



Shiver me timbers

Two magnificent properties put the spotlight on a construction method that not only shaped England's past, but also remains surprisingly current

'One of the most striking examples of the golden era of British timber framing': Grade II*-listed Wingfield College in Suffolk. £1.75m

SIR JOHN DE WINGFIELD made quite the catch at the Battle of Poitiers. The veteran of Crécy had taken hostage none other than the Sire d'Aubigny, captain of the French king's bodyguards. As skilled with numbers as he was with the sword—he was the Black Prince's senior administrator, as well as a soldier—Sir John sold the French aristocrat's ransom to Edward III for 2,500 marks (about £1,666 at the time and £1.8 million in today's money). Sadly, he didn't have much time to enjoy his fortune: the plague took him by November 1361, but not before

he had made a provision in his will to found a new chantry college. His wife, Alianore de Glanville, complied and Wingfield College in Wingfield, Suffolk, was built in 1362.

Now listed Grade II*, the college, which is for sale through Savills at \$1.75 million (01473 234831), is one of the most striking examples of the golden era of British timber framing. Not that anyone would notice at first glance—a stuccoed façade from the 1760s conceals the true nature of the building. 'To the rear, however, its medieval origins are clearly visible,' says COUNTRY LIFE's Architectural Editor,

John Goodall, who has contributed to a book on the house, *Wingfield College and its Patrons: Piety and Prestige in Medieval Suffolk*, and calls it 'a near miraculous survival'.

When it opened, the college was home to a Master and nine chaplains, whose duties included praying for Sir John, the Black Prince and Edward III, as well as running a boarding school. 'The community,' explains Dr Goodall, 'served the fine neighbouring parish church of Saint Andrew, where the tombs of Sir John and the later patrons of the college—the powerful de la Pole family—survive.'



Above and below: The interiors of Wingfield College retain their period charm



The de la Poles became Wingfield's patrons after Sir John's daughter, Katherine, married Michael de la Pole, the scion of a wool merchant family from Kingsthorpe upon Hull, who would become Lord Chancellor and 1st Earl of Suffolk during the reign of Richard II, only to lose the title during the Merciless Parliament of 1388. All his properties were 'confiscated in reciprocation for the extortionate fines he devoured', according to Thomas Fawcett's *History or Narration Concerning the Manner and Form of the Miraculous Parliament at Westminster in the year 1386*. Honours were restored to Sir Michael's son, also named Michael, in 1398, starting a trend that would

see the family lose (or come close to losing) title and land across the centuries, not least when William, 1st Duke of Suffolk, was exiled for corruption—a rather more mundane reason for his downfall than his Shakespearean reputation as a manipulative lover and a murderer. His end, however, was as gruesome as in the second *Henry VI* play: captured at sea as he was heading to France, he was beheaded; his body was first taken to Wingfield, but later buried in Hull.

Despite these ups and downs, the de la Poles went very close to becoming England's new monarchs—quite the rise for a family of merchant origins that had initially been

teased in Parliament for its modest pedigree. William's son, John, married Elizabeth, sister of Edward IV and Richard III, and their children became the York dynasty's heirs. But John, Earl of Lincoln, died after supporting the ill-fated attempt to put Lambert Simnel on the throne, Edmund was beheaded by Henry VIII, and Richard, nicknamed the White Rose, died fighting for his claim in the Battle of Pavia. Henry VII and Henry VIII had clearly had enough of the family because they kept the last born, William, prisoner in the Tower of London until he died—a massive 37 years, the longest time anyone had ever spent at the Thameside fortress. →

Property market



Grade II-listed Hunton Court in Kent hides its timber origins behind a Georgian-style façade and sits in some 132 acres of grounds. £10m

Although the college was initially spared from this turmoil, managing to find a patron in the new Duke of Suffolk, Charles Brandon, and his wife, Mary Tudor, it didn't survive the Dissolution of Monasteries. Some of the buildings were demolished and the rest adapted as a house, its medieval vestiges progressively buried under layers of plaster. They were only revealed in the 1970s, when the then owner, Ian Chance, carried out a renovation.

