

CHAPTER 5

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY HOUSE

I THE ORIGINS AND FORM OF THE COUNTRY

HOUSE

The Early Halls

It is not known how our earliest country houses developed. The earliest major useful source to social and economic historians in England is the Domesday book. While this appears to be a relatively complete record of landownership at the time of the Norman Conquest, there are significant omissions, and a number of places within Greater Manchester whose names suggest a pre-Norman origin do not appear in the record.

The reasons for these omissions may have been political, or due to inefficiency, or a lack of co-operation with the commissioners on the part of the inhabitants. Whatever the reasons, there almost certainly existed halls in the middle of the eleventh century on sites which were subsequently occupied by some of the country houses included in the gazetteer. However, it should be noted that the repeated selection of a particular site for building might be influenced by its favourable topographical situation, and need not indicate any continuity of settlement. As can be seen from the excavation reports in this volume, the earlier and more flimsy structural remains on a site where there is continuity of settlement, may often have been completely destroyed by the building of subsequent structures or easily missed during partial or rapid excavation. This means that even where a site has been excavated we cannot be certain that the date of the original settlement has been discovered.

The Standing Structures

Over the years students of vernacular architecture have come to recognise a series of basic house plans which appear to have been

common throughout the country, or within particular areas of the country at different periods. Brunskill (1978 and 1982) has tabulated these house plans and their names are now almost universally recognised. The types (fig 5.1) which are particularly relevant to Greater Manchester are the 'single ended hall', the 'double ended hall', the 'multi-storey' house and the 'double pile house'. The progenitor of this developmental series is the open cruck hall, the origins of which begin in the Anglo Saxon period. Such halls consisted of a large rectangular room, open to the roof, which was supported by large curving timbers or crucks.

The epic poem **Beowulf** tells of one great undivided hall, with an entrance strengthened with iron. Wood (1965) suggests that the roof was of gilded shingles and comments that the impression given is that of 'a highly ornamental barn'.

Excavations at Yeavinger of the palace of the kings of Northumbria, and at Cheddar of the palace of the kings of Wessex, have revealed the general shape of these long open halls and show that these buildings followed a tradition derived from the Germanic continental hall.

One particular parallel with the continent can be noted in the 9th century hall uncovered at Cheddar, which was probably that of King Alfred himself. The hall, (about 80 feet long by 18 feet wide), is in fact somewhat wider in the middle, roughly 'boat shaped', like buildings at Warendorf in Germany and Trelleborg in Denmark.

Baguley Hall, Radcliffe Tower, and Smithills

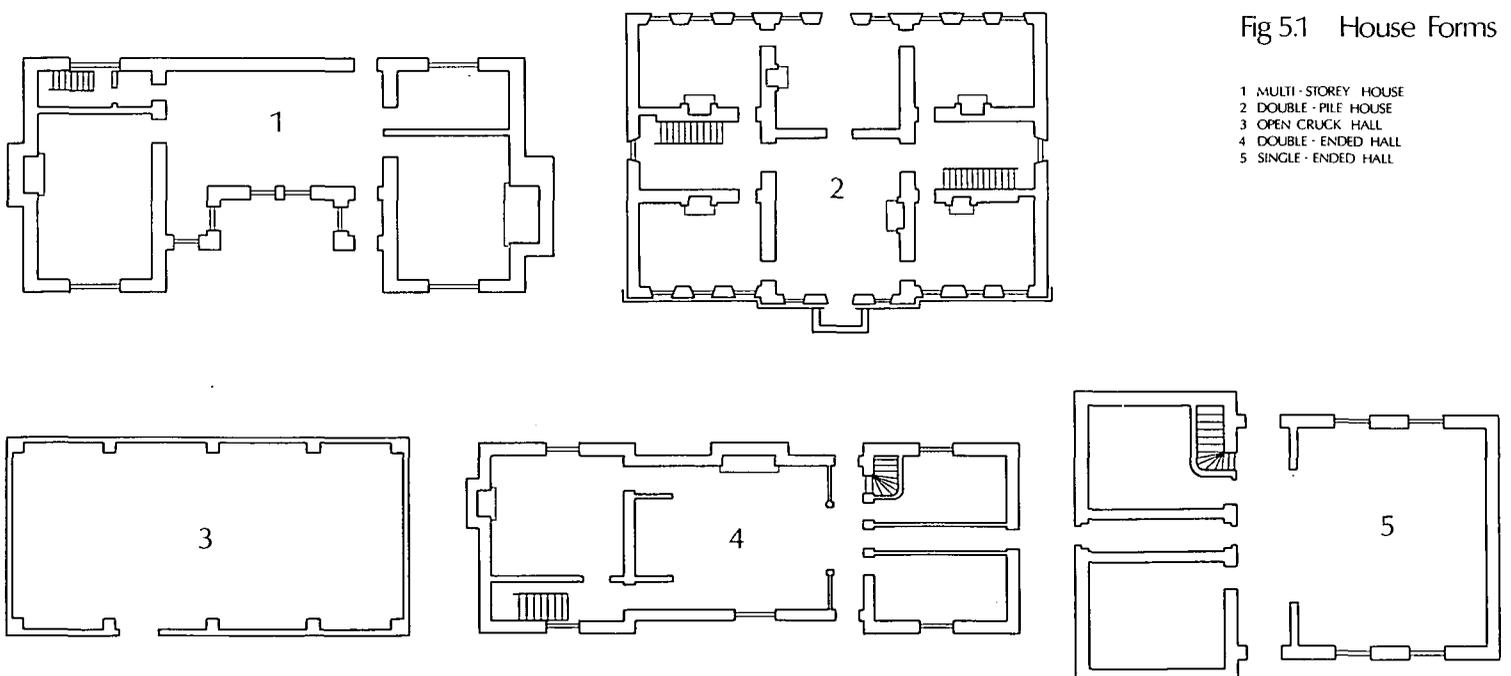


Fig 5.1 House Forms

- 1 MULTI-STOREY HOUSE
- 2 DOUBLE-PILE HOUSE
- 3 OPEN CRUCK HALL
- 4 DOUBLE-ENDED HALL
- 5 SINGLE-ENDED HALL

Hall in Greater Manchester County, and Tabley Old Hall in Cheshire, all seem to have a slightly bowed outline as well as remains of thick plank-like timbers also found at Trelleborg. It is suggested that they represent a late 14th century survival of a tradition resulting from the Viking settlement of the area (Smith and Stell 1960 cited in Wood 1965, 214).

