

## Chapter One

### *The 1820s: Between the villa and the cottage*



It sometimes seems as if the times we are living in are reminiscent of the early decades of the nineteenth century. All around England people can be found building houses in an almost Tudor-gothic style, sometimes with huge chimneys over inglenook fireplaces, leaded window panes, oriel windows and great sweeping roofs. Many contemporary speculative builders are now running up 'Georgian' residences with meagre Tuscan porches fronting blank symmetrical facades, in quantities that would have been unthinkable when I was a child in the 1960s. The parallel is not limited to modest domestic architecture. Indeed, in pre-Victorian England the unprecedentedly huge Palace of Westminster was designed, to general wonderment and some scorn, in an unintelligibly idiosyncratic style that was said to be representative of Britain's history; today, in the late Elizabethan era, another vastly expensive parliament building has arisen above the pavements of the northern capital in an equally obscure style that has been described by its architects, with even less plausibility, as having new forms derived from Scotland's own ancient traditions. In many towns and villages, fine gothic churches are again being mutilated with gimcrack partitions devised for highly non-liturgical practices, and cheap lean-to additions once more deface the exterior of their ancient masonry. There is now, as then, much talk of the Anglo-Saxons and of the distinct peoples of Britain, and of their characteristics and customs; there is chatter in the newspapers and amongst the politicians of the rowdiness, the vulgarity, and the drunkenness of the poor people of the towns, and of the philistinism and decadence of the very rich. And there is now, not unlike then, a very Hanoverian heir apparent to the throne of the United Kingdom living with a lady who was until recently his mistress in a stucco house originally designed by Nash, a house gone over not long ago by a leading interior decorator, partly at the taxpayers' expense and no doubt also to their delight, in an opulent late eighteenth-century taste which now matches ormolu with wall-to-wall beige carpeting.<sup>1</sup>

What we do not know of the present day, as we know retrospectively of the end of the Georgian era, is whether we are in a period of decisive change. In many respects, the years from the 1820s to the 1840s created modern Britain. The post-Napoleonic settlement in Europe, the Great Reform Act, the establishment of free trade, the formation of two modernised political parties in England, and the beginnings of the

#### 1.1

The offices of Queen Anne's Bounty in Dean's Yard, Westminster. Edward Blore designed no 3A, in shadow to the south (left) in 1846; the following year he added an extra storey to the house as well as the large office premises at no 3 with their imposing tall oriel (right).

process which created a structure of comprehensive government from parish to Empire all underlie subsequent developments in our history. New methods of analysis and the subdivision of 'science' provided the early century with professors, doctors and quacks in the developing fields of biology, botany, geology, mechanical and structural engineering, in medicine, sociology, phrenology, and much else.

In many ways, the private houses of this era are the touchstone for the great watershed which marks the Georgian era from the modern one that we took for granted until comparatively recently. The practice of architecture was revolutionised over a short period of time. It is from the early part of the nineteenth century that we first have the professional architect in the modern sense, presiding independently over the execution of a building contract that resembles the ones of today, questioning the stylistic rationale of his designs as he might do now, and specifying technical and mechanical apparatus such as the latest water closet and kitchen equipment like a modern practitioner. And it is during this period that specific building types that bridge the divide – most notably, the smaller private house – provide remarkable evidence of the changes that were occurring. The typical English parsonage provides an unparalleled window into a changing world, for it is a house-type that so many of us are familiar with, that can be seen in or beside almost every village, and which for many people has remained the quintessential English house, the one which at once conjures up a picture of a people and its landscape. Many hundreds were built at this time and, technically, it is the best documented of any contemporary building type; and yet ironically, in spite of that profusion of historic documentation concerning the clients, the sites, the materials, the elevations and the plans, there is next to nothing about the design of these houses in the academic literature, journalism or personal memoirs of the time, or indeed in architectural debate or personal memoirs. Furthermore, although Peter Hammond's *The parson and the Victorian parish* of 1977 included some very enjoyable descriptions of parsonages and parsonage life, there has been almost nothing written in modern times about their architecture, with the exception of passages in just two small books on the general history of the parsonage published in the early 1960s.<sup>2</sup> They simply are what they are, a remarkable collection of houses that represent the history of English domestic architecture at a critical period. These new houses



reached into villages across the whole of England, from the south-west of Cornwall up to the Northumbrian coast. Of course they provide a remarkable backdrop to the stories of those that commissioned them, designed them and built them; but they also carry in themselves the germs of the new architecture: for there is no other building type that so accurately portrays the transition of English architecture from the symmetrical classical-Georgian to the colourful, sometimes rowdy, sometimes moralising, aesthetics of the mid-Victorians. And since the history of the medium-sized private house encapsulates in some ways the history of architecture as a whole, the clarity of the changes as they can be seen in the developing parsonage across the period is itself an invaluable guide to the hopes and vicissitudes of designers from all ages; for in spite of some bold attempts by pious architects of the 1840s to find a special character for them, the changing style and plan of the parsonage continued to reflect the general nature of the debate across the architectural profession. At the beginning of the nineteenth century nearly all new parsonages looked much the same. By 1850 almost every one was different. What had happened?

### **New laws for new houses**

Early nineteenth-century English literature is rich with descriptions of parsons, and once one begins to look for them one soon finds clues as to the changing nature of their domestic circumstances. A most familiar example, from 1816, is Jane Austen's Mr Elton, the neighbour of her eponymous Emma. Emma is most careful to maintain social relations only with families of similar status, which largely means those with houses and servants on a scale comparable to the grand house in which she herself lives; and yet Mr Elton, though clearly socially acceptable to her and indeed in demand amongst the gentry for his company, lives in 'an old and not very good house, almost as close to the road as it could be'.<sup>3</sup> He seems to have very few servants, the most that his modest income and his small home can accommodate. If Mr Elton's house is to match his social aspirations, and if the little Eltons who will be born there are to enjoy the privacy and decency that would soon be expected of any respectable household, it is clear that the vicarage at Highbury is in need of substantial remodelling or rebuilding. And there were thousands of Mr Eltons with social pretensions living in comparably modest circumstances across the country.

It often seems that whenever in England the acquisition of property has become important as an indicator of status, a legal and financial framework has quickly grown up to accommodate the national passion for home ownership: and since the domestic circumstances of early nineteenth-century parsons were particularly inadequate relative to their social status, it appears, in retrospect, to have been only a matter of time before their needs were met. According to *The Church in an age of negligence*, Peter Virgin's fascinating study of the period, a very large number of parishes had no residence at all: as late as 1833, there were, he writes, nearly 2,900 parishes like this, and a further 1,700 had no fit building.<sup>4</sup> Many that were in use were ancient or dilapidated, and only slightly better than the houses of most working people; and those, by all accounts, were little better than hovels with one or two rooms. Mary Russell Mitford described some of them in her popular writing of the 1830s: of an unfortunate man called Tom Cordery she wrote 'Tom's cottage was, however, very thoroughly national and characteristic: a low ruinous hovel...tattered thatch...half-broken windows...one long, straggling, unceiled, barn-like room, which served for kitchen, bedchamber and hall'.<sup>5</sup> The great topographical writer John Britton, possibly exaggerating, wrote that the village where he had been born in 1771, Kingston St Michael in Wiltshire, was 'so unlike Miss Mitford's that it might be regarded as belonging to a different part of the world, and occupied by a distinct class of the human race', by which he meant that it was a great deal worse. He too was brought up in a house where one room served for kitchen, parlour and hall. 'It was about fourteen foot square, by six and a half high'.<sup>6</sup> A typical parsonage of the era might have consisted of only a handful of similar rooms on the ground floor, with a couple of bedrooms above for the family, and one further one for a servant. Since some mortgage application drawings show an existing house, it is possible to see exactly how modest they often were: one at Woodbastwick in Norfolk, for example, had three small rooms in a row on each of two floors, and was a single room deep.<sup>7</sup> Jane Austen again provides a telling detail when Emma leaves Mr Elton in the room of his house 'that he chiefly occupied' and moves to meet his housekeeper in another room behind it 'with which it immediately communicated', for no small house of any quality built even as long ago as the beginning of the eighteenth century would have had a pair of communicating rooms in this

fashion.<sup>8</sup> Until our period begins, a parson without his own income or the private means of a generous patron had no way of building himself and his family a decent new house. A substantial parsonage built privately from the Reformation until the end of the eighteenth century testifies to a comparatively wealthy family. To return to Jane Austen: the Reverend Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* of 1798–9 is the son of the parish patron, and his new parsonage at Woodston, ‘a new-built substantial stone house’, was paid for by his father. As the latter accurately exclaimed, ‘there are few country parsonages in England half so good’.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century, the social nature of the clergy was changing in a process that Virgin describes. First of all, parsons received their income in the form of tithes, a tax on the agricultural produce of their parishioners: a vicar was one who received ‘little’ tithes, that is, a tax on produce grown *upon* the land, such as animals; whereas the rector was an incumbent who received ‘great’ tithes as well – that is, the income from crops grown *in* the land. They both profited therefore when farmers benefited from the wars with France that restricted foreign imports and pushed up the value of their crops. Secondly, as the national Church took upon itself new duties as an educator within the parish, the parson was expected to be an educated man himself; in some cases, he was in fact a don from Oxford or Cambridge who had chosen to marry and was thus required to leave the college, which used its patronage of parish livings to find him a home. The parson was also increasingly likely to be a magistrate at this period, and that in itself conveyed the status, if not the membership, of the gentry.<sup>10</sup> All these implied respectability, and as a result the clergy was boosted by those from wealthy or landed homes, who might also have made a sensible marriage. With a private income, social status, and a fine plot of land on the glebe on which to build, an incumbency in a quiet rural parish became more attractive than it might historically have been, and the second son of a landed family inevitably became an ideal client for an architect.

Furthermore, the politics of the Church of England were contributing to the demand for new parsonages by an increasing intolerance of pluralism – that is, the holding of more than one parish incumbency by a single parson. A parson appointed to two parishes required one residence only, leaving his other parish or parishes with



neither resident parson nor usable parsonage, if any. Sir William Scott's Residence Act of 1803 required every incumbent to justify adequately his non-residence, and also every bishop to find out how many of their parishes had no resident incumbent – a significant duty given that each county had several hundred parishes and that the bishop himself, most probably old or very old, as Virgin so well describes, was busying himself at the House of Lords and in general not much given to travelling around country lanes.<sup>11</sup> In 1835, following a significant upsurge in support for disestablishment from Dissenters, two parliamentary commissions reported in detail on the finances of the Church, making recommendations for reorganisation and new diocesan boundaries.<sup>12</sup> Three years later in 1838 the Pluralities Act severely limited pluralism in the case of new appointments, permitting it mainly only in small benefices within a short distance of one another; that meant that in time almost every parish would have to find both parson and parsonage.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, the statutory changes needed to encourage the building of new and fitting parsonage houses had been enacted in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, but were still lying almost entirely dormant in the early 1800s. In the 1770s and 1780s the British parliament had been engaged in an unprecedented burst of legislation concerning building and in particular, the paving of roads: these new laws sit side by side in the statute books with those attending (with greater emergency, one imagines) to the political and military problems of the American colonies and elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> In the case of parsonages, the process started with an act passed by the British parliament in 1777, the first of two generally named 'Gilbert's Acts' in honour of their promoter, Thomas Gilbert MP.<sup>15</sup> This act, properly known as the Clergy Residences Repair Act, 17 Geo III cap. 53, was the first to allow the governors of the Church of England fund known as Queen Anne's Bounty to lend money for the repair and rebuilding of existing parsonages on the security of the revenues of the benefice, that is, their income from tithes (fig. 1.2). The Bounty, defined in the act as 'the bounty given by her late Majesty Queen Anne, for the augmentation of the maintenance of the poor clergy', had originated in taxes on church wealth called the first fruits and tenths which had been confiscated by Henry VIII from the Roman church. The first fruits, or annates, were a tax consisting of the revenue of the first year of a benefice after it

became vacant, the incoming incumbent being expected to survive on his income from performing religious ceremonies rather than from the tithes; the tenths were a ten per cent tax on the whole of the church's wealth, originally imposed by Rome in the reign of Edward I to fund a papal campaign against the Holy Roman Emperor; the latter was raised sporadically and with discretion, and subject to restrictions imposed by the English parliament.<sup>16</sup> These taxes still provided an annual income although, following a long history of political and royal pressure, the number of people who had to pay them had been greatly reduced since the days of the Reformation.

