

# Oxspring Lodge:

## reconstructing a Yorkshire hunting lodge

By P. F. RYDER

**SUMMARY:** *A mid sixteenth-century hunting lodge of the Bosville family, which survive intact until the late nineteenth century, is now reduced to its footings. Using an unpublished description and photographs taken early this century, the lodge can be reconstructed on paper showing it to have been of unusual hybrid construction using stone external walls along with a internal timber frame; some similar sixteenth-century structures survive in the area. The building also demonstrates a fusion of 'Highland' and 'Lowland' traditions in carpentry, and in addition provides an interesting example of what are usually thought of as vernacular building techniques in a high-status structure.*

### I

### INTRODUCTION

Oxspring Lodge, a 16th-century hunting lodge of the Bosville family, stood on the north of the River Don at 700 ft. (230 m.) OD, 3 km. east of Penistone and 17 km north-west of Sheffield. Although even recent Ordnance Survey maps label the site at SK/270025 as 'Manor House (remains of)', nothing survives today except for a rectangle of partly grassed-over footings, completely mute as to the nature of the interesting and unusual building which stood intact a century ago.

It is a matter of rare good fortune that the Lodge was recorded and photographed by C. F. Innocent, the Sheffield architect best known for his *History of English Building Construction*<sup>1</sup> and J. Kenworthy, a local historian, early in the present century. Three photographs of the ruin appear in Innocent's book<sup>2</sup> and another in one of Kenworthy's works,<sup>3</sup> but no full account of the structure has ever been published. The surviving record, in the form of a written account and a dozen or so fine photographs, is to be found in a collection of unpublished Kenworthy manuscripts now held by Sheffield City Library.<sup>4</sup>

Using this material, along with the fragmentary remains which survive on the site today, the Lodge can be reconstructed, on paper, with a fair degree of accuracy: in view of its unusual constructional and decorative features, the building is (or was) one which merits being brought to the attention of modern students of vernacular architecture, especially in view of recent research in the subject.

Kenworthy's account provides a brief but succinct description of the general form of the building and of a number of its features of interest, and merit

reproduction in full with the exception of a quite lengthy digression, characteristic of the writer's style, on the use of oak trees.

## II

THE ACCOUNT OF OXSPRING LODGE BY J. KENWORTHY<sup>4</sup>

It is a transitional building, inasmuch as it applies the principle of post-and-truss construction direct to the use of stone walls, and thus tested the capability of such walls to carry tie-beams with deep braces resting on stone corbels fixed in the wall. These trusses were fixed alternately with principals supported on posts, and

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FIG. 1

The Lodge from the south east (C. F. Innocent, c.1910)

PENISTONE

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the posts were rendered rigid by beams framed into them at the height of the first storey, which beams carried the floor joists of the second storey: a brace from post to bonding beam, in the second storey, was a further precaution against collapse. The wall-plates were framed in as well, and carried the roof spars and joists of the attic floor. The beams at the height of 8 feet would also help as a bond in supporting the walls.

The walls are 30 inches thick, and their height under the eaves 16 feet. The building when complete would measure about 38 feet long by 25 feet wide. These dimensions, deducting the thickness of the walls, would equal an inside area of about 600 square feet, or the floor area of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  bays of building 'on crucks' at 240 feet per bay.

The walls are constructed of stones from the easily quarried upper beds of local rock—Penistone flags—which gave a wall of good texture with close and level joints. The walls were left dry on the outside, the interior being filled with well-tempered clay, and though the thin bedded rubble lay close, the old builders had a knack of laying the outside edge to throw the rain out, and thus help in keeping the wall dry, as in the case of walls of slate and rock used in the dwellings of the Lake District.

Quoins of good sized ashlar, neatly dressed, held up the corners of the building and the long heavy stone brackets successfully held in check any tendency there might be for the gable coping to slide.

The roofing was of higher pitch than usual for grey slates, but it was exceedingly well constructed of oak timber throughout. The spars, which fell during a high wind in June 1911, were of good strong section and lay on good stout purlins, being fixed about 12 or 14 inches apart. They were pegged through at the top, with a collar beam as shown, there being no ridge tree. They were also securely fixed on the wall-plates, where sprockets fell from them over the eaves in order to keep the wall dry.