A single ended hall (fig 5.1) usually has a two storey wing at the end of an open hall. The wing may or may not project beyond the hall side wall, but it is usually separated from the hall by a cross passage. The passage was often divided from the hall by a screen which, in houses in the northwest, was often movable and known as a 'spere'.

A double ended hall usually has a central open hall flanked by two, two storey wings. There is usually a cross passage at one end of the hall, as with the single ended hall.

A multi-storey house is, as its name suggests, defined purely by the fact that the entire structure is more than one storey high.

A double pile house is essentially two blocks of two or more storeys, back to back with a central staircase.

Single and double ended halls are often masked by later additions which alter their original plan; the initial structure at Smithills, Bolton, appears to have been that of a single ended hall before the addition of a solar and other private rooms made it a double ended hall, and the evidence from Dukinfield suggests that the earliest timber structure was a double ended hall. Multi storey and double pile houses almost invariably stand on their own with little or no subsequent accretion. Clegg Hall, Rochdale, is a typical example of a multi-storey hall built completely in stone in the 17th century, while Alkrington Hall, in the same borough and dating from 1736, exemplifies the standard double pile house, and marks the move away from strictly vernacular architecture to a more international style.

The types of house which characterised this area were invariably either built of stone or constructed of timber frames on stone footings with wall panels of white-washed daub, so giving the characteristic 'black and white' appearance. Few surviving structures date from earlier than the 16th century. Those houses which survived from before this date are usually of timber 'cruck frame' construction and of the form known as the 'Open Hall'. This type of construction was revealed during restoration by the owners of Peel Hall, Ince.

2 THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

The typical hall of the 13th and 14th century was of cruck construction in which the main wooden structural elements were 'A' frames, known as cruck blades. Figure 5.2 shows an hypothetical reconstruction of a typical cruck

framed hall, based on the building at Dukinfield Old Hall. The spaces between these cruck blades were at first filled with wattle and daub and the roof could have been of thatch, or on a more wealthy house, of glazed roof tile. Internally the house would be divided either by curtains, movable hurdles, or static wooden wattle and daub screens. These cruck built halls often survive as the main hall of a larger house, as at Smithills, where the supports for a movable screen, or 'spere', can still be seen. As early as the 13th century some open ground-floor great halls had been improved by the addition of another building as a wing at one end.

Such a hall would house the owner and his family, his servants and estate workers. The family would sleep in the screened off end of the hall with everyone else in the main body of the building. Service accommodation would occupy the entrance end, and to minimise the risk of fire, the kitchen would be outside the main body of the hall. Peel Hall, Ince, appears to have retained this simple layout for some time. It is at this period that the moat became fashionable both as a defensive feature - as in Figure 5.3 - and as a symbol of social aspiration.

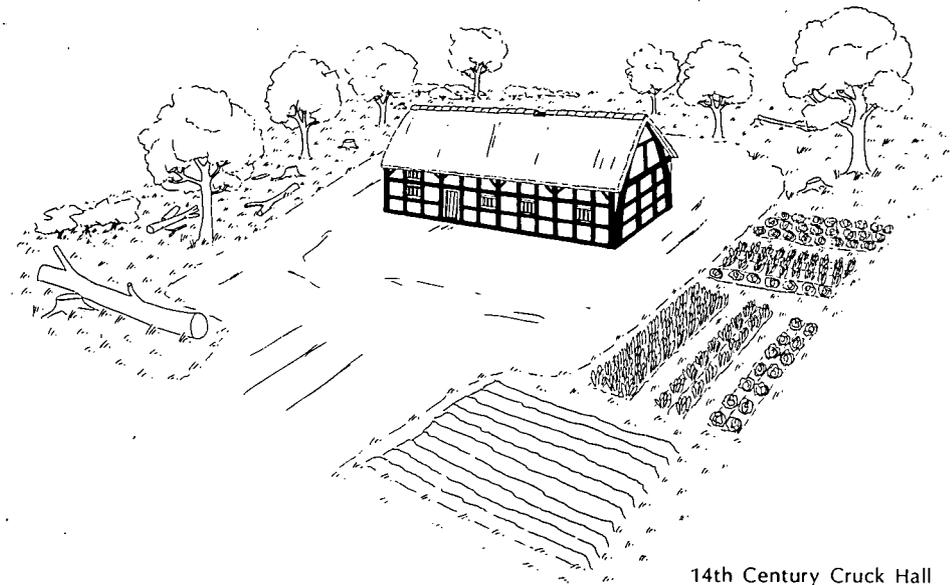
No complete examples of halls of this period have been uncovered by excavation in Greater Manchester, although at Peel Hall, Wythenshawe, and Broadoak, greenglazed roof tiles were found to suggest the presence of such a building. No other artefacts datable to this century appear to have been discovered, and our knowledge of pottery before the 15th century in Greater Manchester is almost non-existent, with the notable exception of the 12th or 13th century pottery and post built structures at Buttery House Farm, Hale.

The Fifteenth Century

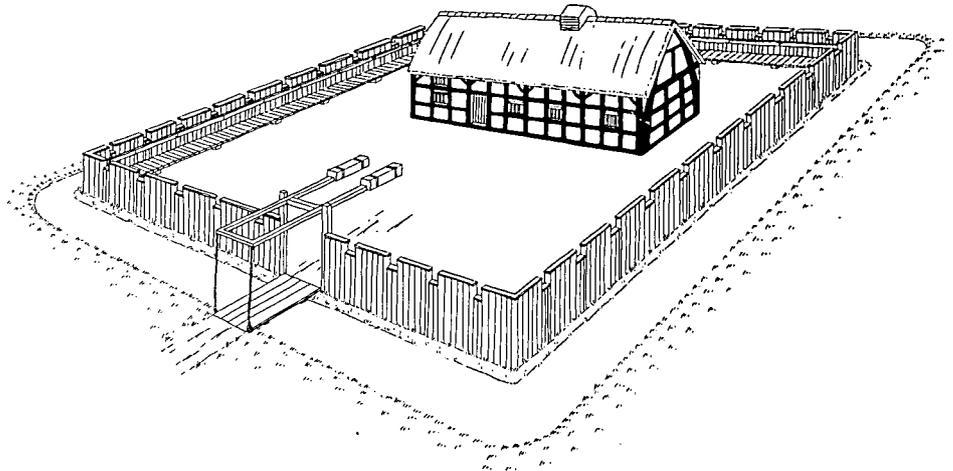
In the 15th century increasing political instability, culminating in the Wars of the Roses, appears to have led to the fortification of some houses. In 1403, James de Radcliffe applied for and received a 'license to crenelate' his house, and although licenses to crenelate did not usually specify moats, it seems possible that moats were added or extended at the same time. Some houses, such as Radcliffe Tower, were thus considerably altered for defence at this time (figure 5.4), and at Bury Castle, portions of the defensive wall and its supporting buttresses have been discovered by excavation. In general, the less wealthy families will have taken no such measures and will have lived on sites similar to that illustrated in fig 5.5. By the end of this century the single winged hall had been superseded, in most cases, by the double winged hall.