As its preamble stated, Gilbert's first act proposed using the Bounty to improve living conditions because the lack of suitable accommodation was deterring clergymen from living in their own parish. The act contained instructions and restrictions pertaining to the mortgage, and also stated that a resident incumbent would have to return £5 per cent per annum of the principal sum borrowed; consistent with the act's declared intentions, an incumbent not resident for 20 or more weeks a year would have to return double that. Having borrowed the money, the incumbent would eventually pass on the debt (together with the repaired house) to his successor in the parish, the payments due being part of the remuneration package that came with the appointment; for the freehold of the parsonage was vested in the holder of the office of incumbent. Oxford and Cambridge colleges were also allowed to lend money for the purpose of building a parsonage house in parishes of which they were the patron. The original act merely allowed, rather than required, the governors to lend money, and in spite of a moment of generosity in 1779 when the incumbent at Kirkby Lonsdale received £95, in practice they did not do so before a number of revisions had been made. The second Gilbert Act of 1781 explained and amended the original legislation, and also corrected an impracticality relating to repayments, but it had no immediate practical effect; in a temporary triumph for the bureaucratic mind, however, it did emphasise the need for the applicant to use the standard forms of application included in the schedule appended to the original act.<sup>17</sup>

Eventually, however, new legislation originating in a broader desire for church reform made an impact on the provision of clergy housing. Scott's Residence Act of 1803, mentioned above, required bishops to



1.2  
17 Geo iii cap. 53: the opening rubric to Gilbert's Act of 1777.



make an annual return to the privy council of the state of their benefices, which meant that the poor living conditions of much of the clergy soon became public knowledge at least to some extent;<sup>18</sup> and a second act that year, which ended restrictions on private benefactions to the Church that had been imposed by the Mortmain Act of 1736, allowed the Bounty to fund a new house where a benefice had been ‘augmented’ – that is, its income raised either in perpetuity or in the form of a one-off grant.<sup>19</sup> It was in connection with an application to refurbish and add to an old house at South Newington in Oxfordshire under this legislation that William Hony, representing the parish patron, Exeter College, Oxford, informed his bishop that the College ‘did not apprehend any objection to this mode of applying the money, as the living certainly cannot be improved in any other way which shall be at the same time so advantageous to the Incumbent & to the Parish’.<sup>20</sup>

A third act, intended to permit the building of new churches by private benefaction up to the cost of £500, allowed for such benefactions to include ‘ample provision’ for ‘decent and suitable accommodation of all persons, of what rank or degree soever, who may be entitled to resort to the same, and whose circumstances may render them unable to pay for such accommodation’.<sup>21</sup> This act concluded a period of legislation that had altered the relationship between the gentry and the Church: henceforth, visible benevolence on the part of the former to the latter became a way of enhancing prestige. The oldest complete files amongst diocesan collections date from this era: in Chichester, the Reverend John Cheale Green rushed to take advantage of the latest changes, and in 1804 received an augmentation of £200, which was spent on improving and enlarging his house.<sup>22</sup> In 1809 Sydney Smith, making the most of his personal connections, became one of the first people to make use of Gilbert’s Acts, borrowing £1,600 for an ambitious remodelling of his house at Foston near York.<sup>23</sup> Then, in 1811, the governors of the Bounty decided (without, apparently, any immediate cause or incentive) that the existing legislation allowed them to start providing mortgage loans for entirely new buildings, and set aside £50,000 to be lent annually in mortgages;<sup>24</sup> and it is from now onwards that new parsonage building began in earnest. By the end of 1825, the Bounty had lent £362,129.11.5.<sup>25</sup> When, in 1838, the Parsonages Act allowed the old house and up to

12 acres of its land to be sold altogether, and a new house on a new site to be funded from it, the traditionally strong link between an incumbent and the mediaeval site of his parsonage was finally dissolved.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, originally established in 1835 by Sir Robert Peel and charged with the internal reform of the Church of England, decided in 1842 to make single grants of between two-fifths and half of the cost of a new parsonage house, requiring at first that an incumbent use the services of their architect, William Railton, and that in every case, each house to which the Commissioners gave a grant 'be erected and completed entirely under their direction and control'.<sup>27</sup> There were now four distinct paths to receiving public finance for a new or remodelled house: a gift from the parish patron or other private benefactor; a grant from the Commissioners; an augmentation by the Bounty; and, the most commonly employed, the offer of a mortgage under the provisions of Gilbert's Acts, which required the active support of the local bishop.<sup>28</sup> The procedures by which public money was raised for a grant or mortgage required new formalised administrative systems, and it is these which so vividly illustrate the processes by which rural Georgian England with its squires and parsons was transformed into the Victorian England of administrators and officials, increasingly introducing new public duties, new procedures, new approvals, new meetings, new standardised forms to be filled in, and new work for lawyers.

### **Plans and papers**

It is the process of the awarding of a mortgage under Gilbert's Acts that has provided us with so comprehensive a picture of the new houses: indeed, the paperwork which must have been irritating and time-consuming for the architects and clients of the period has resulted in us having the most comprehensive record of any contemporary building type. In order to regulate both the application and the mortgage repayment procedures, the original act of 1777 itself included an appended schedule which provided the sequence and the wording for the various instruments used in this process. These varied slightly as legislation changed, but in all cases it worked as follows. The incumbent notified his bishop that living conditions were unsuitable in his parish, and this started the ball rolling. The bishop reacted by

setting up a commission of enquiry, calling upon the incumbent's neighbours, clergymen from nearby parishes, to find out 'whether there is a fit house of residence within and belonging to' the parish concerned; what were 'the annual profits of the said benefice' (that is, the incumbent's income from tithes there); and 'whether a fit House of Residence can be provided'. These gentlemen would duly report that 'there is no fit house'; and they would confirm that land was available, which after 1838 could be other than on the existing glebe lands themselves. They would submit the details of the parson's parish income from tithes; a rector, with his higher income and mortgage-raising capacity, would be likely to be eligible for a larger mortgage, and thus a larger house, than a vicar, although a vicar in a prosperous part of the country would be likely to be at an advantage over a rector in a poor one. For the greater part of the clergy, income from the tithes varied between a few hundred pounds a year, and just over a thousand; from 1836, the process began whereby the tithes were eventually – over 35 years – commuted into fixed payments.<sup>29</sup> A curate, at the bottom of the ladder, might even after the passing of the 'Curates Act' of 1813 have an income of only £80 per year, received from the incumbent of his parish; but then his needs would have been less: George Eliot's Amos Barton, struggling to make a living in the mid-1830s, employed only 'Nanny' – 'nurse, cook, and housemaid all at once...the robust maid-of-all-work'.<sup>30</sup> The commissioners – those carrying out the enquiry on behalf of the bishop – were also charged with finding out whether an incumbent had already received funds from the Bounty for dilapidations on the original house, and they were required to state how much, and when, and whether the money had been properly spent.

The next process was the approval of the proposed architect, surveyor or builder, his plans, and his estimates. This person was required to sign an affidavit that asserted his competence – that he 'has been accustomed to survey and value and superintend the building and repair of houses and other buildings' or words to that effect. This affidavit summarises other declarations kept with the file confirming that he had surveyed the existing parsonage; that he was submitting a plan or set of drawings for a new house with a specification; and that he had properly estimated the cost of the new building.<sup>31</sup> He also gave here the value of materials from the old house that could be reused in the



new one.<sup>32</sup> Further declarations provided the details referred to in the affidavit, including the survey of the old building, stating that it was unfit (or otherwise) for repair, and which materials might be reusable from it; and the signatory was required also to state whether there was timber growing upon the glebe land that might be employed in the new building (there almost never was).<sup>33</sup> Then followed the plans, specifications, and estimate themselves. Any further documents kept with these declarations and drawings usually concern the mortgage itself, for all or part of the building cost, stating the interest and repayment requirements; and the patron of the benefice would appoint an agent for handling the moneys that passed hands, which gentleman was required to keep a notebook containing the details of the transactions. The patrons themselves are scarcely referred to in the diocesan collections, although their approval was also sought. A rare example, for Soham, refers to an approval for a mortgage given by Pembroke College, Cambridge, nearby.<sup>34</sup>

According to the law it was the bishops that initiated, and by inference approved, the applications; and it was they that were responsible for the application procedure itself.<sup>35</sup> In practice, however, the governors of the Bounty as mortgagor set the conditions for approval and also seem nearly always to have approved the plan before it reached the bishop. Tracking the progress of the applications between the applicants, the diocesan bishop's court and the Bounty's offices in Dean's Yard, Westminster, is not always easy, because references in the minutes of the Bounty governors' meetings to specific applications and their approval do not always follow a consistent pattern. Part of the reason for this is that the governors, a group of usually eight bishops chaired by the archbishop of Canterbury, met at almost weekly intervals but only in the first half of the year, which means that the first session of the new year was a very long one and included lists of all approvals made in the second half of the year without further detail; and in any case, the governors were mainly merely ratifying decisions made at an earlier, undisclosed date by their secretary and his staff. Furthermore, there are rarely sufficient documents within the diocesan collections themselves to be able to ascertain to what extent, and when, an application was sent to and from between the parties; but in a typical example where the information has however been retained on both sides, for the new vicarage at

Stalisfield in Kent, the governors approved the application on 1 May 1841; the commission was issued by the bishop on 26 October the same year, and the architect's affidavit was signed on 1 November: in other words, in spite of the wording of the acts which emphasises the role of the bishops, the real power of approval lay in the hands of the Bounty.<sup>36</sup> Plans were, however, sometimes submitted to the diocese before reaching the Bounty perhaps where an incumbent feared that a local bishop might prove obstructive; and some surviving correspondence implies that a parson felt obliged to justify his claim to a mortgage to his bishop rather than directly to the Bounty.<sup>37</sup> At any rate, it is clear that the bishop often launched his commission only when the results of it were a foregone conclusion, since I found no instance of a report advising against rebuilding: indeed, on many occasions the bishop evidently received his report from his commission of enquiry simultaneously with his signing of the paper for its appointment, and that the architect already had the necessary papers ready. At Biddenden in Kent, for example, John Walker of Maidstone completed his declarations on 21 March 1842, and the bishop launched his commission the following week.<sup>38</sup> Incidentally, the process by which parsonages were built with funds from augmentations granted by the Bounty followed a similar pattern throughout, even without the legislative framework of Gilbert's Acts. There was no need for the commission process emanating from the bishop's palace, but the Bounty demanded the same high standards of presentation from applicants, and the bishops signed the drawings with their approval; from 1840, the Bounty combined the two processes by requiring that applicants supplement their grant with a separate Gilbert's Acts application.<sup>39</sup> The patrons' approval for the project was also sought under this procedure, and unsurprisingly they seem to have welcomed the improvement.