The building is 2 storeys high with a commodious attic in the high-pitched roof but owing to the gable wall on the north-west having fallen and the one on the south-east being badly ruined, we cannot say how the attic was lit, unless there were lights of some kind in the roof. The spars, in their ruinous condition, do not shew any hint of dormer lights. Perhaps it was lighted from the gables.

There is a fireplace in each of the 3 storeys, and the flue, which included these fireplaces in its bulk, was carried inside the building at the east end. The largest of the 3 fireplaces is the one in the best room, on the ground floor, which has an opening  $6\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide. It is uncertain as to whether there was a chimney or not at the other end of the building.

We are inclined to think that the main entrance may have been in the west gable, which fell down in or about 1906, also a fairly large window in all 3 storeys. The original windows on both sides of the building appear to have been small, for instance, one window in the room containing the ceiling of framed oak beams was 33 inches wide by  $27\frac{1}{2}$  inches high, and is deeply splayed inside. It had an oak frame of 3 lights with diamond mullions and may have been glazed with diamond panes and have had solid wooden shutters behind, opening inwards.



FIG. 2

Interior of west bay looking north-east (C. F. Innocent, *c.*1910)

The design of the oak frame of the building is well conceived. It is not clumsy. It seems to have been more closely calculated as to the actual stress it might have to bear than was the case in older buildings. The proportions are good throughout, and the workmanship of the best, and the quality of the oak, so far as we could judge in the present condition of the building, was of the finest selection and well seasoned.

The upper storeys are reached by a circular staircase in the recess at the right

hand of the fireplaces. 'The steps are blocks of oak levelled at the back to the curve required in a winding stairway. They are 9 inches deep and 12 inches wide on the tread at its broadest part, and the newel post, into which each step at its narrow end is inserted, measures 22 inches in circumference or about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter. . . .

The Reverend Joseph Hunter in his 'South Yorkshire' says that Godfrey Bosville of Gunthwaite bought the Manor of Oxspring, also Hornthwaite and Rough Birchworth from the Eyre family in 1547 and at his death in 1580 he bequeathed it to his son Francis Bosville. In his will the following items in connexion with the Lodge at Oxspring are mentioned, viz:

'Also bed and bedsteads at his Lodge at Oxspring, and tables and forms there, with all his harness, cross-bows, rack and artillery. They are to descend as heir-looms to the use of his heirs male.'

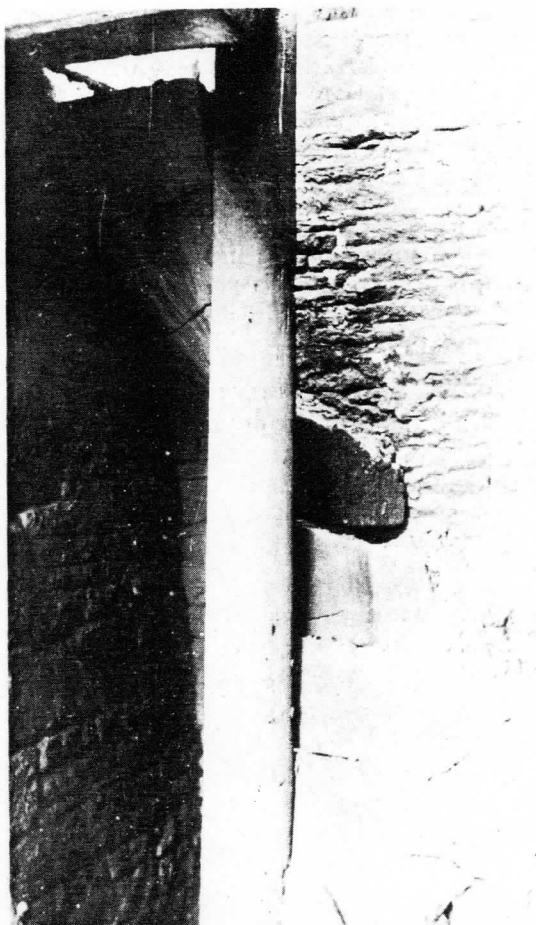


FIG. 3

The Oak newel stair (C. F. Innocent c.1910)

The building has therefore been built as a lodge for a purpose similar to Ewden Lodge, which was in existence in 1574, and Wharncliffe Lodge, built by Sir Thomas Wortley in 1510, at which house 'he (Sir Thomas), did lie for most of the grease time, and the worshipful of the county did there resort unto him having there with him pastime and good cheer.'

