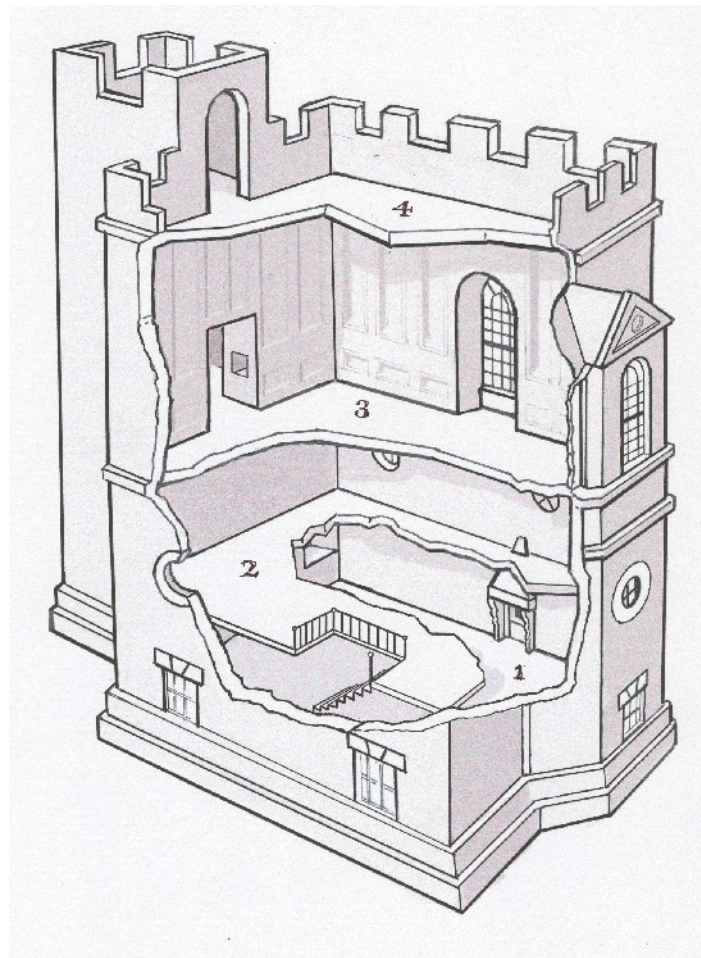
The ground floor is covered in a thick layer of very black earth, so it is not possible to see what kind of floor was used. It was probably brick or stone flags. There are absolutely no remnants of the first or second floors but if a Serlio type of construction was used, then the floors would have been boarded and the ceilings of lath and plaster. The ceiling of the second floor may have been decorated.

## ROOF

Again there are no remains whatsoever of the roof but it was probably fairly flat and covered with lead. There would have been some sort of pipework projecting through the battlements to carry away rainwater.

## A RECONSTRUCTION

With all the evidence now at hand it was possible to make a cutaway drawing of the tower showing the main internal features.



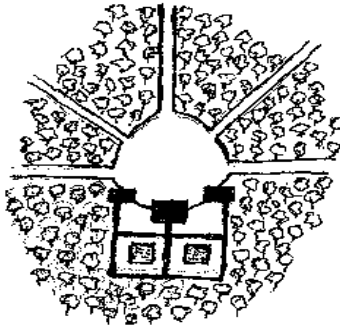
View showing the main internal features.

1. Ground floor with small square windows, open fireplace and stairs to first floor.

2. First floor with small round windows and fairly austere finish.
3. Second floor with panelling, large ornate windows and high ceiling.
4. Battlements with access only from second floor.

## PARTERRE

According to the dictionary a parterre is 'an arrangement of flower plots with spaces of turf or gravel between for walks'. Andrews and Drury's map of 1769 certainly shows an area of rectangular plots to the sides and rear of the tower with a large circular area in front from which five rides radiate. The rides can still be traced on the ground and some at least have low banks on either side. There is no sign of the flower-beds.

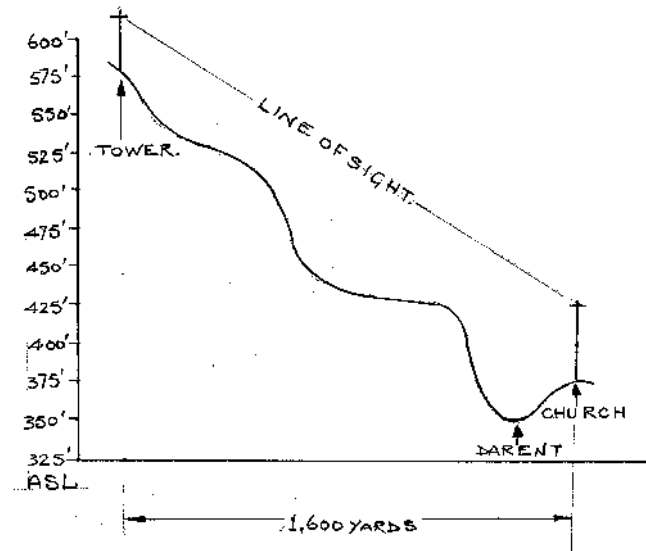


Copied and enlarged from Andrews and Drury 1769.