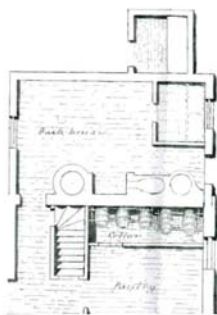
Not all the records of such parsonage approvals have been retained, and not all surviving records are complete. Over the last half-century, the Church Commissioners, successors to the Bounty and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners from 1948, were supposed to have returned to diocesan archives papers relating to parsonages that had been sold; in practice this has not happened consistently, and, as mentioned above, there appears to be very little surviving correspondence accompanying the plans, declarations,

and commissioners' reports. None of the dioceses appear to have kept many if any of the letters they themselves received at the time of the mortgage application, which means that there is almost no record of the notices of approvals that arrived from the Bounty, and whether these carried any conditions not stated in the Bounty's own minutes. Such few letters as do exist are those sent to the secretary of the Bounty or his agents: one occasionally comes across a letter written to a solicitor acting for the governors (the name John Dyneley, of Gray's Inn, London, crops up in several dioceses in the early decades of the century), asking for plans to be put before them. There is also considerable variation in the extent to which parsonage application papers have survived in the different diocesan collections. Survivals from the London and Rochester diocese are comparatively rare, and greatly split between different record offices, possibly reflecting the complicated history of boundary changes between them; there are many records for Norfolk parsonages at the Norfolk Record Office, but comparatively few for the same period for Suffolk in that county's three record offices, although both counties formed part of the same diocese, Norwich. The large and rich diocese of Durham has retained comparatively few records from the early decades. The archives of the diocese of Chichester at the West Sussex Record Office are an oddity: they have retained records only of approvals granted under the second of the 1803 acts described above, the one that allowed for new building as part of an augmentation; presumably the diocese simply did not retain records from approvals under Gilbert's Acts. Yet this augmentation procedure is rare, or unrecorded, in the surviving records in other dioceses. The Church of England's own parsonage records at their Record Centre in Bermondsey have remained uncatalogued and in practice largely inaccessible; they include some 3,000 files, and occupy almost 70 metres of shelf space; and they appear to include correspondence and documentation relating to approvals by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, as well as to parsonages built under the augmentations procedure which have not surfaced elsewhere.<sup>40</sup>

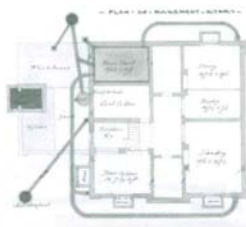
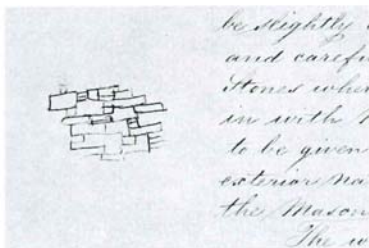
But what there is in the various county record collections gives the most remarkable and comprehensive insight into the building world of the early nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> The architect's drawings, of course, and his specification are themselves a record of professional changes; in the earlier years we have, mainly, builders drawing up what they



have always built, but increasingly they are required to draw it competently and price it accurately. In the very earliest applications there is sometimes a glimpse of the traditions of what was already the distant past: in the Bath and Wells diocesan collection at the Somerset Record Office there is, for example, a crude drawing of a design for a rectory at Tolland which, with its mullioned oak windows and cast iron casements, resembles as much a house of 1712 as of 1812, its true date.<sup>42</sup> As time goes by, we increasingly see the apparatus of the growing professionalism of the architect's office – the carefully drawn and lettered plans, the standardised and thorough specifications; we see fewer people describing themselves as 'surveyor' or perhaps simply 'carpenter', and more who call themselves 'architect'. We see in some plans the work of well-known architects that was obliterated by subsequent alterations – the only place where any such record exists. We also see, of course, unknown builders, scarcely recognised by architectural history, producing beautiful drawings: in a remarkable plan for the new parsonage at Helmingham in Norfolk, we can see the position of the beer barrels in the cellar, each one carefully drawn as seen from above, the work of a sometime architect, auctioneer, timber merchant and crooked local politician called Benjamin Batley Catt (fig. 1.3); and likewise we see established London architects producing very lazy ones.<sup>43</sup> We can see the way in which technological innovations, such as water closets, new damp-proofing methods, and cavity walls, begin to make their first appearance, and thus establish when and to what extent they become standard practice in English domestic architecture. We see, for example, a hurried sketch, perhaps by the young architect George Edmund Street himself, inserted alongside the neat regular script of his clerk, to show a builder unfamiliar with the new principles of the gothic revival what an irregular stonework bond should look like (fig. 1.4);<sup>44</sup> and we see George Gilbert Scott illustrating what he means by 'cavity' wall.<sup>45</sup> A rather less well-known architect, William Edmunds of Margate, provided in 1836 a beautifully neat drawing which included a full water-supply and drainage layout for his new rectory at Little Mongeham in Kent (fig. 1.5).<sup>46</sup> Edmunds is best known to posterity as the constructor of the quay in his home town; perhaps it had been from that project that he had derived his knowledgeable interest in the movement of water.<sup>47</sup>



1.3  
A detail of the cellar plan for Helmingham rectory (1812), north of Ipswich, Suffolk, by Benjamin Batley Catt – unscrupulous politician and part-time architect [Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich, FF1/44/1].



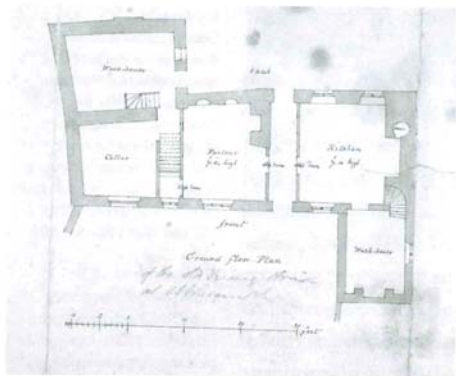
1.4 (far left)  
George Edmund Street's sketch in the margin of his specification for Wantage vicarage of 1849, then in Berkshire, illustrates to an uninitiated builder what 'naturally irregular' gothic revival stonework should look like [Oxford Record Office, MS. Oxf. dioc. papers b.80].

Not all the architects' specifications survive, but from the many that do we can construct an extraordinarily comprehensive picture of the building practices of the early nineteenth century. We hear about the bells for the servants, the styles of the fireplaces in the different rooms, the types of plaster required, the floor finishes, the decorative work, the crown glass (in the best rooms) and the common glass (backstairs). We can see plans for stable yards, fully kitted out *de rigueur* for the early nineteenth century; elsewhere, we might see that the incumbent's mortgage is in fact mainly for the purposes of bringing his kitchen offices up to scratch, and providing him with a dung pit (fig. 1.6).<sup>48</sup> We can sometimes see where land is bought for annexation to the glebe, to give the new incumbent a sense of living in the park like that of his father's grand house.<sup>49</sup> In some cases – notably in that of A.W.N. Pugin, who was otherwise too busy to prepare a full spare set of drawings and specifications of the buildings he designed – the diocesan application gives us the only surviving complete record of a practitioner's professional working method.<sup>50</sup> In addition we can sometimes see an accurate record of an old parsonage which the architect submits because he is remodelling and rebuilding it. Amongst the records of the Exeter diocese, held at the Devon Record Office, we can see something even more remarkable – a meticulous drawing of the plan, elevations, and site location of an old parsonage, probably sixteenth century, or earlier, a long, low building of ramshackle appearance, with merely a parlour and a kitchen downstairs, each with a large fireplace, together with wood house, cellar, and wash house; upstairs it had two bedrooms, a further servants' bedroom, and two lofts, one unfloored (figs 1.7, 1.8). One can easily imagine the excitement of the vicar as he looked at his architect's splendid proposal for a stately classical modern house,

1.5 (above left)  
Little Mongeham rectory, near Deal, Kent, by William Edmunds (1836): basement plan showing drainage and water supply connections. Upstairs, the house has a typical central-corridor plan with a dining and drawing room to the right of a hall corridor, and a library to the left [Canterbury Cathedral Archives, DCb/DC/M20/1].



1.6  
A comprehensive set of new kitchen offices, including a servants' w.c. and a dungheap, added to the early eighteenth-century parsonage at Broughton under Blean, near Canterbury, by the Whitchord office in 1854. The old house had 'much want of ordinary repair' [Canterbury Cathedral Archives, DCb/DC/B17/1].



1.7, 1.8

Survey drawings by S.H. Turner of the existing parsonage at Abbotskerswell, near Newton Abbot, Devon, included with the application documents for a mortgage to build a new house. The old one, which was typical of many, consisted only of a kitchen and parlour on the ground floor, neither of them much bigger than the cellar, wood house and wash house adjacent to them [Devon Record Office: Exeter Diocese, Re-Building Parsonages file].

with its drawing room, dining room and study which were healthily large, modern, and orthogonal (figs. 1.9, 1.10).<sup>51</sup>

### A record of England

But all this goes beyond a mere history of the designs and the construction of the new buildings themselves. The financial transactions, the signatures of the notaries who witnessed the affidavits, the dates on the documents which show us how much time elapsed between the applications and the approvals, and the actual construction itself – all these add up to a broad picture of early nineteenth-century life. It is possible to follow, through the careful minutes of the meetings at the Bounty Office, how the repeal of the corn laws and the drop in the value of agricultural produce that follows is adversely affecting the tithes, and thus is causing some parsons to have difficulty in paying their mortgage payments.<sup>52</sup> There are humble letters addressed to bishops at smart addresses in Mayfair, and we can wonder how concerned those prelates really were at the time with their incumbents' supplications.<sup>53</sup> There are, too, detailed reports of the conditions of churches and parsonages submitted by rural deans as part of the new legal requirement to compose full returns on the condition of a diocese and which provide so rich a picture of contemporary clerical life: a remarkably complete set dating from 1820–2 amongst the records of the Chichester diocese paints a favourable situation, in which one dean after another reports 'with great satisfaction' or with 'pleasure' that the parsonage houses in his





sanction a plan & estimate for a House upon such a benefice exceeding an outlay altogether of £700'. What had inspired Hoare's pretensions to a larger house than his status would suggest? A little over a fortnight later, he is able to report to the bishop that Parsons is able to get the cost down to £1,000; in the end, they compromised on £1,160, and the ambitious Tudor-gothic design went ahead (fig. 1.11).<sup>58</sup> These little spurts of pride are visible here and there all over the country, and each diocese provides a series of wonderful vignettes. Take Canterbury, for example, a comparatively small diocese geographically in spite of its prestige, where there are records of only 23 new houses between 1820 and 1840.<sup>59</sup> Here, in Hawkhurst, the curate Henry Cleaver tells the secretary of the Bounty that 'it is my intention to build my house in a more substantial manner than they are ordinarily built in this part of the county'; and he submits a stable plan with his application, surely a presumption on the part of a curate.<sup>60</sup> The Reverend John Boak, from Paston near Peterborough, writes anxiously to a lawyer at Gray's Inn to explain his hurry in submitting an application for a new rectory at his second incumbency at Swalecliffe, near Herne Bay: the house is for his new curate, the last one having resigned perhaps to attend to his own second parish; the only house available, which was currently tenanted, had not been lived in by clergy for the past 100 years.<sup>61</sup>

It is not only the incumbents that took pride in their station. An F. Brown, of Francis Street, Torrington Square, London, is unremembered by architectural historians, and yet undeservedly, for in 1841 he submitted a beautiful set of watercolours for his design for a small flint vicarage, at Stalisfield, between Ashford and Faversham (fig. 1.12).<sup>62</sup> At Stockbury, a young man called Hussey has in 1834 designed a bizarre asymmetrical house in (more or less) the prevailing classical-Georgian style: would anyone recognise here the latent talent that would yet turn him into a leading gothic architect many years

#### 1.11

William Parsons' entrance elevation of his design for Thurmaston vicarage, near Leicester: a typical Tudor-gothic house of the 1830s, it was designed just over a month before Queen Victoria ascended to the throne [Lincolnshire Archives, MGA 220].





## 1.12

A charming application drawing of 1841 by F. Brown of Torrington Square, London, for Stalisfield vicarage, between Canterbury and Maidstone, Kent [Canterbury Cathedral Archives, DCb/DC/S28/1].