The lodge at Oxspring has several features in common with Sheffield Lodge or Manor, and may be considered mid 16th-century date, as against early 16th century for Sheffield Lodge. There is no ridge tree in the latter, and the spars are pegged through at the top as is the case at Oxspring Lodge. The partition which is fixed at the centre of the building, and divided each of the three floors into two rooms—six in all—was made after the same manner as those in Sheffield Lodge. The description of those in Oxspring Lodge, as given by Mr. Innocent, is as follows, viz:

'Early 16th century laths in the Sheffield district were fixed by 'shooting', that is, they were sprung into V-shaped grooves cut into the sides of the upright studs. Occasionally, as at the now ruined Oxspring Lodge, near Penistone, the studs were inclined. The laths were fixed a little distance apart to give the usual key, and as these were 'full long' their spring kept them in position. This method of fixing the laths recalls some of the early wooden partitions, and one of the methods of fixing wattle uprights already described, with the difference that the grooves for the laths are vertical, while in the previous examples they are horizontal. The Swedish 'skiftes vaerk', in which the laths are replaced by solid deals without plaster, is more nearly allied.

At the same period, in South Yorkshire, an attempt was made to provide a stronger panel filling than the usual oak board, by the use of local stone or 'grey' slates, which were fixed between the studs by being fitted in grooves in their sides, and then plastered over. Such stone slate filling was used on the ground floor at Oxspring Lodge, and the "shot laths" on the upper floors.'

A room in the lower storey had originally been lined with oak panelling of beautiful workmanship, whose panels were carved after the manner of folded linen. The Lodge, however, had been let off as a tenement late in the 19th century, and the panelling was covered with whitewash, and on stripping the walls, when the building was abandoned to decay, the fact that the panels were carved was not discovered in time to save them from being chopped up for firewood.

This particular room, which had been adorned with linen panelling, also carried an interesting ceiling, to judge from the arrangement of the beams supporting the floor above, whose intersections were possibly carved with bosses bearing armorial devices. This is not improbable, because, as remarked by Hunter, 'Godfrey Bosville seems to have sought to lay the foundation of all his titles deep'.

### III

#### FURTHER NOTES ON THE STRUCTURE AND PLAN OF THE BUILDING

A few points in the above description perhaps need elucidating with the aid of modern terminology. The timber frame of the lodge would *appear* to have been confined to first floor level, the six principal posts being carried on bressumers and