The overall slight increase in wealth seen in this century may have meant larger households, and fortification would certainly have been accompanied by an increase in the number of armed men in a gentleman's or knight's retinue.

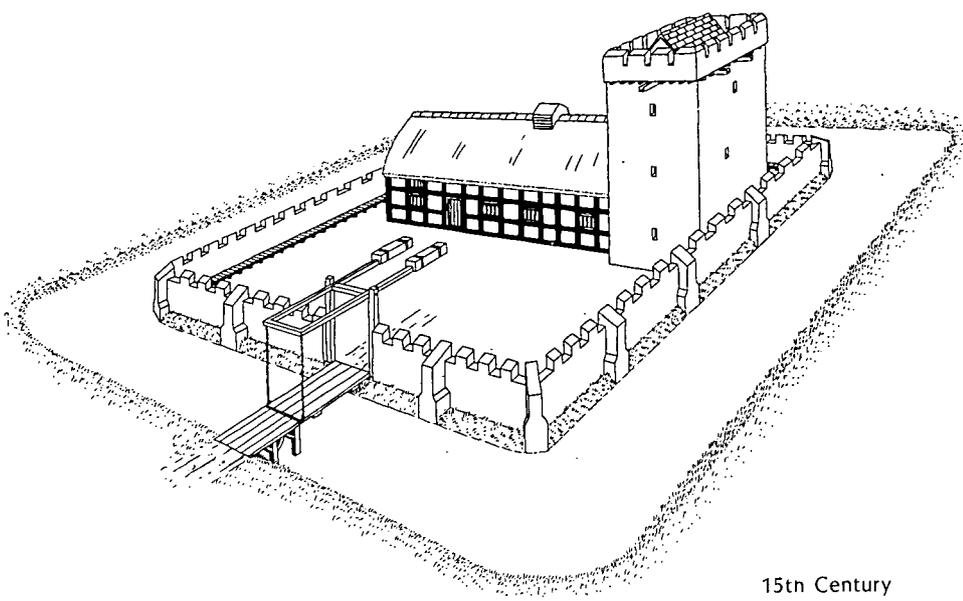
As with the 14th century there is an almost



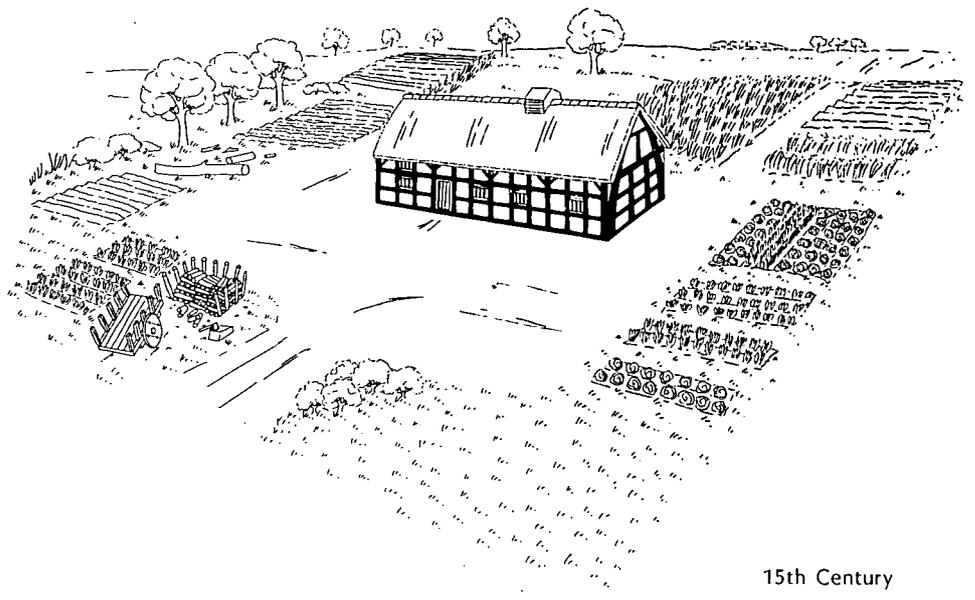
14th Century Cruck Hall
Fig 5.2



14th Century
Fig 5.3



15th Century
Fig 5.4



15th Century
Fig 5.5

complete lack of retrieved datable artefacts from any type of site in the Greater Manchester area.

3 THE POST MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The Sixteenth Century

During the 16th century stability began to return to the countryside, and the economic prosperity of the preceding century had paved the way for the expansion of trade and the gradual development of a truly wealthy class.

By this period, the double winged hall was becoming more elaborate, with fireplaces and chimneys and perhaps a gallery running along the great hall in the centre, to join the upper floors of the two wings. The entrance to the cross passage may by now have a porch or even have been incorporated into the service wing. At the other end of the hall, the position of the dais may have been marked by a bay window (Brunskill 1982, 40-50).

These halls provided the starting point for the great development of the later 16th century; the classic Elizabethan manor house which combined elements of traditional English vernacular architecture with the Renaissance concern for symmetry, increasing decorative complexity, and standards of comfort. The old open hall was replaced by a new hall with a first floor above it, and sometimes a third storey. There were more separate rooms, each with their own fireplace and chimney stacks. These became an important decorative feature around this time, as can be seen at Bramall Hall, which was converted to the new style by insertion of a floor in the great hall. At others, such as Ancoats and Agecroft, new halls were built which sometimes incorporated jettying. This jettying was not an important part of the northwest tradition of timber frame building, and where carried out it seems to have been a decorative rather than a structural feature, as at Hall 'l' Th' Wood, where it is continued from the first floor over the hall, along the ring where it is not at floor level but at the level of the window sill (Smith 1970).

Arden and Stayley Halls provide particularly noteworthy examples, in stone and timber, of the Elizabethan manor house. They are two storeyed throughout, without jettying and with a symmetry maintained by pairs of gables over windows and porches. Although timber was to continue as the most common building material, this period saw some of the earliest use of brick, for example, in Houghend Hall, an Elizabethan red brick building now alas lost to us through the process of rebuilding and modernisation.

In this area rebuilding and extension of houses occurred with increasing frequency (fig 5.6). The separate house at Denton Hall appears to date from this century, as do other examples of the 'double house' phenomenon. It is not certain whether the second building functioned as a court room for a manor, although in some cases the second building was certainly used as

a dwelling house, probably for the family of the eldest son, or a widowed mother, as a type of dower house.