later (see fig. 4.8)?<sup>63</sup> John Whichcord, a recognised local architect from Maidstone, reports that the old rectory at Warehorne is ‘ancient’, although £85 worth of materials from it are reusable in the new (and rather crude) Tudor-gothic house he is proposing, about eight per cent of the total cost of its rebuilding; so it is clear what became of that particular ‘ancient’ structure.<sup>64</sup> We hear of the Reverend Mr Edge, at Nedging; of the architect Hezekiah Marshall, at Romney Marsh; and of George Langford building at both East Langdon and Langley.<sup>65</sup> The occasional scene culled from the parsonage records of all types is unforgettable. Henry Harrison, parson at the Beresford family’s newly and richly appointed church at Kilndown in west Kent, is having a row with his architect and builder, an Italian of German origin called Alexander Roos, who wants him to pay before the works are properly finished, the oldest pretext in the world for a disagreement between builders and their clients. As well as being incomplete, the house is damp, and still uninhabited, and so Harrison is having to pay rent as well as carry part of the cost of the new house which he cannot enjoy.<sup>66</sup> The angry succession of inverted commas in his draft letter, perhaps never sent, speaks for itself. ‘With respect to “my opinion about the Parsonage”, which, “you regret to hear” – I simply said, that on looking



closely into things, I thought it a “cheap slovenly contract job”.<sup>67</sup> At least three letters fly back and forth that week between the parties: Roos, who has carried out work at Bedgebury Park, the Beresford mansion, writes from that address implying his favoured status. The row ends up on the table of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who are contributing to the project and thus required to adjudicate, and letters are soon flying in to London.<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately for Harrison and the Beresfords, the architect Benjamin Ferrey, acting for the Commissioners, has already attested that the work has been executed in a ‘good and substantial manner’ with the exception of minor details only.<sup>69</sup> Eventually, after almost three years of continuing attempts at repair, the aging Viscount Beresford’s stepson A.J. Beresford-Hope decides to take the matter in hand and the up-and-coming architect Ewan Christian is sent to have a look. A long list of complaints about the layout of the house (‘to the Dining room there is no good entrance except through the Drawing room the other door being placed opposite the Water Closet at the end of the passage into which the kitchen opens. The staircase which is imperfectly lighted is far too precipitous to be safe for young children. The entrance is mean and dark’) is followed by a crushing list of failures: the plaster in some rooms has never dried out; the stable drains run through the house, to an open and undersized cesspool just outside the dining-room window; and ‘the smell from the Water Closet on the day of my survey was very bad’. The conclusion must have left no one in any little doubt: ‘I think I have never before inspected a modern built parsonage, the interior of which was so devoid of all appearance of comfort and finish as that which I have now reported on’.<sup>70</sup> It is a particularly wonderful picture of architectural disasters and conflicting personalities, because it comes at the crossroads of the gothic revival. On the one side we have Lord Beresford, curmudgeonly Wellingtonian general turned Regency politician, so different from his cultured, earnest stepson, the quintessential young Victorian; and on the professional side, Roos, after a successful career in which he has worked at Hadzor in Worcestershire, at Aske Hall in Yorkshire, and at the Deepdene in Surrey, and who has perhaps prided himself on his designs for delicate Pompeian ornament, finds himself towards the end of his career suddenly having to deal with three young men whose star is rising: Ferrey, an established if uneven goth; Christian, who replaces Ferrey as

adviser to the Commissioners; and R.C. Carpenter, standard bearer for the Ecclesiologists, who is about to replace Roos as designer of the parsonage.<sup>71</sup> The fact that Roos' career as a fashionable and stylish Georgian architect was by now well in the past is suggested by a single poignant detail: Ferrey, on earlier checking Roos' plans for the house, had reported to the Commissioners that the proposed bedroom corridor was too narrow at a mere two feet, two inches wide; what had been sufficient for the slim frocks of the Regency would have been hopeless for Mrs Harrison, thundering downstairs in a broad-hipped dress of the 1850s.<sup>72</sup>

Even the differing style of the minutes of the meetings of the governors of Queen Anne's Bounty on the one hand, and of the Board of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners on the other, has something to contribute – remarkably so, since both consisted to a great extent of the same people, and were both usually chaired by the archbishop of Canterbury. At Dean's Yard, in the shadow of Westminster Abbey, the minutes recorded by Christopher Hodgson were brisk, lively, and business-like (fig. 1.1); whereas those of Charles Knight Murray, Secretary to the Commissioners at 5, Whitehall Place in the centre of government, were pompous, high-handed, occasionally fawning (where a grand family such as the Beresfords was concerned, for example) and desperately dry. The only humour these minutes provide comes in the form of the struggles for prestige between the bishops. An application for assistance from a humble parson may often be rejected out of hand for procedural reasons; but there is no end to the time and attention they will spend on getting a palace in order for a right reverend prelate. The early volumes of the minutes of the board of the Commissioners contain in some detail the process of ascertaining whether Stapleton House in Bristol and Riseholme Hall outside Lincoln would be appropriately grand to serve as residences for the local bishops; there is much to-ing and fro-ing between the Commissioners themselves, and the various architects acting on their behalf, as to the desirability and implications of their purchase, remodelling and refitting.

Viscount Duncannon, a lay commissioner and a well-known politician, personally made a list, recorded in the minutes, of all the fixtures in the various palaces which should remain the property of the sees after the incumbent has departed: 'Bins in the wine cellar;

Coal plates and Chains, in Coal Cellars; Scrapers; Knockers; Nobs for doors; Harness Pegs and rails; Saddle Trees; Cornbins'.<sup>73</sup> For a recent First Commissioner of the Board of Woods and Works, who had earlier dealt with such projects as the new Houses of Parliament and the National Gallery, this trifling with knockers and cornbins must have seemed a little absurd, especially since His Lordship, descended from both the Ponsonbys and the Cavendishes, was something of a Nob himself. The beneficiaries of all this fussing must primarily have been the new professional agents, the architects, surveyors and lawyers; it seems particularly funny that in the case of Stapleton House, the architect on site who profited most from the extra work provided by the vanities of these Anglican prelates was a man called Mr Pope.<sup>74</sup>

### **Walkeringham vicarage**

This survey begins with a building which represents the typical appearance of the Georgian parsonage yet also in so many respects carries the germs of the changes that were about to alter the appearance of the type. In May 1823, in the fourth year of the reign of King George IV, the builder James Trubshaw designed a new parsonage for his friend the Reverend Joseph K. Miller at the village of Walkeringham, in the far north of Nottinghamshire by the Lincolnshire border, and just north of the road that runs eastwards from Sheffield and Rotherham towards the North Sea. The house was to be built on glebe land a few hundred yards to the south of the parish church of St Mary's, somewhat away from the circuit of tracks that made up the centre of the village – if it could be called a centre, since the houses at that time were for the most part strung out along the roads leading north and north-west. Miller needed to raise a mortgage for the construction of his vicarage, and he could do this through the legal mechanism established by Gilbert's Acts. He required the permission of the patron of his living, which was in this case Trinity College, Cambridge; and of course he required the services of a house designer and builder.

In the 47 year-old Trubshaw he found both these combined in one person. Trained as a mason at Haywood in Staffordshire, and with experience on a number of the prestigious projects of his day, he had established himself also as an architect from some point in the second decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>75</sup> He was first employed in building



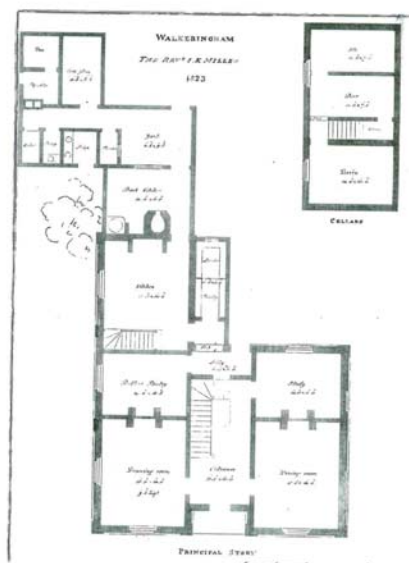
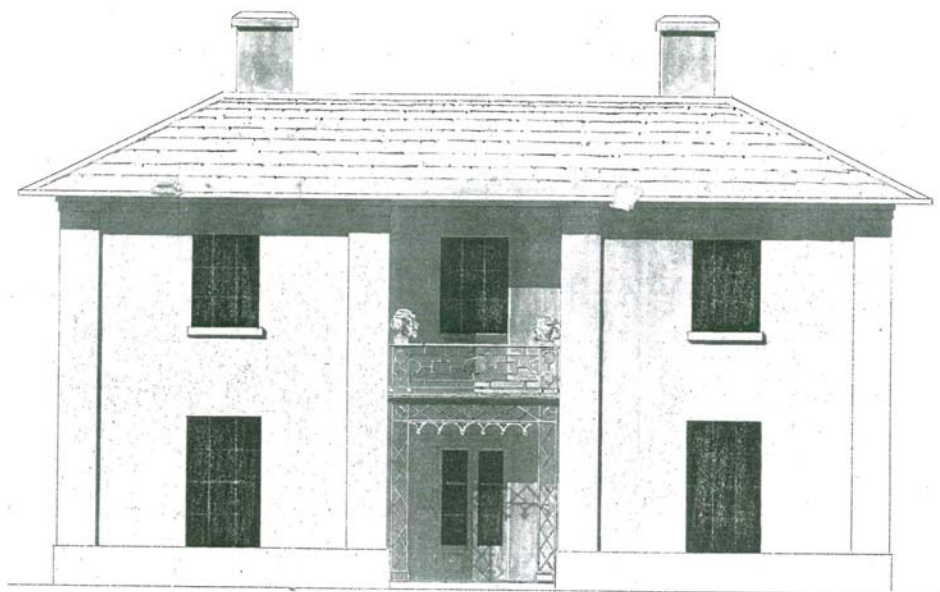
and making alterations to various large houses; and, having gained the confidence of his clients, began to design houses himself. Walkeringham was his first parsonage design, and he attempted nothing that would surprise his client.

The house that Trubshaw presented for approval was a two-storey one, symmetrical along the entrance front on its south side (figs. 1.13–15).<sup>76</sup> This was three bays wide, and the central bay was recessed a few feet into the building and contained the front door. From the outside the whole house was very plain on all sides. It was built of brick with no ornament at all except for thin pilasters which marked the divisions between the bays, and a decorative iron trellis around the front door, which was surmounted by a pretty balustrade in a Chinese pattern. There were identical nine-pane sash windows on the upper floors, and 12-pane ones below. A low slate pitched roof with deep eaves sat over the house and squat chimneys emerged over it. Trubshaw drew the west elevation of the main part of the house – ignoring the less attractive part to the north, which contained the back kitchen, the pigsty and the privies – but he did not bother with the eastern side,

#### 1.13

The south front of Walkeringham vicarage, Nottinghamshire, designed by James Trubshaw in 1823.





1.14 (above)  
Trubshaw's design for the  
south front of Walkeringham  
vicarage [Borthwick Institute,  
University of York, MGA  
1823/5].

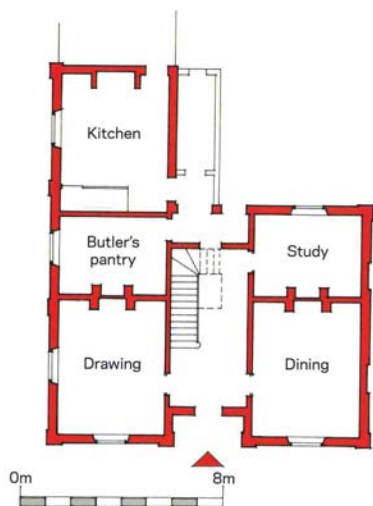
1.15 (right)  
The proposed ground-floor  
plan for Walkeringham  
vicarage [Borthwick Institute,  
University of York, MGA  
1823/5].

which had nothing more than four blind windows on it although in effect it faced the garden.

The appearance of the house from the front door will have suggested its internal layout to the visitor. The house had what I shall call henceforth a central-corridor plan, meaning that there was a wide corridor containing stairs leading away from the front door, with a major room either side of it overlooking the front (fig. 1.16). At Walkeringham the drawing room was to the left, and an identically-sized dining room to the right. Behind the drawing room was a butler's pantry, and behind the dining room was the vicar's study. This might at first seem the wrong way round, but there was a logic to it. The drawing room was positioned on the south-west side to enjoy the best of the afternoon light, but the kitchen and its offices also needed to be to the west of the house in order to be closer to the road and away from the route across glebe lands to the church (fig. 1.17). A parishioner on the other hand could walk across to the house from the church and enter by the back door, and thus be hidden from the vicar's imposing entrance driveway and his front door. The main stairs were positioned in the corridor, rising straight up in front of the visitor as they would in any townhouse of similar scale. Upstairs there were two large bedrooms above the main rooms, and two smaller ones: one above the study, and the other above the front door; this latter one could enjoy the balcony with its balustrade. There were two servants' bedrooms on the same floor, and one more (lit by a rooflight) and a big storeroom in the attic. There were ale and beer stores in the cellar of the house, as well as a dairy, reached from the back stairs in the kitchen.

The Walkeringham parsonage was far enough away from the parish church to be considered in landscape or townscape terms to be almost entirely detached from it. It is true that Mr Miller could walk directly through his garden and across to the south-west porch of his church and avoid the public road, but his front door was on the south side of the house, the greatest distance away from it. In that respect it was entirely conventional, for parsonages then seem usually to have been designed in that way. The effect mimicked a country house in its park, although it should be added that there were then also new parsonages so grand that the drive up to them was as impressive as that of any minor aristocrat; after all, an early nineteenth-century parson might fancy himself as a squire, and eminently respectable.