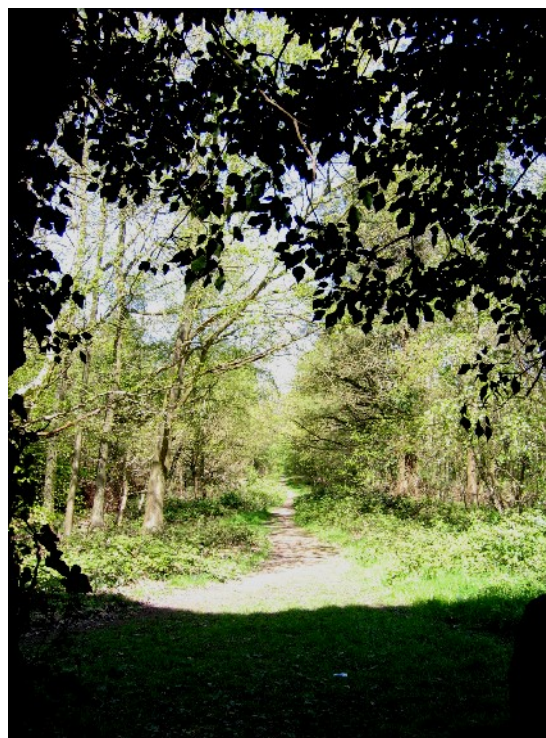
## ORIENTATION.

Donald Downes is certainly correct when he says that the tower is aligned precisely on Westerham church. In fact its alignment is five degrees west of true north and the central axis, front windows and the long ride all point straight at the church steeple which is just under one and three quarter miles away. By plotting the relative heights of the tower and the church and the contours in between it is possible to show that the church would certainly have been visible from the top of the tower. Colbran in his New Guide to Tunbridge Wells says that the tower was built to obtain an uninterrupted view of St Paul's London which is twenty one miles away. Although the top of St Paul's is three hundred and ninety feet above sea level and the top of the tower is six hundred feet above sea level with the North Downs in between, the tower would have to be over two hundred feet tall for St Paul's to be visible at all. In addition St Paul's is on quite the wrong alignment.





Contour sketch. (Vertical scale exaggerated).



The north ride viewed from the front ground floor window.

## WHAT WAS THE TOWER USED FOR?

Mary Warde's letter of 1741 give a very clear idea of the use to which the tower was put in its early days and my guess is that this is how it continued to be mainly used. It was never designed to be lived in even for a very limited time as there is no sign of any toilet facilities, there does not even seem to be a water supply unless rainwater was collected from the roof and stored. Apart from a fairly inefficient fireplace on the ground floor there is no heating. It is clear from the way the building is constructed

that a high degree of social segregation took place. The ground floor was only accessible from the door at the rear of the building. This area is where food and drinks would have been prepared. An internal staircase led to the first floor which with its plastered walls and small round windows would have been fairly austere and probably used by hunt servants, beaters etc. Access to the much more palatial second floor was only via the spiral staircase in the outer tower. This large room with its windows with commanding views, decorative wood panelling and high ceiling was clearly used by the gentry. Access by the gentry to the battlements could only be made via an extension of the spiral staircase. There is no direct road to the tower from Squerryes Court so all the indications are that the tower was for occasional, fairly bucolic parties or perhaps a days shooting.

## CONCLUSION

It is a puzzle that a building that was put up at some considerable expense around 1735 should have been described by John Colbran barely one hundred years later as 'being for some time in a ruinous condition'. This is unlikely to happen by natural causes. If a fire had destroyed the tower there would almost certainly be signs of the intense heat on the interior walls but there is not. Possibly a change in the fashion of entertaining is the reason. If more formal parties were held in Squerryes Court and the tower became disused it may have become a location for tramps, peddlers and others to stay overnight, in which case it might have seemed prudent to make it unusable by removing the roof, floors, panelling and staircase. All these items would have had value and could be recycled in other buildings elsewhere on the estate.