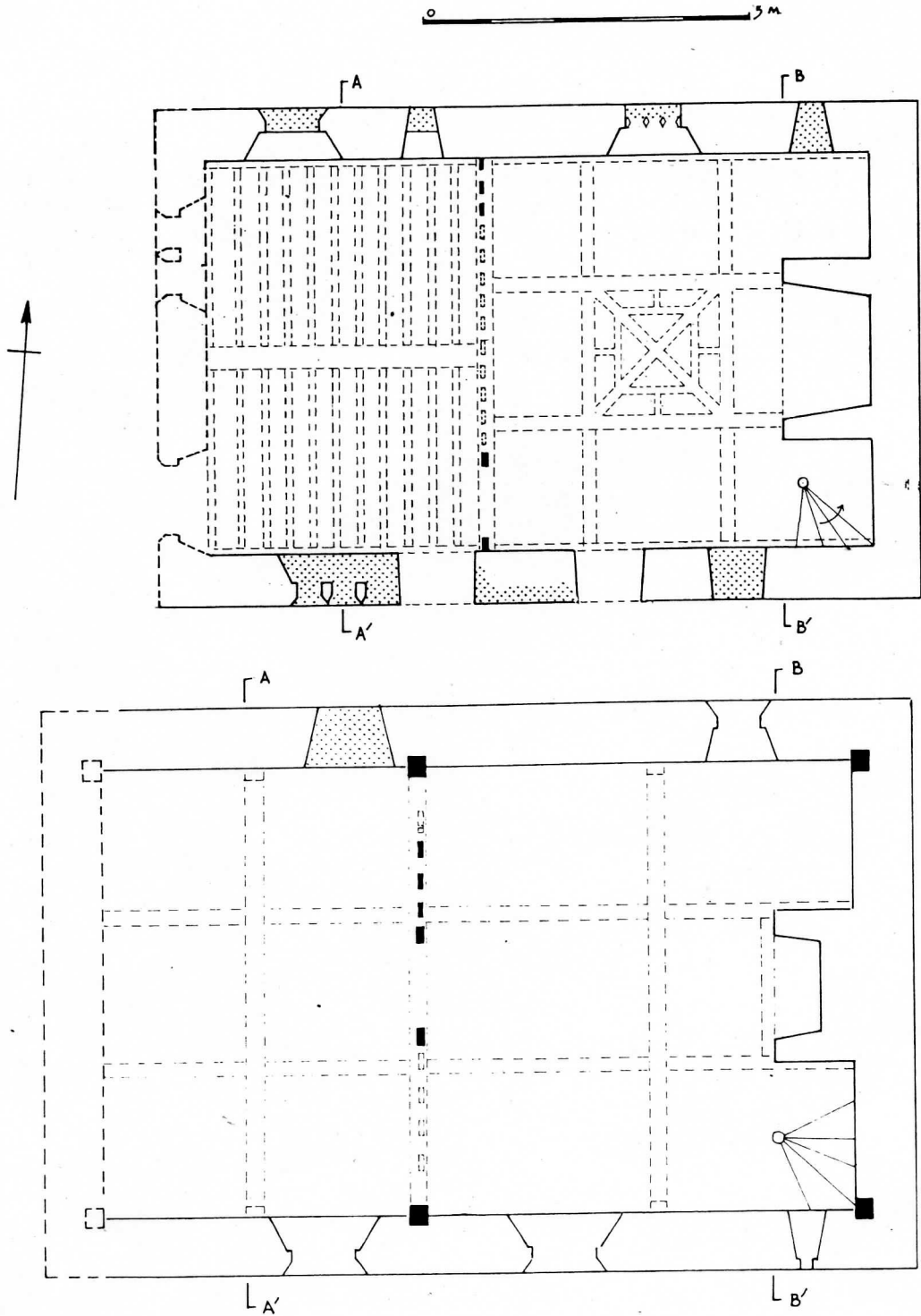


FIG. 4

Reconstructed Plans of Oxspring Lodge c. 1910 (after photographs by C. F. Innocent)

(a) Ground Floor (note arrangements of openings in west end are conjectural)

(b) First Floor

girding beams or rails (Kenworthy's 'bonding beams') set into the internal face of the walls; unfortunately neither the photographs nor the written account make this absolutely clear. It should perhaps remain an open question whether the corner posts ran the full height of the building—the photograph published by Kenworthy makes it clear that those of the central truss did not. The intermediate trusses had shorter wall posts resting on stone corbels. The roof had principal rafter-trusses with collars and butt purlins; the common rafter pairs also had collars, and there was no ridge.

The internal arrangements of the lodge can be reconstructed in some detail. As Kenworthy suggests, the main and perhaps the only entrance would seem to have been in the west gable. This opened into a well-lit room, having a three-light window on the south, a two-light on the north and probably another two-light window on the west (to judge from the fallen jamb and sill lying in approximately this position visible on one photograph). The ceiling was formed by a central axial beam carrying quite closely spaced joists. On the far side of the room was a close-studded partition with a segmental-arched door on the right into the second ground floor room, the hall.

The hall, the larger of the two ground floor apartments (Kenworthy's 'central' truss appears, from the number of rafters over each bay visible in the photographs, to have been set west of centre), was panelled and heated by a large fireplace with a monolithic lintel cut to a segmental arch, set in an internal stack centrally placed at the east end of the building. The ceiling beams of the apartment framed a central section in which the arrangement of diagonal beams and trimmers was obviously intended to create a decorative effect, and probably provided (as Kenworthy surmises) the basis of a heraldic display. The 'bonding beams' which stood proud of the internal faces of the walls were thickened in an unusual manner at their junctions with the transverse ceiling beams; the intermediate tie-beams were similarly treated at their junction with the axial beams which carried the attic floor.