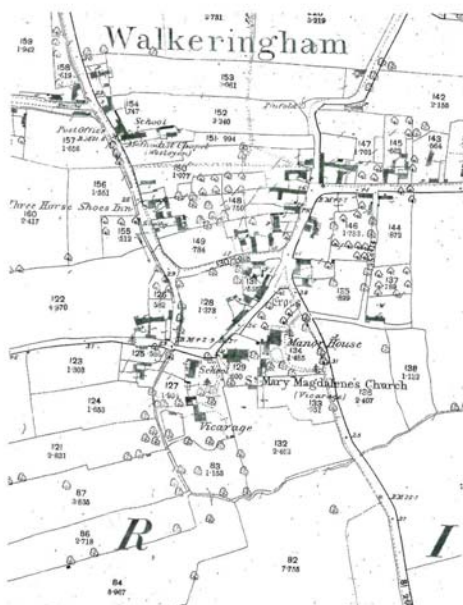


#### 1.16 (above)

The central-corridor plan type, exemplified by Trubshaw's plan for Walkeringham vicarage. These houses have a pair of major rooms facing the entrance and separated by a narrow stair hall. There is often, as here, a third major room at the back.

#### 1.17 (above, right)

Walkeringham village, surveyed in 1885 for the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 series. The entrance elevation of the vicarage faced south, and away from the church.



The drawings that Trubshaw presented were more than usually elegantly executed when compared to similar projects by his contemporaries; he had no doubt learnt from what he had seen when working for experienced designers, such as recently when constructing Ilam Hall, near Ashbourne in Derbyshire, for the London architect John Shaw. But the planning of this new house was similar or indeed almost identical to most of that of the new parsonages being built at that period. And a great deal were being built. An investigation into any part of the country at this period will easily show more and more houses that look like that at Walkeringham. The villa pattern books written (often in self-advertisement) by architects were full of designs for small detached houses which might be adapted to an appropriate site; they varied in competence and in the originality and convenience of their planning, but together they provided the least imaginative carpenter or bricklayer turned house-designer with a limited series of classical facades and details that might be adopted. The middle of the first decade of the nineteenth century had in particular seen a wave of such books. Robert Lugar's *Architectural sketches for cottages*,

rural dwellings, and villas (fig. 1.18) and William Atkinson's *Views of picturesque cottages* appeared in 1805; Thomas Dearn's first volume of *Sketches in architecture* came in 1806, as did Edward Gyfford's *Elegant cottages*; and both architects published follow-up volumes the following year, Dearn's second volume of *Sketches*, and Gyfford's *Small picturesque cottages* (fig. 1.19); that year saw also Lugar's *The country gentleman's architect* (fig. 1.20). Of these, Dearn's second book is particularly interesting to us now, because he chose to reject the time-wasting involved in creating new or original types of domestic architecture. 'The component parts of architecture may, with much propriety, be compared to the letters of the alphabet, and I should think that man's time misemployed who should propose to add to one or to the other'.<sup>77</sup> His principles – he called them 'the two grand essentials' – are stated at the outset: 'convenience and economy',<sup>78</sup> and he employed them himself, limiting discussion to one feature only in each of the buildings he proposed. In one instance this was the provision of two elevational treatments for the same plan: one was 'tout à fait riant', which was 'better calculated to meet the public taste', whereas the other was 'more sober and dignified' and thus 'appropriate for a rectory or vicarage-house' (fig. 1.21).<sup>79</sup> This last observation is an example of how pattern-book writers characteristically intended their proposals to suit an existing way of life rather than generating a new one; indeed, many seem to have had a particular interest in the wellbeing of the retired gentleman.<sup>80</sup> The idea that the clergyman in particular should seek a 'retired' lifestyle is one that makes more than one appearance at this time;<sup>81</sup> perhaps an avoidance of any of the contention involved in choosing an unusual style was consistent with that sense of retirement.

The Walkeringham parsonage was built in the diocese of Lincoln; and elsewhere in the diocese many houses were going up in a similar style: they were two-storey, three-bay, symmetrical houses in a style which might loosely be called classical-Georgian and with central corridors. And this was the pattern throughout the country: from bishop's palaces in Norwich, Oxford, Winchester, Canterbury, and Durham, and all the others, permissions were being issued for houses which to some extent have come to define the essential character of the smaller, but dignified, English country residence. It is just as the building of new parsonages was gathering momentum that William



1.18

'An ornamental Cottage with ruins; contains rooms sufficient for a numerous and respectable family, partly formed in ruins, together with a chaise-house and stable, connected by a gateway... The idea to be conveyed was an abbey mutilated, and to shew the Cottage as if dressed out of the remains'. Plate 8 from Robert Lugar's *Architectural sketches*, 1805.



1.19

Plate 13 from *Small picturesque cottages* (1807). Edward Gyfford's designs tended to have an unrealistic quality to them.



1.20

A 'Farm House or small Villa' (plate 7) of parsonage size from Robert Lugar's *The country gentleman's architect* (1806). His proposal has a typical L-corridor plan.

## 1.21

Less 'calculated to meet the public taste', perhaps, than the alternative classical design, but nevertheless 'sober and dignified' and therefore 'appropriate for a rectory or vicarage-house'. A villa (plate 12) from the second volume of Thomas Dearn's *Sketches in architecture* of 1807. In fact when Dearn did eventually design a parsonage, at Cranbrook, Kent, 15 years later, he chose to make it classical.



Cobbett rode around England for his *Rural rides* in the 1820s, and the country that he saw was exactly that which resounded to the carpenter's saw and the plumber's mallet on many an empty site on the glebe.

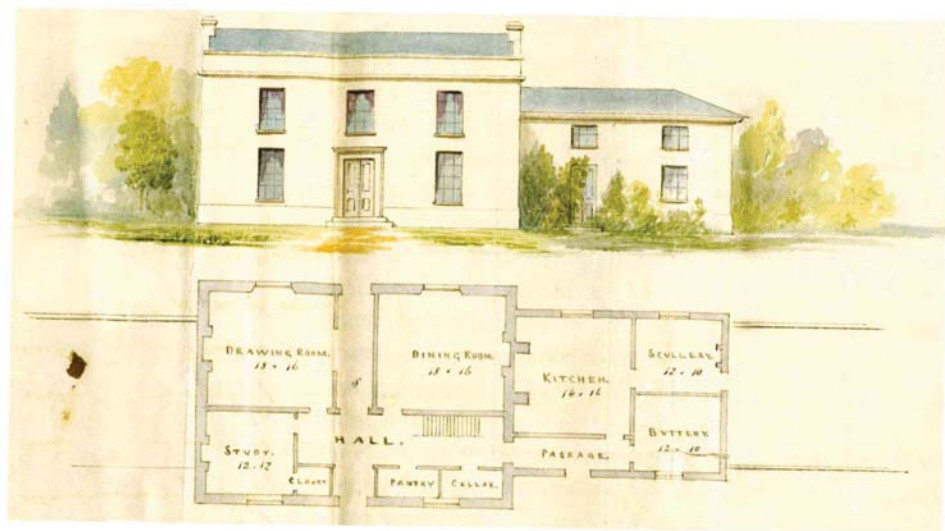
### **The classical-Georgian parsonage in a prosperous diocese**

A part of the country that Cobbett frequently referred to is Norfolk, often reminded of it when travelling elsewhere.<sup>82</sup> In addition to the growing prosperity and status of parsons nationally, the draining of the fens had increased agricultural production throughout East Anglia, and consequently the parsons' income was increasing, too. There were 625 parishes in Norfolk alone, and, according to Virgin, there were proportionately more clerical justices of the peace here than in other parts of the country.<sup>83</sup> East Anglia was flourishing, and the Norwich diocesan records confirm it.<sup>84</sup> At least 16 parsonages there were remodelled or rebuilt before 1811, the date at which the Bounty began in earnest to process applications for new houses; these include a large and imposing house at Blofield of 1805, the cost of which was estimated at over £2,000.<sup>85</sup>

Because there are so many of these records in this area, we have a lively picture of the way in which architects, surveyors and builders profited by the new opportunities for work, and how they



experimented by varying the standard layout of a central-corridor type house which was typified by that we saw at Walkeringham. In the 1810s, for example, a Suffolk carpenter who was also a versatile and picturesque architect called Mark Thompson had designed three buildings in romantic gothic styles, but in 1820 and 1821 he designed two parsonages, providing them with stern, plain fronts and central corridors. At Bures, halfway between Sudbury and Colchester, the drawing room and dining room were placed either side of a central door, divided by a corridor, and the study was at the rear; but the house faced the garden rather than the entrance drive; and the staircase was located in a back passage running across the house instead of along the central corridor that divided the main rooms (figs 1.22, 1.23).<sup>86</sup> This building cost £690 once the reuse of materials from the old house had been taken into account: these were worth £180, and so at a total of £870 the house was about £100 cheaper than Trubshaw's. At Hartest, south of Bury St Edmunds, Thompson built a much more expensive house, where the new rector, a Mr Maddy, had received substantial funds already granted for renovations from his predecessors.<sup>87</sup> The new house was to cost £1,420, with the reuse of some old materials, and after it was swiftly built Maddy was able to move into a six-bedroom house of some splendour. Here Thompson again varied the standard central-corridor type, but in a different way. The central corridor, this time with its stairs in the usual position, led into the centre of the house, but the two principal rooms were arranged to one side of it so that one faced the entrance drive and the other the garden. On the entrance side was a dining room, to the right of the front door on entering; and the drawing room was at the back, and had a grand apsidal end to it. In order to maintain symmetry on the front facade, there was but one window to the left of the front door, but this was split clumsily into two – one half lighting a small pantry and the other a storeroom. This was possibly an afterthought, with the two rooms taking the place of what ought to have been a study. The kitchen took up the final quarter of the main block of the house, at the back-left from the front door. Other examples across the diocese at this time show how architects made loose variations on the basic planning of the central-corridor house. An architect called George Maliphant designed a house at Worlington (half way between Bury St Edmunds and Ely) in 1819 which was again composed with a symmetrical front



and a central-corridor plan, but he added a great deal of splendour by placing the stairs at the back of the house around an open well (fig. 1.24).<sup>88</sup> And in the following year, when the Bures house was under construction, a talented amateur architect from the cathedral close in Norwich, the Reverend Arthur Browne, altered an existing parsonage at Hepworth, north-east of Bury, which was different from the standard type in that the front elevation was asymmetrical: he placed the library to the left of the front door, but both the drawing room and the dining room (the latter reached by a rear corridor) to the right of it. His submission included a proposal for a charming cart lodge with rustic pillars, and a chaise house and stables with Diocletian windows (fig. 1.25).<sup>89</sup>

There is some evidence that the classical style was considered appropriate for parsonages even when other houses of similar status were moving into other styles. I have already mentioned Robert Lugar, as one of the authors of a villa pattern book of the 1800s. His literary career made a second start in 1823, when he republished both his *Architectural sketches* and a book of 1811 called *Plans and views of buildings executed in England and Scotland in the castellated and other styles*; and in 1828 he published his final work, *Villa architecture*. This last book provided readers with a perspective and plans of his

1.22 (opposite, above)  
The garden (south) front of Mark Thompson's 1821 vicarage at Bures, between Sudbury and Colchester, Suffolk.

1.23 (opposite, below)  
Thompson's mortgage application drawings sometimes included delightful watercolour drawings. This is his design for Bures. Unconventionally for a central-corridor or L-corridor house, the two principal rooms face away from the front door [Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds, 806/2/4].

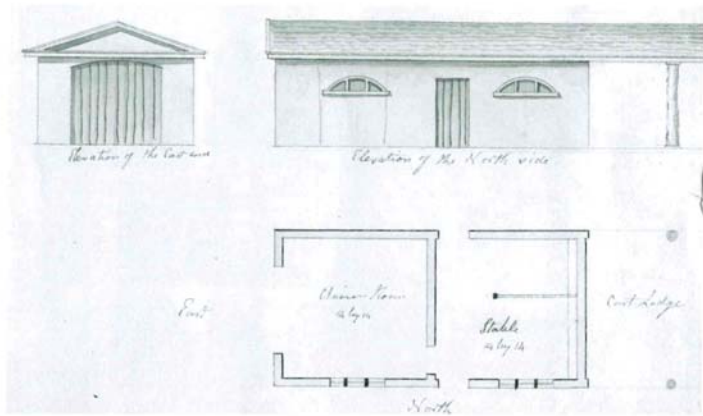
1.24 (below)  
Worlington rectory, 1819, Cambridgeshire, designed by George Maliphant. The projecting bay in the middle of the house and lesene-like brick piers at the corners were a way of disguising the visual dissonance of a symmetrical elevation that has a narrow corridor bay at its centre.