The trend towards larger households continued, although few houses would now maintain armed retinues; in any case, the introduction of firearms and cannon would have rendered any such defenses insignificant. Figure 5.7, based on Dukinfield Old Hall, shows a typical winged multi storey house of this century, together with its formal entrance. Even the smaller houses, (fig 5.8), saw a switch in emphasis from defensive elements to symbols of status such as formal gardens. In many cases moats were backfilled during the 16th century, though in others - as in figures 5.6 and 5.8 - the moat was retained, and expansion or modification took place within the platform area.

There is a reasonable level of artefact recovery for this century, with devolved medieval forms, such as the jug, made at Norton Priory, and later types, especially the dark glazed 'Cistercian' wares, being found. These later pots were generally cups, possets and tankards, and some carried a white trailed slip decoration. Towards the end of the century the dark glazed kitchen coarseware, typically represented by the pancheon, began to make its appearance.

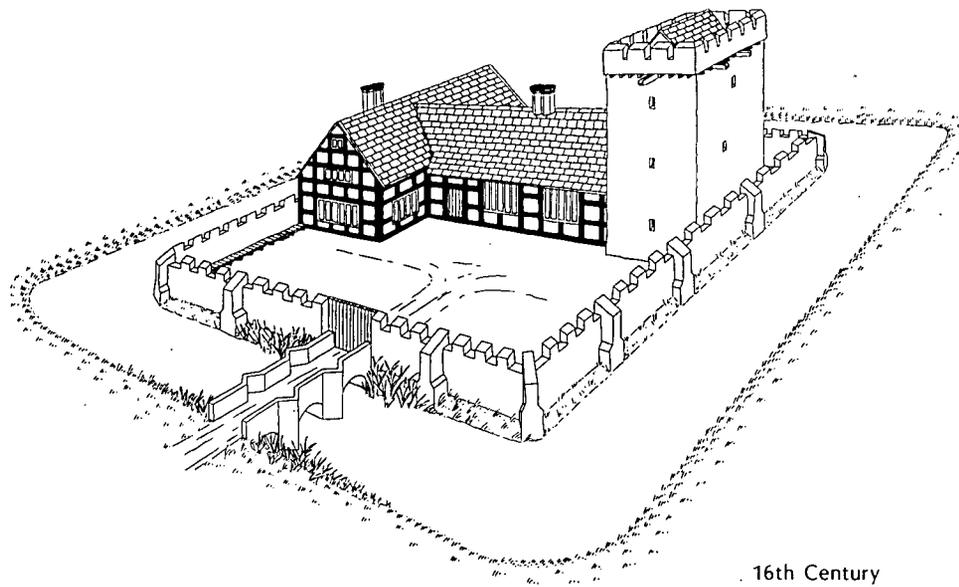
The Seventeenth Century

Although this century saw the upheavals of the Civil War, and the 'Glorious Revolution', the effect on the country houses of the county was negligible. Manchester was briefly besieged, and Bolton and Wigan stormed during the Civil War, but no houses were invested, as happened at Lathom House in Lancashire, and so defensive works around houses are not found.

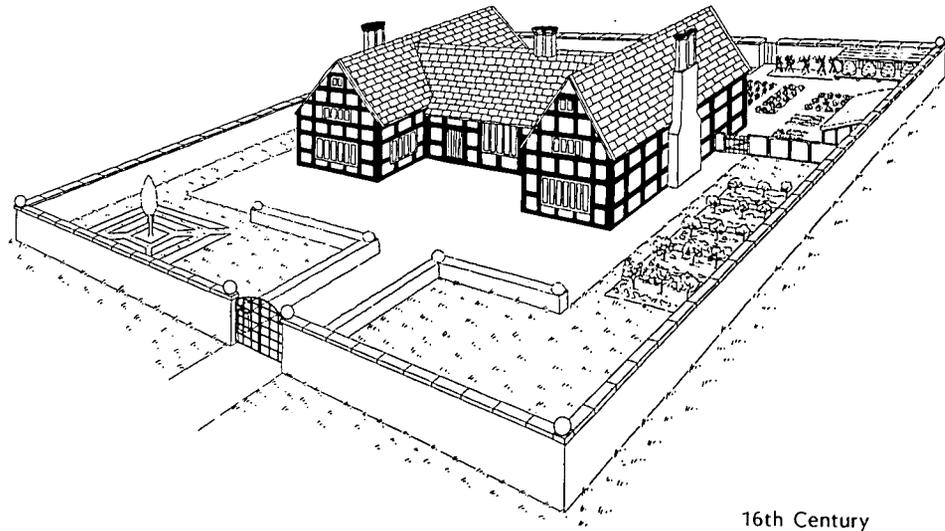
The shift of power away from the established church and towards the landed classes meant that armed retainers would have all but disappeared, although this trend might have been temporarily reversed during the Civil War. Overall prosperity increased throughout the century, and improvements designed to reflect the increasing status of many owners were carried out. In this way some house outer works were altered to look more impressive, whilst being totally useless for protection against artillery attack.

In some houses the wooden structures were clad in brick or stone, while yet more were completely rebuilt, as in the preceding century (fig 5.11). Baguley Hall has a brick, late 17th century south wing added to the medieval main hall. At Ordsall Hall there is the interesting instance of a large west wing of brick, dated 1639, which Smith (1970, 156) regards as having been originally a completely separate domestic unit, not joined to the older timber framed great hall until the 18th or 19th century.

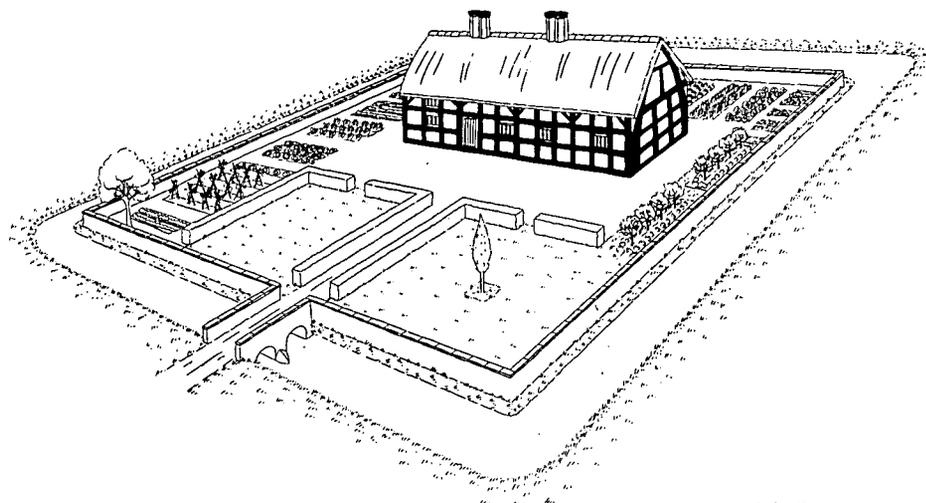
A comparison between figures 5.7 and 5.10 shows the changes that had occurred in the case of Dukinfield Old Hall, over the last century. New rooms were added to cater for a growing