The oak-mullioned window described by Kenworthy was apparently situated on the north of the hall; one of the photographs shows that its external opening was without stone dressings, unlike the stone-mullioned windows elsewhere in the building. This distinction between window types is puzzling, and might point to a late 16th- or early 17th-century remodelling of the original fabric.

The impressive oak newel stair was set on the south side of the internal stack and rose the full height of the building, the individual treads being morticed and pegged into the newel post.

The two first floor chambers were divided by a framed partition with a central doorway similar to that at ground floor level. The eastern room was heated by a fireplace with a massive monolithic lintel which still lies on the site, along with that of the ground floor fireplace, the latter now broken into two pieces. Each chamber had a window with a chamfered stope surround, probably originally of two lights, on the south; the eastern had a similar but narrower window on the north whilst the western had a north window without stone dressings, which probably carried an oak frame. There was also a small loop lighting the newel



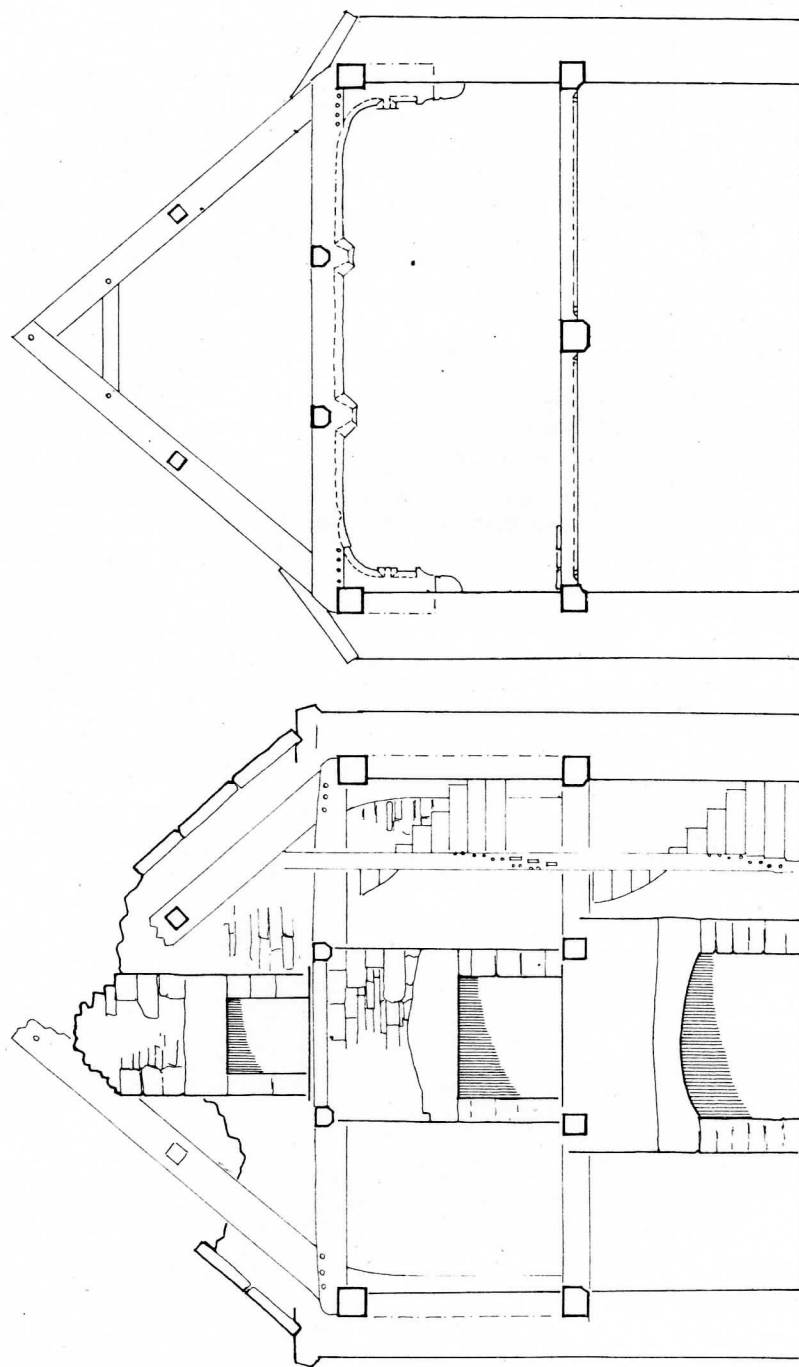


FIG. 5

Reconstructed Sections of Oxspring Lodge c. 1910

(a) Section A—A' looking east; (b) Section B—B' looking east

stair. In addition to the unusual decorative treatment of the intermediate tie-beams, already mentioned, the faces of the wall posts which carried them had raised octagonal bosses, which presumably carried some form of heraldic or decorative ornament.