1.25

A detail from a design by the Reverend Arthur Browne: the chaise house and stable at Hepworth between Bury St Edmunds and Diss, Suffolk. To the right, a rustic column supports the roof of the 'cart lodge' [Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds, 806/2/10].



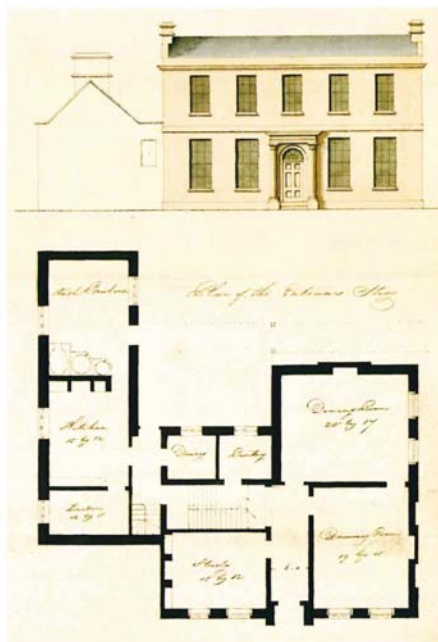
rectory of 1820–2 at Yaxham in Norfolk, the only parsonage he is known to have designed (fig. 1.26).<sup>90</sup> His watercolour drawings can still be found in the Norfolk Record Office, together with the more prosaic details of the project such as its estimated cost: £1,876.<sup>91</sup> A grand symmetrically-fronted house with an imposing Tuscan porch between bays topped by ‘Greek’ gables, this is the only new large house in the entire volume still in the classical style, for Lugar has otherwise moved on to a castellated Tudor-gothic.<sup>92</sup> He derived this imposing front from an earlier design of his for a house called ‘The Ryes Lodge’ at Little Henny in Essex, which had appeared in his *Plans and views*.<sup>93</sup> Why did Lugar persist in the classical-Georgian style for a parsonage, when he had abandoned it for most other buildings? He was, after all, an eccentric planner, devising contorted routes through his villas probably to enhance their picturesque potential. His descriptions of the house at Yaxham published in the book suggest that the style carried implications of modesty and retiral appropriate for a clergyman: ‘This style of house is suitable to the neighbourhood of a large town or village, and may be accompanied by a paddock or small lawn, with plantation and neatly dressed grounds. The outline of this Design is sufficiently varied to divest it of formality, yet not so broken as to deprive it of the character of a genteel residence, occupying a place in style between the villa and the cottage.’<sup>94</sup> In the text facing the plan of the house, he describes how the house is sheltered from the winds (and from the church) thanks to the rich plantation round about,

commenting in conclusion that the setting ‘promises in a few years to make this a very comfortable retired residence’.<sup>95</sup> In this last he was perhaps underestimating his client, the Reverend Dr Johnny Johnson, who soon decorated its rooms with racy murals by his old friend William Blake.<sup>96</sup>

### **Conservative planning**

These examples from the Norwich diocese indicate the prevalence of the classical-Georgian style throughout the 1820s; this was typical of the country as a whole, and so was a very marked consistency of plan. There were only two significant alternatives to the central-corridor type, of which one was not much more than a slight tweak in the arrangement of the stairs. We have already seen that Thompson’s house at Bures had been arranged so that the staircase was out of sight, tucked away to the right as one entered. When the rooms are arranged so that there are three major ones in total, two facing the entrance front and one behind, and the stairs are located at the side, behind one of the front rooms and at right angles to the entry corridor, we have what could be called the L-corridor plan (fig. 1.28). Parsonages arranged like this were rare at this date, finding broad favour only in the 1830s, perhaps as soon as it was recognised that they shield the upper landing from the vulgar gaze of those who happened to be waiting at the front door of the house. There are none in the Norwich diocese but for Bures (an oddity, since the house faces the garden rather than the entrance) until the 1830s, and even another impressive collection, that for Oxford, includes just one new house with this plan from the 1820s, at Forest Hill of 1827, by John Hudson, an Oxford builder (fig. 1.27).<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, it was an extensive remodelling of an older house that provided the other L-corridor arrangement in the diocese during the decade, at Swincombe by John Plowman and also in 1827.<sup>98</sup> The L-corridor plan is essentially an adaptation of a simple urban type to a more open and larger rural site, since it works best with a side window for the staircase, and with plenty of space at the rear, since at least one room will be pushed further back from the entrance front.

The more significant variation was one in which the three principal rooms were arranged in a row to form what was usually a symmetrical front facing the garden; there was a corridor linking them as a spine that ran along the back of these rooms, leading to the front door near



1.26 (above)  
Yaxham rectory, near East  
Dereham, Norfolk (1820-2);  
Lugar's own illustration for his  
book *Villa architecture* of  
1828 (plate 13).

1.27 (above, right)  
Forest Hill, near Oxford (1827).  
This impressive project is  
doubly significant: it was the  
first new house recorded in  
the diocesan collection with  
an L-corridor plan; and its  
construction bankrupted its  
client, the colourful perpetual  
curate John Mavor  
[Oxfordshire Record Office,  
MS. Oxf. dioc. papers  
b.103/2d].

one end of it. This type, the 'back-corridor' type, had three major advantages over the other two layouts (fig. 1.29). One was simply that all three rooms could enjoy the best aspect, which might well be limited to one side of the house only. Another was that it could easily solve the problem of how to add a wing of new reception rooms to an old house: one simply ran a corridor between them. And the third was that this arrangement solved a perennial problem of the symmetrical, classically-inspired Georgian house. This problem was that a symmetrical front mimicking the classical tradition naturally suggests that the central bay of the main facade should be larger, or more dominant, than the two bays flanking it – and yet as we have already seen in so many examples, that central bay was occupied by a corridor which was narrower than the two rooms either side. There were several devices for getting around this problem. The most simple, and that generally adopted, was simply to ignore it, for the inner walls were hidden behind a flush masonry facade; only a builder or an architect, who would assume that the main room windows to the left and the





right were not necessarily positioned centrally in their rooms along the facade, would appreciate what was happening inside. This is what Thompson did at Bures and Hartest, and we are so used to it that it does not seem strange. But other architects were bothered by the discrepancy, and used various devices to cover it up. A broad porch certainly helped. At Worlington, Maliphant had gone one stage further, bringing the central bay forward slightly, and applying a simple projecting porch (see fig. 1.24). The result is that the three bays almost read as one combined broad bay at the centre of the house. Large projecting central bays are, curiously, rare at this time.

The back-corridor plan had been in use mainly for rather larger houses at least since the beginning of the nineteenth century: Nash used it, or variations of it, for several of his villas, including Cronkhill of 1802 and on a grander scale for his Royal Lodge at Windsor of 1811–20. Interestingly, he also designed a rectory in Ireland, at Lissan in County Tyrone, in this way in 1802.<sup>99</sup> The plan freed the architect to do as he wished with the main garden elevation of the house, and he could

#### 1.28 (above, left)

The L-corridor plan type also has a pair of major rooms that faces the entrance or garden, but the stairs are tucked away to one side. There is usually, as here, a third room. This plan is based on the design by Henry Jones Underwood for Elsfield vicarage, near Oxford, 1836 [Oxfordshire Record Office, MS. Oxf. dioc. papers b.103/2].

#### 1.29 (above)

The back-corridor plan type arranges the major rooms in a row facing the garden; the corridor, which runs like a spine behind them, is entered from one end. This example is based on the plan by James Pritchett for Bossall, near York, 1838 [Borthwick Institute, University of York, MGA 1838/2].

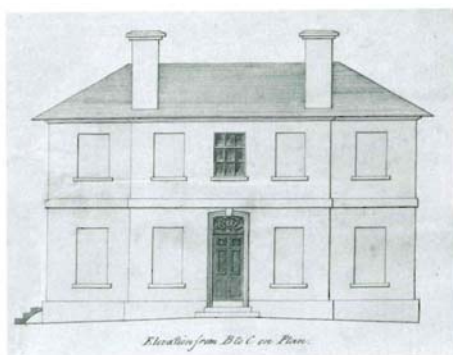
easily place the largest of the reception rooms – and thus its principal and central bay – in the centre of his facade if he so wished. But perhaps more significantly, as things turned out, the back-corridor plan resulted in the birth of the short side elevation, the one that had the front door on it at one end. Because of the front door, this elevation became an important one, and yet for the architects it must at first have been problematic. Alongside the front door was the side wall of the adjoining major reception room, whose windows faced the other way, along the main elevation. So the architect had a front door and a piece of blank wall to contend with. That blank wall might, however, have included the room's fireplace, so he had two major elements with which to try to build an elevation that would make sense with an otherwise classical, symmetrical house. At first, architects found this difficult: the fact that so few architects adopted this convenient layout in the 1820s must surely be a sign that they were reluctant to depart from the conventional plans of house building, as is the fact that they often treated their new freedom with caution; and when they did first attempt it, the results were not always successful. John Apsley, surveyor and builder of Ashford, produced an extraordinary design in 1836 for a parsonage at Kennington, in Kent, of which the symmetrical entrance elevation consisted of a central front door, a small landing window above it, and two pairs of blank windows either side giving a misleading impression of the rooms behind them (fig. 1.30).<sup>100</sup> Over at Winterborne St Martin in Wiltshire, in 1838, Edward Monney used a combination of both blind and real windows, but still ended up with a peculiar facade (fig. 1.31).<sup>101</sup> Later architects, even comparatively accomplished ones, similarly failed to grapple with the potential of this new entrance front: John Whichcord, at Newchurch near Romney Marsh, also tried imitating on this side the traditional front elevation of a central-corridor house, and fared at least as badly as Apsley.<sup>102</sup> The garden front, on the other hand, was imposing. There are however two houses in Suffolk by the Melton architect William Bilby that demonstrate that by simply treating the effect of the plan as it was, rather than by twisting it into a symmetrical front, it was possible to arrive at some very fine effects. In 1836 he designed a vicarage at Bredfield with a bold entrance facade punctured only by a broad front door with a pair of pilasters either side of it, and a small window directly above it, all set to one side of the wall exactly as the plan would suggest.

The composition is further enhanced by the appearance on the entrance front of part of the kitchen offices, set back from the main front (fig. 1.32).<sup>103</sup> In a slightly later project, for Martlesham, he applied this approach to the remodelling of an existing building: the new house consisted of a pair of reception rooms; a corridor ran along the back of them, with a door at either end, and the old house provided the kitchen and office wing, which was clearly visible from the front.<sup>104</sup> These new entrance elevations have an interesting, style-less air to them, boldly admitting that they are different from the classical-Georgian composition along the main garden front, whilst being neither apologetic nor contrived.

Another approach was to build up a second symmetrical front for this entrance elevation, balancing the side wall of the reception room to one side of the front door with the side or main wall of the kitchen or offices on the other. This bestowed on the kitchen facade a grander role than had previously been accepted, marking a significant step towards its external expression. In one late classical-Georgian house, the urban vicarage at Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire of 1843, the architect Harvey Egerton dressed up the narrow side entrance elevation with a grand Ionic portico, thus achieving harmony on both elevations as well as a sensible plan, the best of all worlds (figs. 1.33, 1.34).<sup>105</sup> Some imaginative architects varied the plan, probably to reduce the effect of the long single-loaded corridor: at Hamble-le-Rice on Southampton Water there is a fancy helical stair at the entrance end of the corridor, altogether a surprising plan for as early as 1821. The designer was a builder called Martin Filer from Winchester,

1.30 (below, left)  
Kennington vicarage, near Ashford, Kent: an example of what happened when architects first tried to devise suitable entrance elevations for a back-corridor plan. By John Apsley, 1836. The house has been demolished [Canterbury Cathedral Archives, DCb/DC/K3/2].

1.31 (below, right)  
Edward Monney's design for the entrance elevation of his parsonage at Winterborne St Martin, near Dorchester, Dorset (1838) shows that the back-corridor plan could throw up elevations that could almost be described as functionalist *avant le nom* [Church Commissioners: CERC, QAB/7/6/E32].