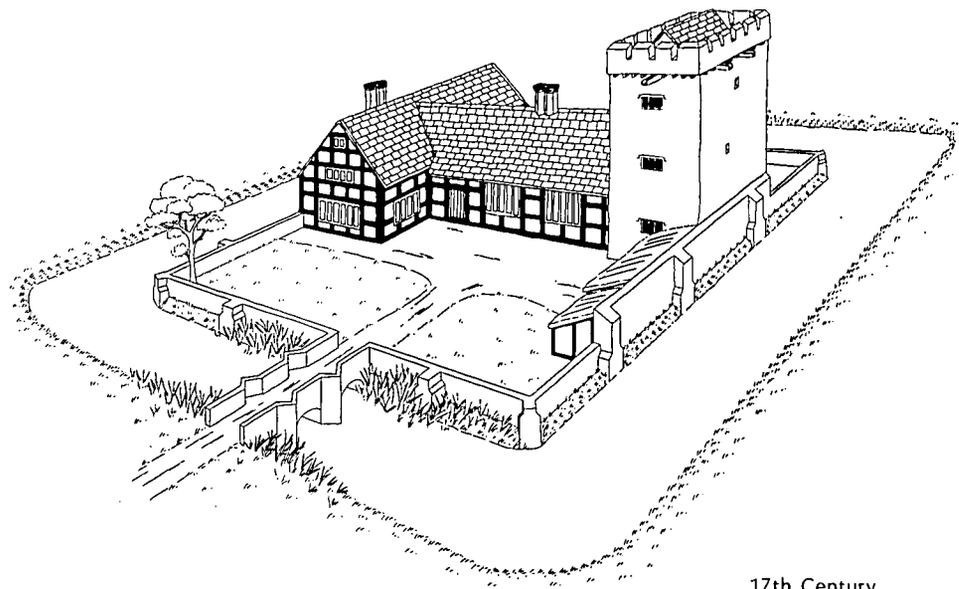
16th Century
Fig 5.6



16th Century
Fig 5.7



16th Century
Fig 5.8



17th Century
Fig 5.9

establishment and to satisfy a demand for a new variety of rooms. The provision of a free-standing chapel was made in order to allow the practice of non-Conformist worship in a more formal fashion than before.

The artefacts recovered from this century constitute the earliest large group from country house sites in the county. As usual the ceramic remains are the most significant. Tobacco smoking was gaining widespread popularity in England, and clay pipes appear with more frequency. These locally made pipes tend to have rather small, globular bowls, which form an obtuse angle with a rather thick stem. Household pottery continued to reflect the forms developed in the early post medieval period, and both the more common table wares and the coarse kitchen wares are invariably made in a dark red fabric with a purple black iron glaze, often speckled with manganese. This type of pottery may well have been produced locally, although no kiln sites have yet been investigated in the county. Glass bottles also began to appear more frequently in this century.

4 THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

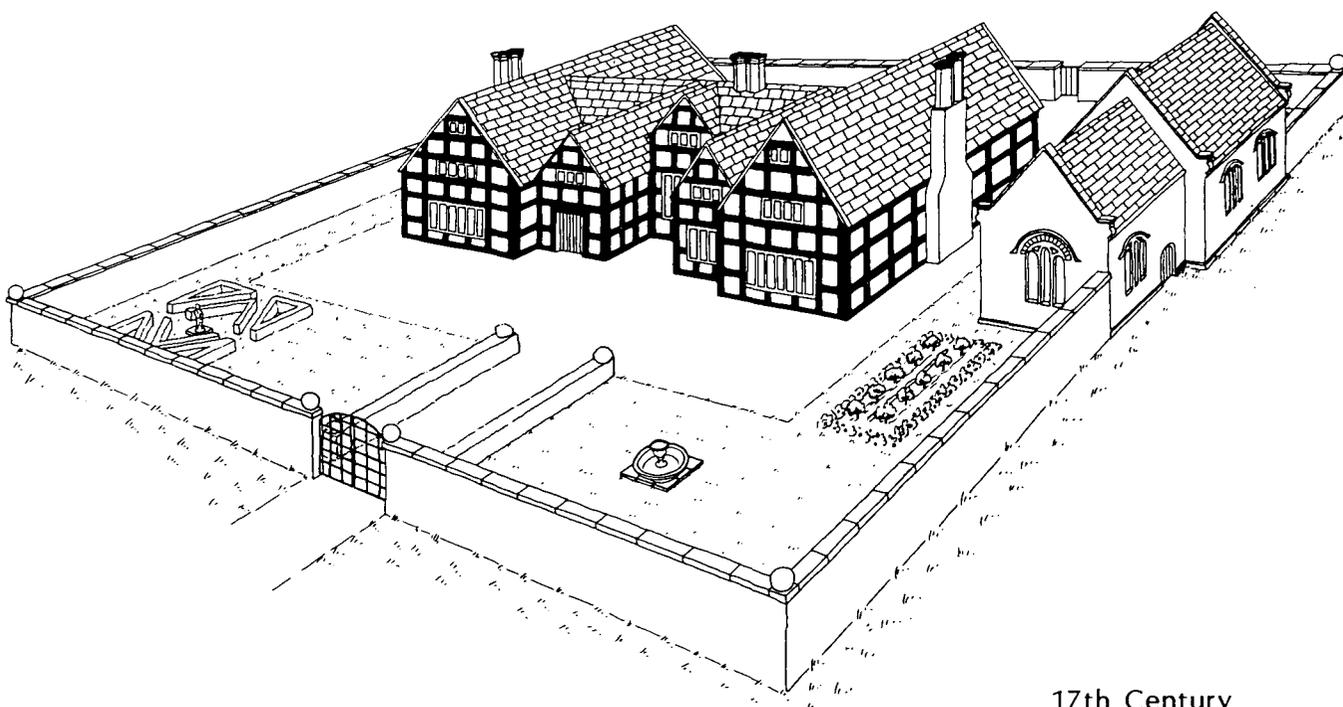
The Eighteenth Century

The 18th century saw the consolidation of the position of the affluent land owner. Many country houses were extended and rebuilt as their owners became more wealthy, and older, redundant halls were demolished, let to tenant farmers, or sub-divided into cottages. The majority of houses excavated in Greater

Manchester, however, do not exhibit signs of growth. It seems that while some of the occupants of country houses became wealthy, others declined or moved away from their rural property into the gradually expanding urban centres. The houses available for excavation were obviously those which had declined to such an extent that by the 20th century they had been demolished, and all of these houses exhibited signs of a decline during the 18th century as moats were allowed to dry out (fig 5.12), and repairs became generally more haphazard in nature and extent; the tower at Radcliffe, for example, became obsolete despite the continuing use of the site (fig 5.12). The trend towards a reduction of earlier defences continued during this period (fig 5.9), although relatively few moats appear to have been backfilled, many remaining open as status symbols - as in figure 5.9 - or as formal garden features - as in figure 5.11.