The eastern of the two attic rooms, at the head of the stair, was heated by a fireplace similar to but smaller than that at first floor level; how the room was lit remains uncertain. The partition at attic level appears from the photographs to have been of stud and daub construction, apparently without any doorway—this would imply the existence of some sort of ladder stair in the western first floor chamber.

Thus the total accommodation of the lodge comprised six apartments—the hall for eating and entertaining guests, the adjacent room perhaps used as a store-cum display place for the Bosville hunting equipment (as Godfrey's will makes clear), two quite prestigious first floor chambers adequate for the owner and his guests, and humbler attic-level accommodation for the necessary retainers. Whether there were other contemporary structures is uncertain, although the footings of a building about 4.5 m. square internally still survive a few metres away to the south, which might conceivably be interpreted as a detached kitchen.

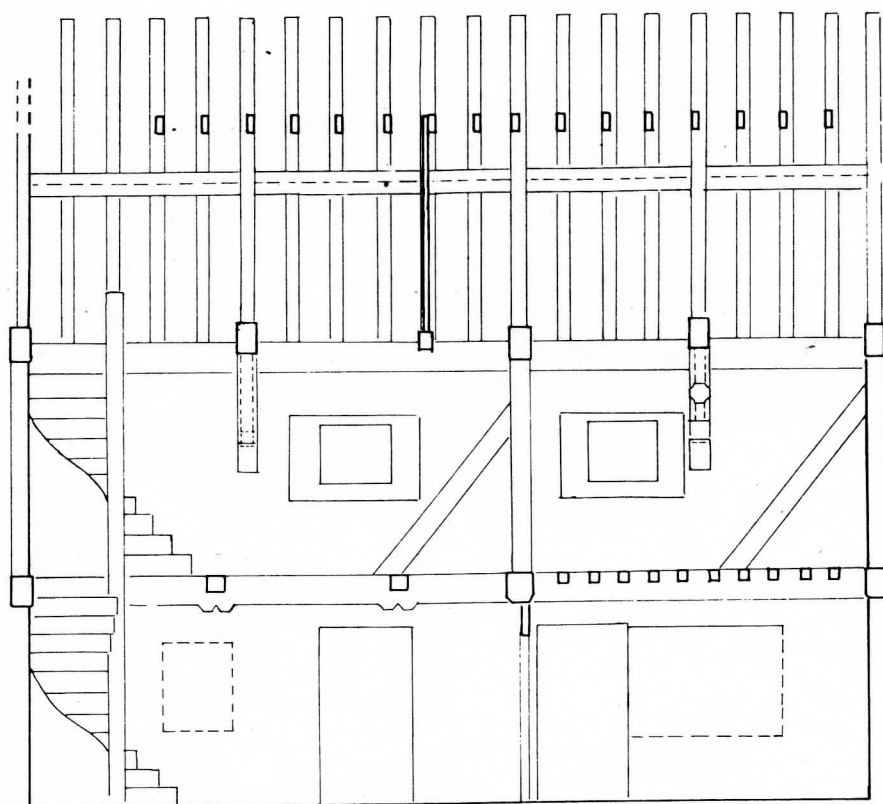
## IV

### THE LATER HISTORY OF THE LODGE

Oxspring Lodge does not appear to have maintained its original function for more than a century or so. The Bosvilles remained at their family seat of Gunthwaite, 5 km. north-west of Oxspring, until 1773, but the lodge appears to have been let to tenants as a farmhouse since, at the latest, the early 18th century. The probate inventory of John Pashley (presumably a tenant) of Oxspring Lodge,<sup>5</sup> taken 6 September 1727, refers to the rooms of the building as 'house, parlour, nar (near) chamber, far chamber and milk house'.