1.32  
Bredfield vicarage, near  
Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1836,  
by William Bilby. An elevation  
that frankly addressed the  
requirements of a back-  
corridor plan could produce  
imposing results.

and his plan is unusually neat and logical in other respects, too.<sup>106</sup> Others achieved the same aim by dividing the long corridor route up into varying compartments: Maurice Davis junior did this at the curate's house he designed at Hinton St George in Somerset in 1839 (see fig. 4.29); and the London architect Edward J. Andrews was effectively doing the same at a much grander house a little later in the same county, the rectory at Compton Martin of 1841, where he created the rear route to the principal rooms from a series of widely varying spaces that started with an imposing entrance hall and continued via a narrow corridor to a stair hall at the end (see fig. 4.33).<sup>107</sup>

The back-corridor plan was then an interesting development that was yet to yield valuable results. For a stylistically ambitious architect it could be invaluable. William Donthorn is best known as a gothic architect, but amongst his many parsonage designs there are two schemes of 1831 in an Italianate style, in the Royal Institute of British





1.33, 1.34

Tenbury Wells vicarage,  
Worcestershire, 1843,  
by Harvey Egerton.

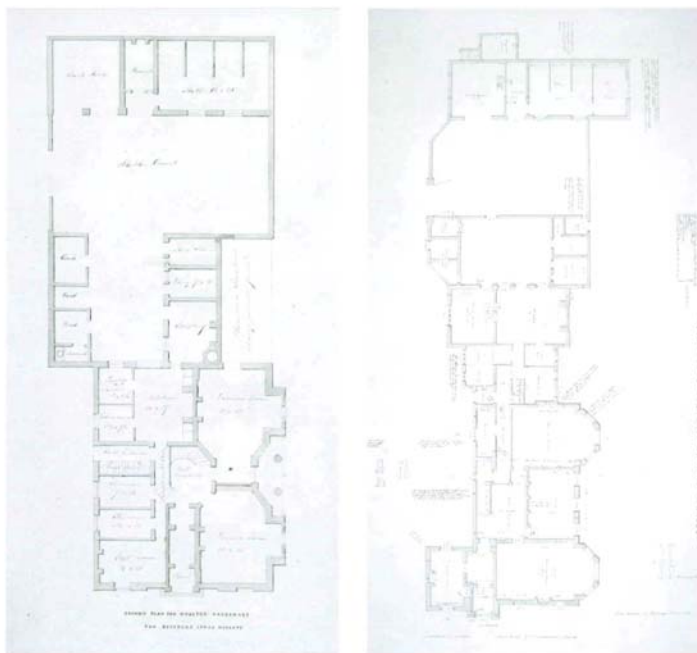
The remarkable overscaled  
Ionic porch forms part of  
a symmetrical facade that  
turned a back-corridor  
entrance elevation into a  
suitable urban front.



Architects' Library Drawings Collection, for a proposed rectory at Moulton St Michael in south-east Norfolk. In his earlier plan, Donthorn provided the main part of his house with two symmetrical elevations. The first shows a pair of grand reception rooms facing the garden, with an octagonal stairhall behind them reached from a corridor that leads to a front door placed in the centre of the symmetrical entrance front (fig. 1.35). With only two rooms, it is essentially a central-corridor plan where the left hand part of the front is taken up with offices, and is not dissimilar to Thompson's rectory at Hartest. Unlike Thompson, however, Donthorn found himself juggling with blind windows to make his composition work, and in spite of the grand loggia on the garden side, and the promising staircase hall in the middle, the results are contrived.<sup>108</sup> It appears that it was James Wiggett, his client, who then sent him back to the drawing board, as he evidently now required a third reception room as well as more extensive offices. Since Donthorn could not provide a further room on the garden side without entirely changing the plan, he now

1.35 (right)  
William Donthorn's first scheme for Moulton St Michael rectory, east of Norwich, 1831: this is essentially a central-corridor plan. If Donthorn had placed a third reception room at the front, on the other side of the entrance corridor from the dining room (bottom right) he would have had to push the many backstairs offices too far back [RIBA Library Drawings Collection, Donthorn [Moulton St Michael] 1].

1.36 (far right)  
Donthorn's solution was to choose another of the three conventional house plans rather than try to come up with something original. The house is now a back-corridor scheme with an asymmetrical entrance front [RIBA Library Drawings Collection, Donthorn [Moulton St Michael] 4].





abandoned it and adopted the back-corridor type (fig. 1.36). The three major rooms face the garden in a row, and behind them is an even grander staircase hall, reached from a corridor which runs along the short side of the first of the three rooms. He balanced the front door with the tall narrow tower of a Tuscan villa to the left of it – a clever and logical move, because it signified the servant's room by the entrance, and therefore included the 'defensive' use a tower suggested; and he made a feature of the chimney of the reception room to the right by projecting it outwards and decorating it with a blind arch at each of the two floors, and then a real arch and a cornice at the top.<sup>109</sup> But for the unrelieved flatness of the Norfolk countryside, and, no doubt, the weather, the Reverend Mr Wiggett might well have fancied himself to be in Tuscany.

The back-corridor plan was useful and challenging to architects, and as we shall see, it was the only one of the three conventional corridor-type plans which entirely survives the upheavals of the period ahead. In the meantime, it will suffice to note that architects evidently came to like it, for it also survived their transition between styles. James Pritchett, for example, designed a substantial vicarage at Bossall in the North Riding of Yorkshire, costed at £1,150 in 1838, in Tudor-gothic style, with little ornamentation beyond hood moulds and a pointed front door, where a study, drawing room (in the centre) and dining room formed a symmetrical front along the garden (figs. 1.37, 1.38; see also 1.29).<sup>110</sup> When he designed a house on a similar scale but in the conventional classical-Georgian style three years later at Thornton in Pickering in the same riding, he designed a variation of the Bossall house, here continuing the spine corridor directly into the kitchen office wing and placing both staircases within it and along its axis, even though this left him with a clumsy front elevation which he lined with blind windows (fig. 1.39).<sup>111</sup> In general, the more modest provincial architects and 'surveyors' remained most loyal to the simplest versions of the three corridor-type plans, whilst their more sophisticated colleagues attempted slight variations; but even an ambitious and well-travelled London architect such as Matthew Habershon at the height of his powers was designing houses such as the parsonage at Rockland St Mary near Norwich on exactly the same type of L-corridor plan that was familiar to the humblest of builders (see fig. 2.53).<sup>112</sup>







#### 1.37 (left)

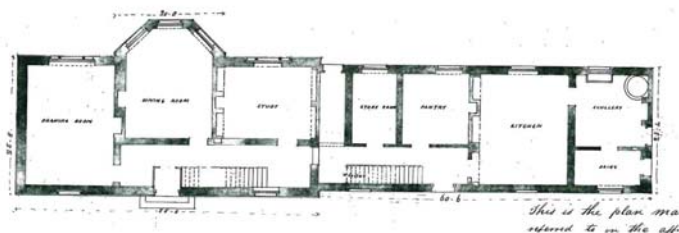
The vicarage at Bossall, near York, designed by James Pritchett in 1838, clearly exemplifies the elevational advantages of a back-corridor plan. The arrangement at last allowed architects to make the central bay of the house the major one and thus escape from the pinched effect of the central-corridor and L-corridor types.

#### 1.38 (above)

The corridor at Bossall, typical of similar houses, runs like a spine along the back of the major rooms.

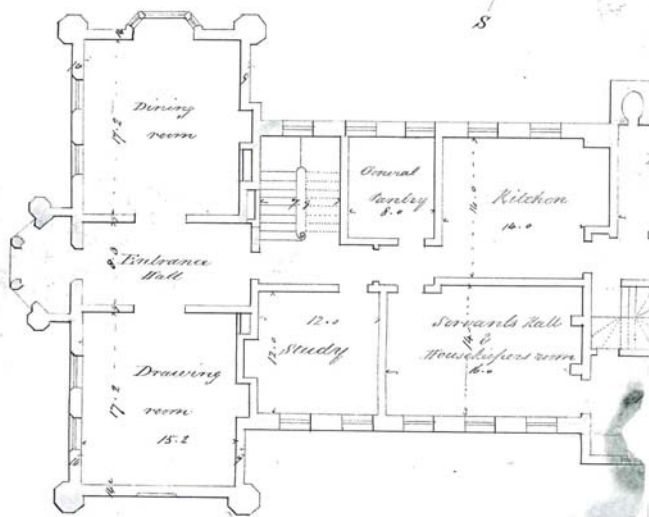


We have seen that architects were occasionally required to modernise existing parsonages (some of which were mediaeval in part) by the addition of new reception rooms, and where possible they did so by applying to the house a new wing which imposed one of the three corridor-type plans. Eventually this was most easily done by attaching a new back-corridor type extension, but before this solution was generally arrived at there are examples of the attachment of a new block consisting of a central corridor with a new room either side: this was done for example at Galby in Leicestershire in 1829 (fig. 1.40), and at Dallinghoo (1832) (figs 1.41, 1.42) and at Nacton (1837) (fig. 1.43) in Suffolk, amongst many others; no doubt there are a great deal of other cases which were too minor to require mortgages and have thus



1.39 (above, right)  
Proposed ground-floor plan,  
Thornton in Pickering vicarage,  
North Riding of Yorkshire  
(1841). Another back-corridor  
plan from James Pritchett,  
this time less successful in  
appearance [Borthwick  
Institute, University of York,  
MGA 1841/4].

1.40 (right)  
Galby, east of Leicester  
(1829). William Parsons  
added this front block to an  
older house in a manner  
characteristic for the period.  
Two spacious rooms flank an  
entrance hall. Behind these,  
there is a new study, kitchen,  
and servants' hall as well as  
a more impressive staircase  
than the old one [Lincolnshire  
Archives, MGA 153].



gone unrecorded in the diocesan archives.<sup>113</sup> At Nacton the architect, John Whiting, also added a new staircase at the seam between old and new. In these three cases the old part of the house seems to have been Tudor or earlier – at Dallinghoo, there are roof timbers in the older part of the house which date back to the fourteenth century<sup>114</sup> – and at Galby and Nacton the architects chose to use a Tudor-gothic style which perhaps to their eye suited the historical remains.<sup>115</sup> The opposite also occurred: a simple classical-Georgian house was added to with a contrasting extension in new Tudor-gothic style: this is what the young goth Benjamin Ferrey did when he added a back-corridor addition to the rectory at Compton Valence, in Dorset, in 1839 (see fig. 2.59).<sup>116</sup> Thomas Rickman's expensive plan for extending the parsonage at Soham must surely be in a class of its own: the old house became the offices of the new, which was entirely conventional, but the grand main block of the new building with its big central pediment was attached at some distance by a wing, funnel-shaped in plan, that provided rooms for the footman and housekeeper.<sup>117</sup>

How different were these plan types to those of standard residential architecture? Not much, so long as the scale and status of the residents were similar. In fact there are amongst the diocesan collections records of a small number of houses that had recently been built for lay purposes but were bought soon after by incumbents for their own use; and, because a mortgage was needed, an application had to be made as if for a new parsonage. The original builder or another surveyor was thus required to draw up and present the plans of the house for submission, thus again leaving us with an unusually good record of it. On these occasions one can see the prevalence of the same basic house types. John Sarell, a surveyor from Montacute, proposed the purchase of a house at Ilchester in 1842, helpfully including the information that it had been built within the last six years; it is a standard L-corridor type plan.<sup>118</sup> An application in 1856 was made by Stephen George, carpenter, builder and surveyor, and shows a house in the parish of Linstead in Kent, located exactly a mile away (as George's site plan helpfully points out) from the door of the incumbent's church in the neighbouring parish of Teynham, for this was the maximum distance stipulated in the first of Gilbert's Acts.<sup>119</sup> He does not give its age, but he had almost certainly built it himself, and it is the simple central-corridor type.<sup>120</sup>

1.41, 1.42

Dallinghoo rectory, near Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1832, by Bilby. The imposing new symmetrical block was attached to an old low building to provide modern reception rooms and principal bedrooms.