Today, says Dr Goodall, 'Wingfield combines well-lit, 18th-century panellled rooms with some splendid medieval ones, including the truncated remains of the collegiate Great Hall, where the supposed portraits of Charles Brandon and Mary Tudor still grace the linenfold panelling. The combination of 'very classic, very Georgian rooms'—chief among all, the elegant drawing room, with its fine fireplace and original paintwork—and the medieval timber-frame rooms, which include the kitchen and some of the six bedrooms, as well as the Great Hall, works unusually well, according to selling agent Tom Orford, making Wingfield 'an amazing house'.

He is as taken by the gardens, 'spectacular in an understated way', and the layout, 'unusually modern for a property of that age', as by the architecture. 'When you have been selling [properties] for such a long time, it's quite rare to get seriously excited by a house, but this one did it for me.'

Grade II-listed, 14,075sq ft Hunton Court, near Maidstone, in Kent—initially launched three years ago (COUNTRY LIFE, July 31, 2019) and relaunched last week by Strutt & Parker (01227 473707) at a guide price of £10m—is another building that hides its timbered origins behind a Georgian look. The house, once known as Court Lodge, had a turbulent history:

'He had the not-so-bright idea of rebelling against Mary Tudor'

first built in the 13th century and part of an estate that had belonged to the Canterbury's Christ Church Priory, it was handed to Sir Thomas Wyatt, Henry VIII's High Sheriff for Kent, after the Dissolution of Monasteries. Wyatt was a man of many talents: a diplomat and a gifted poet, he also managed to navigate the choppy waters of the Tudor Court and kept his head intact, despite having been accused first of adultery with Anne Boleyn, which earned him a spell in the Tower of London, then of treason. His son, on the other hand, wasn't quite as gifted with political nous: he had the not-so-bright idea of rebelling against Mary Tudor and lost both the estate and his life. Although Hunton Court's story recalls that of Wingfield College, traces of the medieval

timbers are rather more subtle at the Kent house, where they make an appearance in the attic and in some of the eight bedrooms.

Most of the rooms have a Georgian flavour, the result of a remodelling by 19th-century owner Henry Bannerman. He added the grand Georgian-style façade and the hand-painted panels—a triumph of cherubs, birds and flowers—in the drawing room (one of five stately reception rooms). They became the backdrop to British political history in the early 20th century, when the house passed to Bannerman's nephew, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who served as Prime Minister between 1905 and 1908 and championed the introduction of free school meals. Matching the beauty of the interior are the 132-acre grounds, with their 18th-century parkland, lakes and magnificent stone bridges.

Having dominated British architecture until the 17th century, timber-frame buildings now look set to make a comeback, after the National Audit Office suggested that using UK-grown timber in construction can help reduce the industry's impact. 'New-build timber-frame homes have great environmental credentials,' explains Jamie Freeman of Haringtons buying agents. 'The carbon footprint is minimal, as 90% of wood consumed is sourced from British and European forests. As they are visually more traditional in form, they are a little easier to get planning permission for, too.'

We can match embroidery and cording thread colours to any interior scheme, and can also create or design embroidered monograms, crests and initials in a huge selection of colours.




Peter Reed
MADE IN ENGLAND

The finest bed linen, hand made to order in England since 1861

For enquiries please contact:
Sarah Bowen
sarah.bowen@peterreed.com
Tel: 07711 405277



www.peterreed.com



VEEDON FLEECE CARPETS

A Handmade Tradition

Veedon Fleece undertakes commissions to any design and colour specification to a maximum size of 20m by 8m and prides itself in the quality of its work created for many of Great Britain's iconic country houses.

www.veedonfleece.com
veedon@veedonfleece.com
T: 01483 575758
veedonfleececarpets

Bespoke & Timelessly Elegant