The lodge suffered some repairs and alterations in its later years. One of Innocent's photographs shows that the central part of the south wall had been refaced in horizontally-tooled squared stone quite typical of late 18th/early 19th-century farm buildings in the area; the two ground floor doorways in this wall may both have been of this date, although the eastern did appear to utilise one jamb of an earlier opening. A range of cartsheds of similar masonry had been built on to the east end of the lodge, and a second range of out-buildings ran south from the west end of the building, presumably linking it to the formerly detached structure of which the footings survive (the 'milk house' of 1727?).

The lodge seems to have been finally abandoned c.1900, and, as Kenworthy records, the west gable was the first part of the structure to fall. Some of the Innocent photographs were evidently taken before the fall of the rafters in June 1911, and others after. No attempts appear to have been made to check the deterioration of the structure. The north wall and east end of the lodge were still standing to some height as late as 1958.<sup>6</sup>



0 5m.

FIG. 6

Reconstructed Internal Elevation of South Wall of Oxspring Lodge c. 1910

## V

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OXSPRING LODGE

Kenworthy very aptly commences his account of the lodge with a comment as to its being a 'transitional' building. This is true in at least three ways, and it is here that the real significance of the structure lies.

Firstly, and as Kenworthy intended, Oxspring Lodge demonstrates the transition between the post-and-truss construction of a timber building, and the use of stone walls. The builders clearly relied on the frame, even when 'suspended'

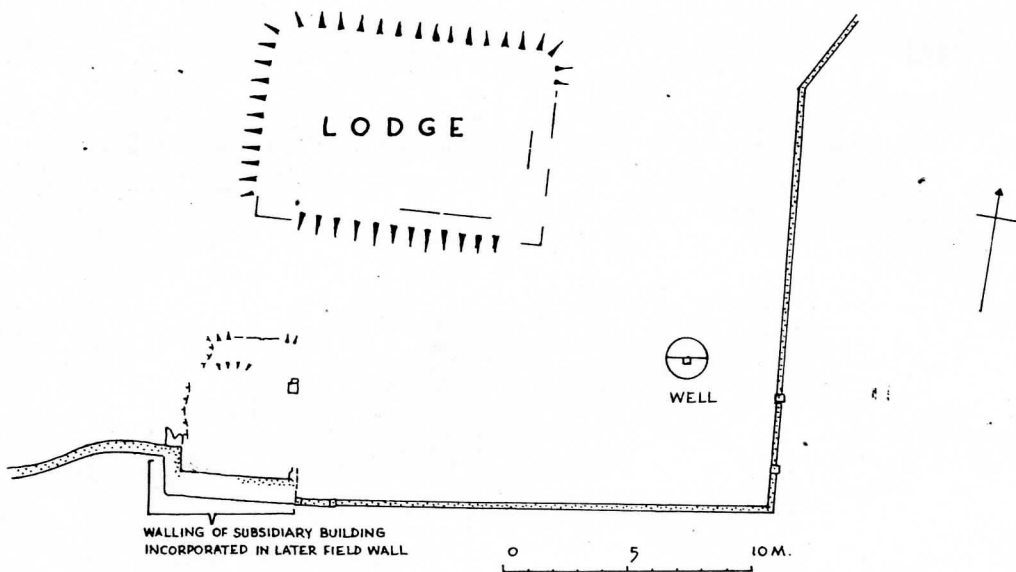


FIG. 7

Oxspring Lodge. Survey of Site, 21 February 1983.

at first floor level, to give necessary stability to the structure and to carry the considerable weight of the stone flag roof.

Stone appears to have been in quite general use for the ground floor walls of buildings in the area, by the early 16th century. The recently-demolished Green Farm at Stocksbridge<sup>7</sup> was a house of this type, whilst Godfrey Bosville's own great barn at Gunthwaite,<sup>8</sup> a structure more-or-less co-eval with the lodge, had its external timber-framing relegated to the upper third of the side walls, and intended primarily as a decorative element. Other South Yorkshire buildings with structural frames but full-height stone walls include the cruck-built cross wing at Windhill Farm, Bolsterstone (SK/246984) and the post-and-truss wing to a cruck hall block at Low Bromley Farmhouse (SK/325991).