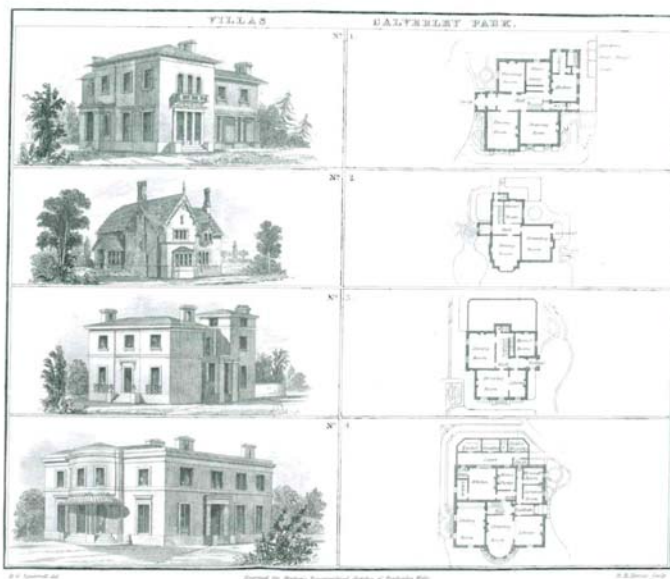


But one can look to a more august source, a single plate in a book by John Britton of 1832, to see exactly how prevalent the basic plans were. This is an illustration of four of the villas designed by Decimus Burton from 1828 in his development outside Tunbridge Wells called Calverley Park (fig. 1.44). Three of the four representative houses shown are in the classical-Georgian style, with Italian touches: one has a tower like Donthorn's at Moulton St Michael, and another has pediment-like ornaments at the top of the chimneys; only one house is in a rarer, rustic-Tudor style. The three classical house plans are exactly those we are already familiar with. No 1 has a central corridor; no 3 has an L corridor; and no 4 is a back-corridor type. Only no 2, the Tudor house, is slightly different, a picturesque variation of the L-corridor type where the position of the stairs is brought in front of, rather than behind, the third reception room. Calverley Park was

#### 1.43

Similarly, John Whiting's extension to Nacton rectory, near Ipswich, Suffolk, (in 1837) provided a formal front and new reception rooms to an old building. His mixture of Tudor and classical-Georgian styles on a single front is characteristic of the immediately pre-gothic revival years of the reign of William IV.

John Britton's detailed description of up-market modern villa architecture designed by Decimus Burton at Calverley Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, provides a point of comparison with similarly-scaled parsonage house plans. From *Descriptive sketches of Tunbridge Wells and the Calverley Estate*, 1832.

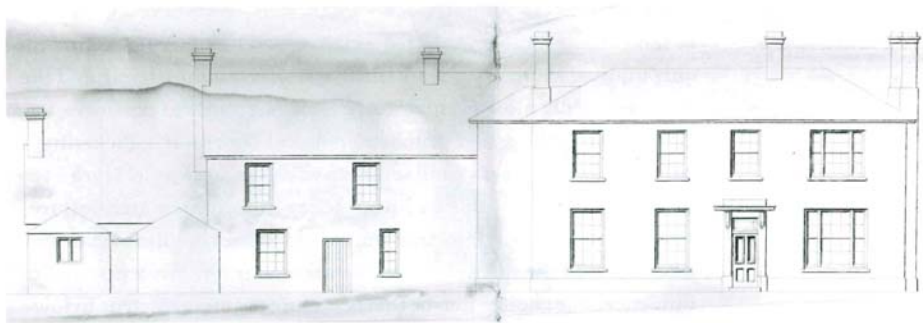


a speculative venture, and that means that the plans were likely to be conventional in order to attract as wide a market as possible; if that was indeed the case, it is clear that the basic types were established across the kingdom. A smart house in Calverley Park would thus have had the same plan as a modest parsonage anywhere else in the country. A clue as to the repetitive nature of house layouts is hidden in the pages of *Emma*: when Mrs Elton comes to patronise her smart neighbour with her dim conversation, she tells her hostess of the similarities between the Woodhouses' Hartfield and Maple Grove, the mansion of her brother-in-law Mr Suckling outside Bristol: 'And the staircase – you know, as I came in, I observed how very like the staircase was; placed exactly in the same part of the house'.<sup>121</sup> Of course it was: just about every house of the 1810s that was neither a palace nor a cottage was a variation on the same central-corridor plan; so naturally the stairs were visible to Mrs Elton immediately on entering both front doors.

It is important to mention that in none of the houses we have seen so far is there any kind of imposing staircase hall that constitutes a room in its own right. In a sense, the type of life these houses was designed for was a static one: receiving visitors or otherwise dealing with others

in a clear hierarchical way according to social conventions; landed gentlemen would need a business room; a parson his study. Either of these that was a justice of the peace would require a suitable room in which to receive applications for poor relief and such like. In so far as the owner of the house could afford it, every activity had its own place, and the house provided a framework for these different and distinct activities. It is when the nature of daily social life begins to change that the plan changes too, for the plan is as it has always been both the generator and the reflector of social change. But in addition to those who either actively campaigned for, or reacted against, such architectural changes – and we will hear about them later – there were of course plenty of architects who ignored or who perhaps were even unaware of the changing landscape of their profession. Across the country, parsonages continued to be built in much the same classical-Georgian style, and with one of the three corridor plans, almost (but not quite) as far as the Queen Anne revival that started in the 1870s. The designers of these buildings were sometimes people who were already set in their ways. However, by 1840, less than ten years after Donthorn's splendid performance at Moulton St Michael, classical-Georgian parsonages were comparatively rare. The Oxford diocese seems to have approved one or two new parsonages a year, and in 1838 and 1840 it approved houses in this style by John Plowman, who was then in his mid sixties; he had been designing parsonages in the same plain classical style since his first for the diocese, that remodelling at Swincombe in 1827.<sup>122</sup> That at Launton, of 1838, was competent, plain, and asymmetrical (fig. 1.45); the second, at South Weston, was a small house with only two reception rooms and could hardly have been

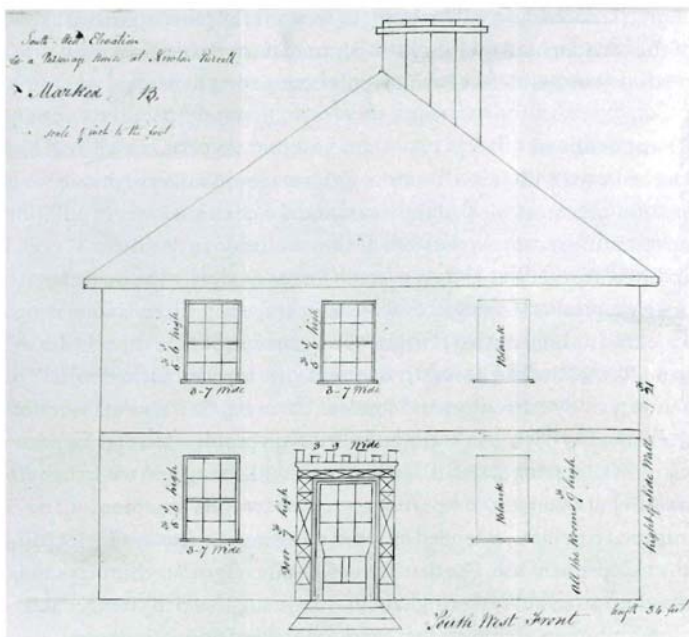
1.45  
Competent, plain, and  
somewhat lopsided:  
John Plowman's design  
for Launton, near Bicester,  
Oxfordshire, in 1838  
[Oxfordshire Record Office,  
MS. Oxf. dioc. papers  
b.104/1].





more conventional.<sup>123</sup> The same could be said of the house of 1843 at Caversham by Drake.<sup>124</sup> The last new classical-Georgian house in the Oxford collection for the 1840s is a very crude cottage of 1844 by a builder from Bicester called Joseph Clements, at Newton Purcell (fig. 1.46).<sup>125</sup> Finally, and interestingly, the very last appearance of the style in the diocese before the conscious revivals of the later century is an unambitious remodelling by the young William Wilkinson, in his mid twenties at the time, who cautiously added reception rooms to an old house along a new back-corridor at Broadwell, in 1846.<sup>126</sup> The early extinction of the classical-Georgian house at the Oxford diocese might well derive from the fact that in the 1840s it was at the centre of a religious upheaval in which architectural style played so major a part; in sleepy Hampshire John Colson, who had previously experimented creditably with the new Tudor-gothic style, designed in 1851 a Regency-style house for Newtown, between Soberton and Fareham, central-corridor and classical-Georgian, as if nothing had happened. And at £1,142 it wasn't cheap, either (fig. 1.47).<sup>127</sup>

In certain circumstances architects seem to have been resigned to add to a classical-Georgian house in a consistent style. In the 1840s this happened to a number of houses. Lewis Vulliamy, whose previous parsonages had been in new or eccentric styles, added a large wing to the rectory at Cottenham in Cambridgeshire in a classical style entirely consistent with the old building. As if bored by this, he submitted his new elevations drawn in a merely schematic way. Other cases of comparatively innovative young architects resorting to the conventions of the past are less explicable. Why did Anthony Salvin, already the architect of many original Elizabethan-style buildings (including an idiosyncratic parsonage at Northallerton, demolished not many years ago) build so conventional a house at Denton, in Lincolnshire, as late as 1841?<sup>128</sup> It has a central-corridor plan, and the only unusual elements of it are that the front is asymmetrical, and the chimneys oddly monumental.<sup>129</sup> At nearly £1,750 it was expensive, too: almost double the cost of Pritchett's house at Thornton in Pickering, built the same year on a similar scale, and in the same style. Since Salvin was not one of those who reacted against the new architecture, and indeed had made his name with grand houses in Elizabethan and Jacobean styles, it appears that local tastes and traditions occasionally influenced the choice; maybe that was more than usually true in low-



1.46 (left)  
No gothic yet, and this is 1844.  
Builder: Joseph Clements, at  
Newton Purcell, Oxfordshire,  
between Bicester and  
Buckingham [Oxford Record  
Office, MS. Oxf. dioc. papers  
b.104/5].

1.47 (below)  
Newtown, near Soberton,  
Hampshire: John Colson's  
entrance elevation from 1851.  
The gothic revival had passed  
him by too [Hampshire Record  
Office, 16M70/27].



church Lincolnshire. Salvin brought forward the narrow central bay of the corridor, and gave it a little pyramidal roof; this unclassical treatment seems to have been his only consolation here.

### **Changes ahead**

I have started with James Trubshaw's vicarage at Walkeringham because it seems to me that the house and the circumstances surrounding it contain the seeds of the revolution in domestic architecture that was so soon to come. In the first place the house is utterly typical of so many that were built at the time in its layout, its scale, and its understated classical-Georgian facades. On the other hand, Trubshaw had not really overcome the basic problem of a comparatively narrow central corridor having to do the visual work of the major bay of the main elevation, a design problem that lay behind many of the changes ahead. The rooms at Walkeringham were the traditional Georgian compartments; the spaces between them minimal corridors, intended only for accessing the rooms and not for any independent use. The flattish roof, the incongruous chimneys and the glum attics at Walkeringham may have suggested to younger and more ambitious architects that there are areas of domestic design which must be reformed if the resulting building is to do justice to the activities that go on inside it: the old Georgian shell will no longer suffice. Nor will the fact that a parsonage looks just like any other house. The extensive kitchen offices and the carefully planned courtyard around it indicate the increased sophistication of domestic life, and hint at the recent advances in the technology itself; their scale and position are at odds with the formal facades of the house. The pleasure of living at the house would have been derived from its attractive isolated setting, detached from the church and facing away from it on the very edge of the village, but that semi-detached relationship will soon be looked at again by those stressing a new association between the parson, his community, and his church; and the originality and charm of the house within would have been derived from its decoration and furnishing, rather than from some special character of the house itself. One imagines the Reverend Mr Miller toasting his muffins in the new fireplace, proud of the security and status his classical house has brought him; for there is very little in the social status of the parson of the time that should distinguish his



daily routine outside the offices he performs at the parish church from that of his smarter and more relaxed neighbours. And as for Trubshaw himself, he was essentially a builder and an engineer rather than an architect, who went on to be an important bridge designer; and here he was acting as building contractor as well as architect; these distinctions are now becoming more critical as the various building professions start to go their own ways. At the start of his long career, Trubshaw's professional world was a simple one, and the new parsonages that he designed were likewise simple, with few different considerations to be borne in mind for each new job, similar to those for other houses of the same scale. For his next parsonage, for Ilam in Staffordshire, designed only a year after that at Walkeringham, he took a stab at joining the new fashion for the Tudor gothic; and with that he was to play a minor role in the first stages of the unfolding dramas of the birth of the gothic revival which were to reach into even the most far flung and the most small and inconsequential of the villages of England.