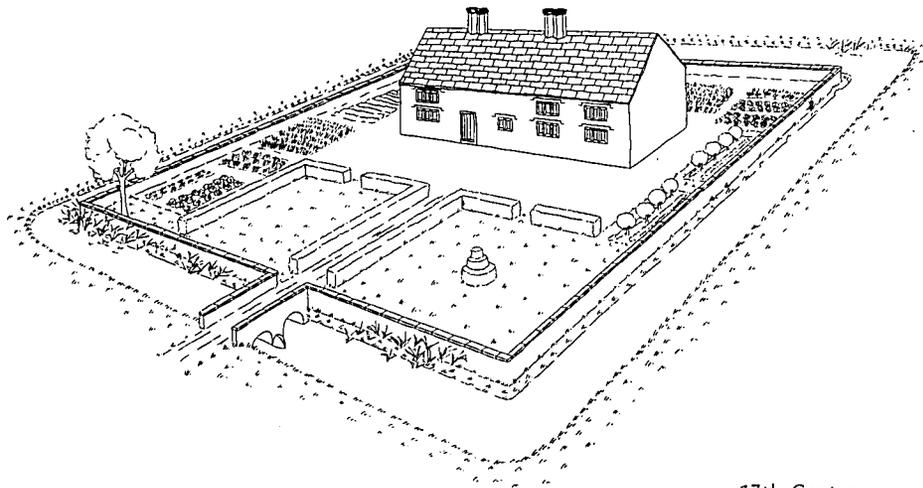
The occupants, while still wealthy in comparison to the tenants of the surrounding land, were not now amongst the wealthiest in the area. As a result they would have employed a reduced number of household servants. Many houses were now leased from their original owners and the occupants were not directly connected with the surrounding estates. As a result the number of workers they employed would also have been reduced.

Some of the minor houses (fig 5.14) gradually came to function as more conventional farms, and the previous frequent separation of living quarters from farm buildings became less distinct. The overall decline in the older