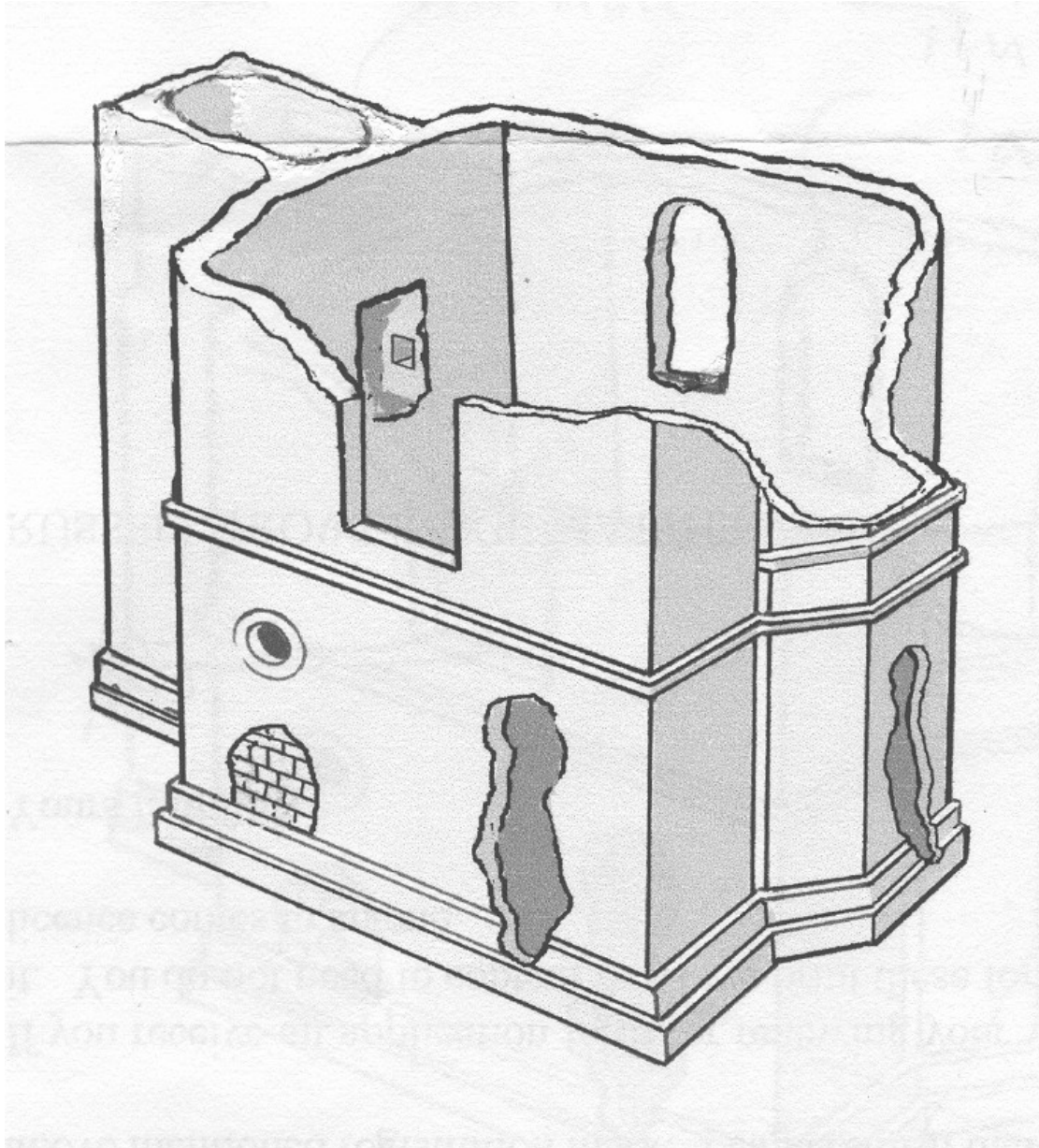
## THE FUTURE

Although the bulk of the masonry of the tower is in reasonable order the ivy that now covers the whole building will eventually work its way into the mortar and will then start to prise out masonry blocks. Several of the windows have lost their surrounds and the ragged holes are gradually getting bigger until in some cases the first floor windows have already run into the ground floor windows.



Two windows on the east side running into one.

The doorway giving access to the ground floor has already had to be bricked up as has the adjacent window. Considerable restoration needs to be carried out if this interesting old building is to be preserved but where the will and the cash for such work is to come from is by no means clear.



The tower as it would look now with the ivy removed.

FINIS.

The research on the tower has been spread over several years and many people have contributed information, postcards, photographs and artwork. My thanks go especially to the following;

Mr and Mrs John Warde. Squerryes Court, Westerham.  
Peter Finch. Westerham.  
The Anscombe family.  
Mr and Mrs SV New. Moorehouse  
Maureen Oakley. Westerham.  
Donald Downes. Westerham.  
Gerry Gibbons. Newbury.  
Gwyn Headley. Harlech.  
Bridget and Annie Carpenter Canterbury.  
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The staff of the Centre for Kentish Studies. Maidstone.  
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. London.  
Veronica Dunn. The Chartered Institute of Building. Ascot.  
The Bodleian Library. Oxford

The help was all theirs, the errors are all mine.

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