Oxspring Lodge is thus a member of a group of hybrid or transitional buildings not confined to any one level of status; most are difficult to date but may, like the lodge, be of the mid-16th century. The wide social spread of these structures, along with their relatively early use of stone as a building material, make the group one of considerable significance as regards the development of building techniques in the region.

The second sense in which Oxspring Lodge is a transitional building is in its style of carpentry. South Yorkshire is an area in which so-called 'Highland' and 'Lowland' carpentries intermingled, at least in the 15th and 16th centuries.<sup>9</sup> The



former style is marked by principal-rafter roof types carrying a ridge, the latter by common rafter roofs.

Oxspring Lodge borrows features from both traditions, as well as displaying others uncommon in the area. The roof has principal rafter trusses, but these do not carry a ridge, a peculiarity shared with two other high-status buildings in Sheffield, the west wing at Broomhall, dated by dendrochronology to 1507–9<sup>10</sup> and the now-demolished Long Gallery at Sheffield Manor. The Oxspring roof, and that at the Manor, have common rafters with collars notched in, in the usual 'Lowland' manner. The use of butt purlins is another oddity; apart from their occurrence in the east wing at Harley Hall<sup>11</sup> they do not appear to have been previously recorded in South Yorkshire, where the trenched purlin is more-or-less universal. The framed structure at first-floor level is also unusual in its employment of downbraces, both between the principal posts and 'bonding beams' and in the form of the diagonal studding in the central truss, angling down from the posts and tie-beam into the bressumer and jamb studs of the central first-floor doorway. Elsewhere in the area, bracing between the post and the horizontal member (wall-plate or tie-beam) *above* is very much the norm.

Oxspring Lodge is also transitional, in a third sense, between vernacular and polite forms of building. Its function and obvious status would naturally tend towards the latter, but its constructional form and affinities to other more humble structures tie it to the former. It is perhaps best classed as a good-quality vernacular building with polite trimmings, evidence that in the South Yorkshire Pennines the constraints imposed by the limited choice of local building materials over-ruled the traditional architectural divide between the gentry and yeoman classes.

The building is also of interest viewed in its context as a hunting lodge, one of a relatively small group of specialized structures of which few examples survive today. Of the other two local hunting lodges referred to by Kenworthy, Ewden has gone and Wharncliffe has been largely if not wholly rebuilt. The late-medieval lodge in Tankersley Park was swallowed up in the later-16th-century mansion which superseded it (of which only a fragment now remains), a similar story to that at Sheffield where the site of the old hunting lodge became the later Manor. Oxspring, although the above-ground structure has largely gone, remains an undisturbed site ideal for archaeological investigation. The results of an excavation would ideally complement the surviving structural records of what was a most unusual and noteworthy building.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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- <sup>1</sup> C. F. Innocent *The Development of English Building Construction* (Cambridge, 1916, repub. Newton Abbot 1971).
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid fig. 47, 140, fig. 48, 141, and fig. 53, 169.
- <sup>3</sup> J. Kenworthy, *The Lure of Midhope cum Langsett*, (1927), 29.
- <sup>4</sup> Sheffield City Library, File MD 3338-4, 21-36.
- <sup>5</sup> Will proved in Doncaster Deanery in September 1728, Borthwick Institute, York. (I am grateful to Dr. D. G. Hey of Sheffield University for bringing this to my notice).
- <sup>6</sup> Ordnance Survey record cards; copies in South Yorkshire County Ancient Monuments and Sites Record, Cultural Activities Centre, Ellin St, Sheffield.
- <sup>7</sup> P. F. Ryder, *Timber-framed Buildings in South Yorkshire*, South Yorkshire County Archaeology Monograph 1, (1979), 47-55.
- <sup>8</sup> S. R. Jones, 'Gunthwaite Hall Barn' *Archaeol. Jnl.* 138 (1981), 462-466.
- <sup>9</sup> P. F. Ryder, *op cit* 85-93.
- <sup>10</sup> J. Hillam, 'List of tree ring dates for buildings with oak timber', *Vernacular Architecture* 11, (1980) 23.
- <sup>11</sup> P. F. Ryder, 'Five South Yorkshire Timber-framed Houses' *Yorks Archaeol Jnl.* forthcoming.

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