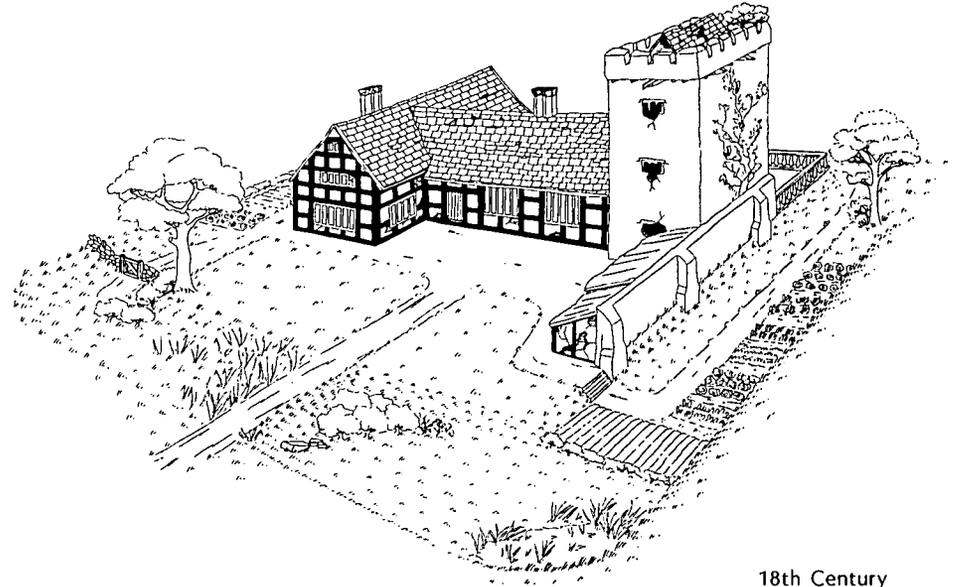


17th Century

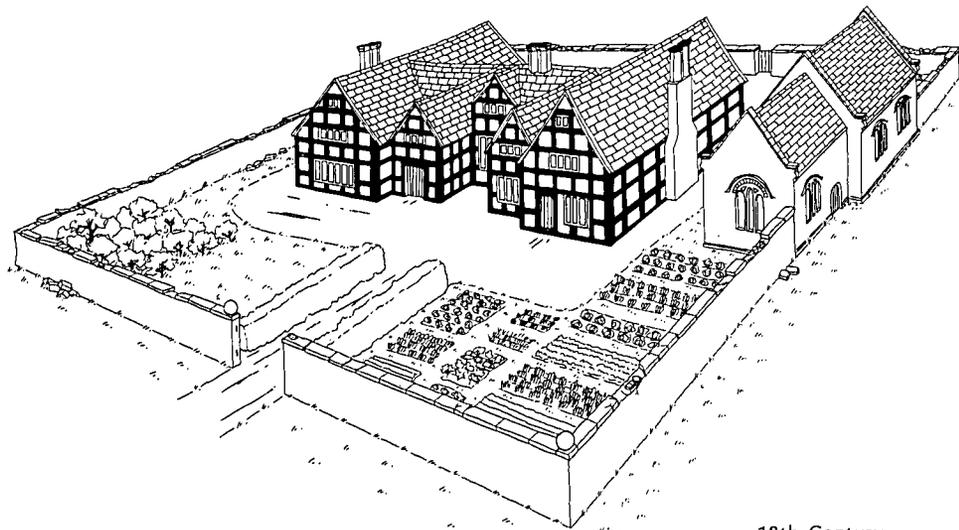
Fig 5.10



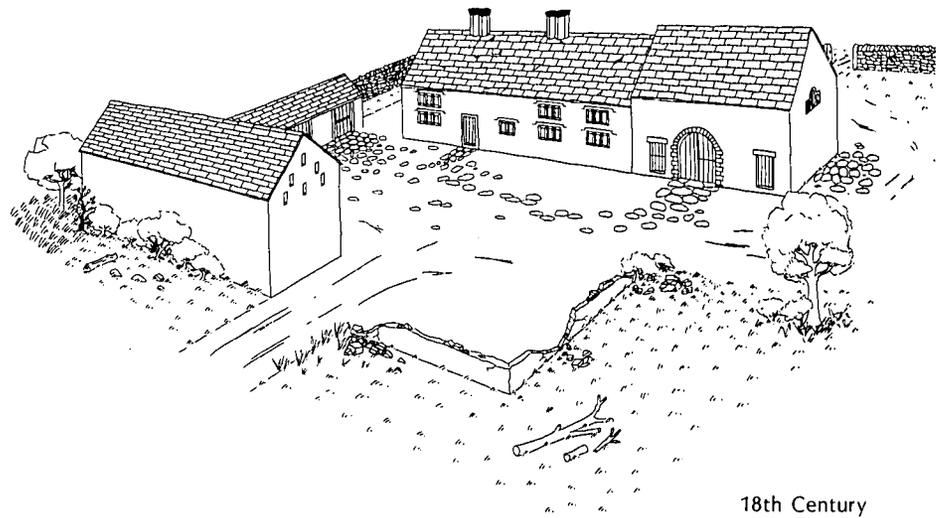
17th Century
Fig 5.11



18th Century
Fig 5.12



18th Century
Fig 5.13



18th Century
Fig 5.14

halls is reflected in a comparison of figures 5.10 and 5.3.

The building of timber halls had ceased by the end of the 17th century; all buildings of quality were constructed of brick or stone, brick buildings again often being plastered over to resemble stone. The earlier halls had usually been of only one room in depth, often only two storeys high, and arranged in a line along a central block with a wing at either end. With the late 17th century had come a more rectangular or even cube shaped house, two rooms deep and now known as the 'double pile house' (fig 5.1). Dwellings of three or more storeys, and cellars or sub-basements became more common. The invention of the 'backstairs' indicated the growing desire to keep servants separate from owners.

Whilst many of the owners of the small halls had experienced a decline in their fortunes, a number of families prospered on the proceeds of the Industrial Revolution and built major country houses in this century. Heaton Hall is a particularly fine example of the architecture of the late 18th century and, with Dunham Massey, is one of the few examples, from Greater Manchester, of the grand country house. Heaton has as its centre a relatively conventional, modest sized double pile house (1750), extended (circa 1772) by two long wings running on either side, producing a very wide frontage on a comparatively narrow house.

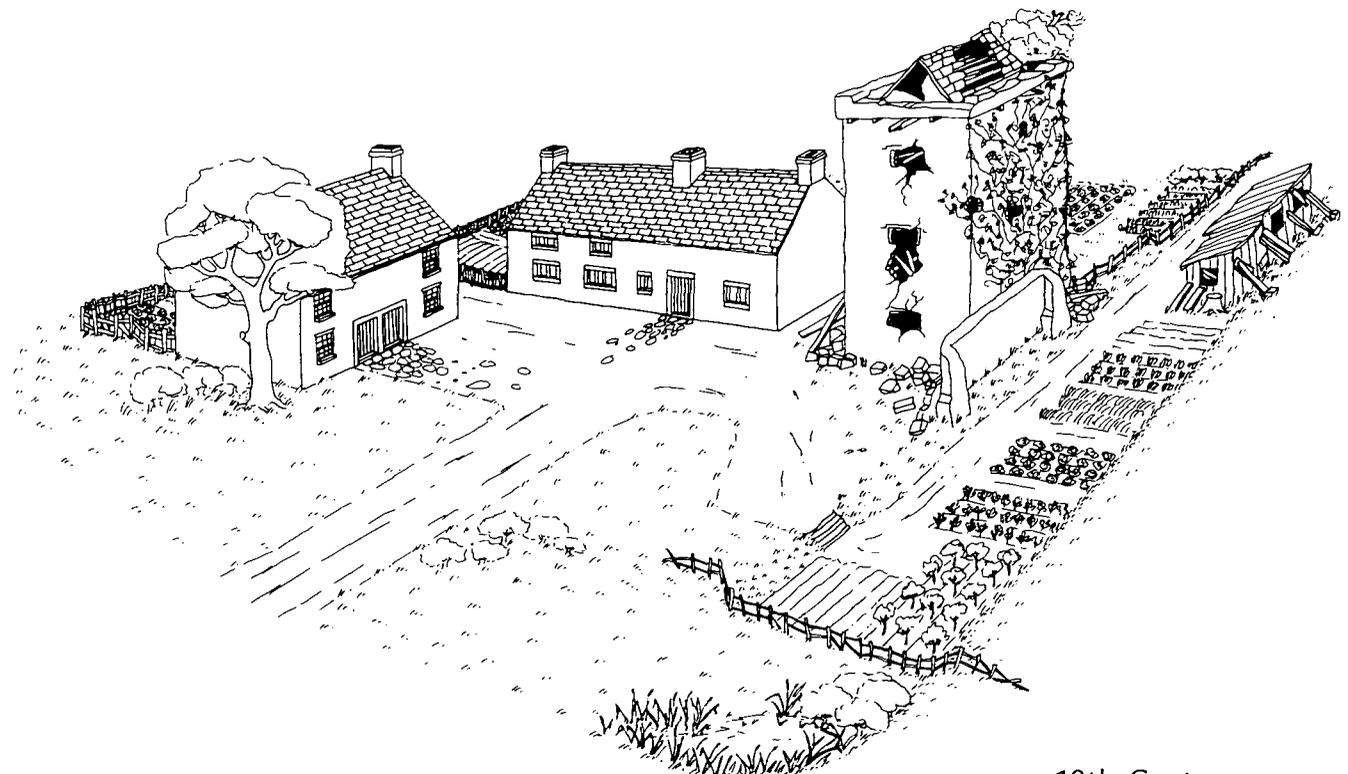
The artefacts recovered from the 18th century phase of activity on all sites show a marked

change in character. The factory produced wares from Staffordshire and other more local potteries were widely available, the tankard, cup, drug jar and chamber pot constituting typical examples of such tin glazed wares. Bottles began to look more like the modern varieties and the clay pipes which were commonplace now had a larger bowl which was almost at a right angle to its narrower stem.

The Nineteenth Century

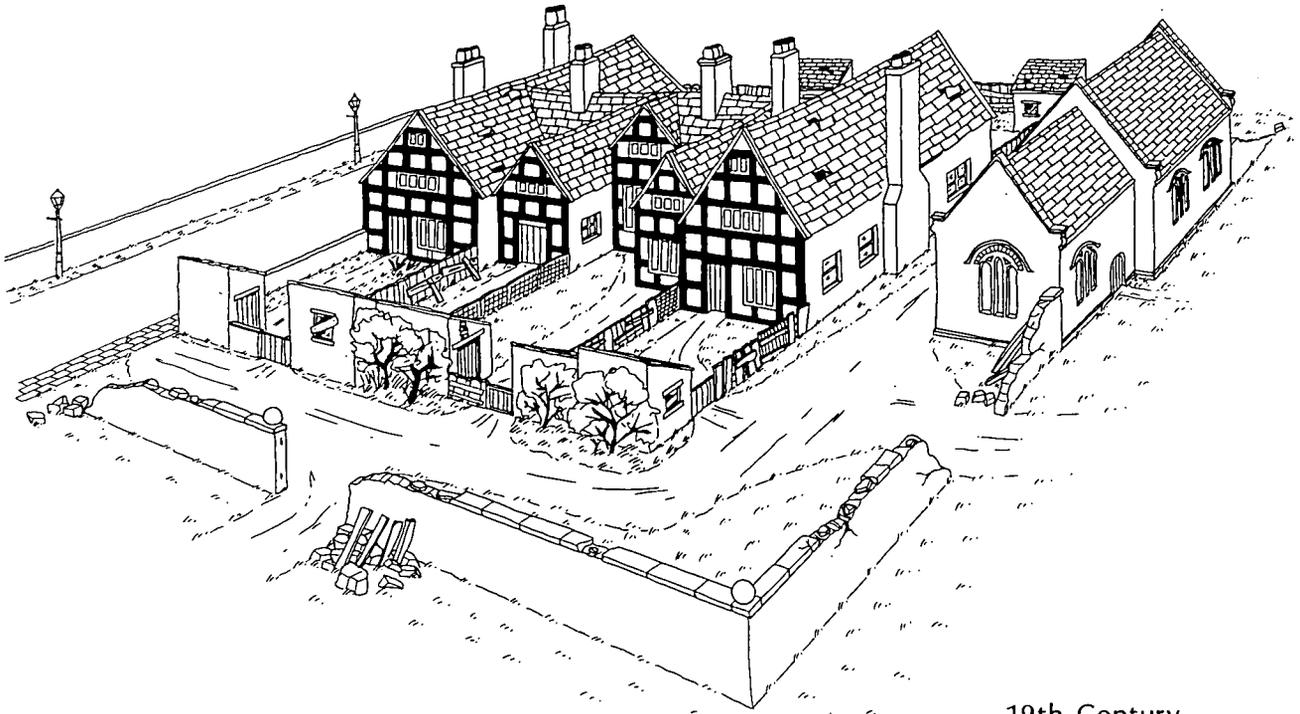
The decline in the lesser country house which began in the 18th century was completed in the nineteenth. Some houses were demolished either wholly or partially, and were replaced by ordinary farm buildings (fig 5.15), while others were converted into larger numbers of smaller dwellings, as in the case of Dukinfield Old Hall (fig 5.16). In many cases the earlier formal plot of the house was disregarded or overrun by walls, as shown in a comparison of figures 5.14 and 5.17, in order to make more land available for farming activities. The latter part of the 19th century saw, too, a marked increase in the practice of backfilling moats, though this was the culmination of a process that seems to have been started in earnest during the 18th century. At Dukinfield, the free standing chapel became a public Congregational chapel, rather than a private place of worship for the family.

The occupants of the Halls, or their replacements, were now either farmers, living in halls that remained part of the rural landscape, or industrial workers, residing in



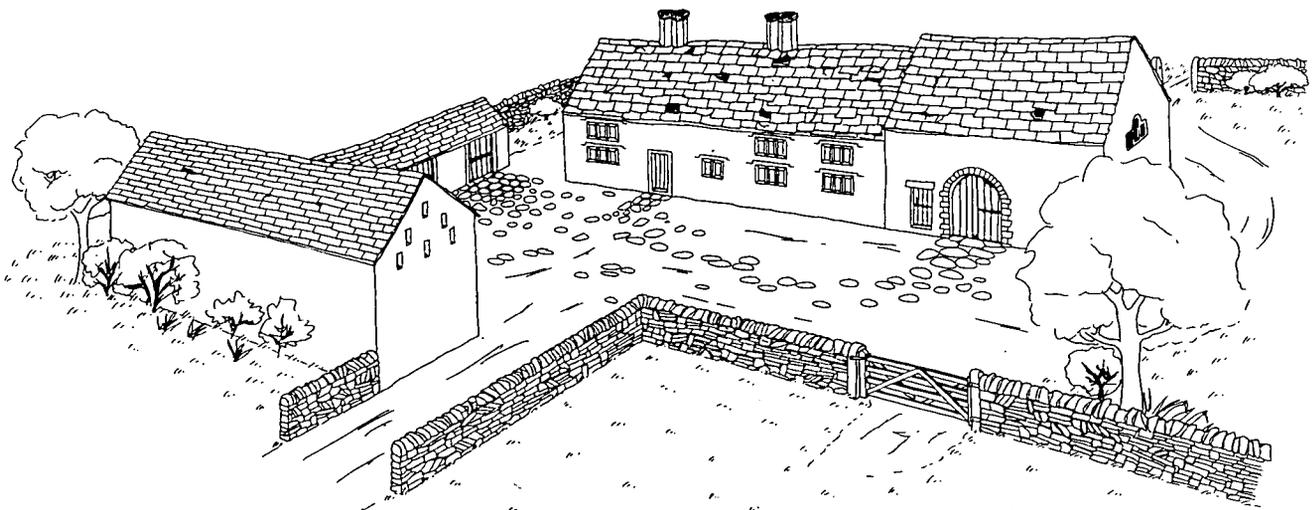
19th Century

Fig 5.15



19th Century

Fig 5.16



19th Century

Fig 5.17

halls that had been incorporated into the rapidly expanding towns of the later industrial revolution. Instead of housing a single family with its servants, many halls were now occupied either by several groups of families, or by single families whose status did not allow them to maintain servants.

The finds from this century are recognisably modern. The mass production of both containers and their contents led to the use of enormous numbers of patent bottles and jars which were often discarded after use. Pottery was frequently blue and white ware produced in the Midlands, decorated with 'Willow Pattern' designs. Local pottery in brown and purple glazes of a more basic functional pattern was still produced, as was the ubiquitous clay pipe.