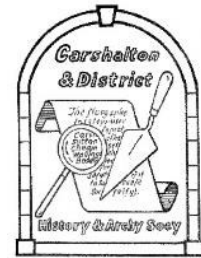


# Carshalton & District History & Archaeology Society

## Local History Note 14



## The structure of the Stone Court Mansion House, Carshalton and the water level in Carshalton Lower Pond

John Phillips

Revised 2 July 2022

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2005 Sutton's Museum and Youth Services jointly organised an excavation for young people which was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project sought to examine the foundations of the Stone Court Mansion House which, from documentary evidence, was built *circa* 1693 to 1710 and demolished about 1800. The excavation was led by Portia Askew of MOLAS and was supported by members of what is now the Carshalton and District History and Archaeology Society. The young people did an excellent job and uncovered a large part of the foundations in the centre of the building.

Portia Askew produced a report on the excavation.<sup>1</sup> This note takes a more detailed look at the remains of the building and its structural history, the understanding of which was the most significant result of the excavation.

Thanks are due to all the people who took part in the excavation, to Portia Askew who led it, to Andrew Skelton for comments on this document and Clive Orton for proof reading.

### 2 THE FOUNDATIONS

A trench was laid out in The Grove Park on the lawn to the south of the present Stone Court.<sup>2</sup> It had a north-south length of 23.5m and was 6m wide narrowing to 3m at the south end (figure 1). The trench crossed the centre of the building and exposed the foundations and lower parts of the north and south outside walls, and also part of the south entrance steps and internal walls dividing the interior into cellars. One wall ran north to south across the house. The area to the west of it was divided into four cellars, and there were three to the east as shown in figure 1. The walls were of soft red brick with occasional chalk rubble in

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<sup>1</sup> Portia Askew *Site of Stone Court, The Grove, Carshalton Surrey SM5*. Molas. Site code GVG05.

<sup>2</sup> TQ 2792 6465.

the core of some walls. The north outer wall was partly of stone and will be considered below. The bricks had a median thickness of 58mm.<sup>3</sup>

All of the cellars were only partially excavated.

Cellar 1 had a floor of knapped flints set in sand. A sondage in the northeast corner showed that the sand was fairly thick and rested on a layer of broken ceramic building material which was underlain by broken chalk (figures 5 to 9). It was not clear whether the broken CBM was the foundation of an earlier floor or whether it was debris from the construction of the building. There was a low wall across the east end of the cellar which partly blocked a door into cellar 5. The wall may be connected with two trapezoidal slots opposite each other in the north and south walls (figures 6 and 10). It seems likely that they are the remains of a standing for barrels or a wine rack.

There was a short course of bricks set at an angle on the top of the north wall which suggested that the cellar had originally been vaulted.

Cellar 2 also had a floor of knapped flint bedded in sand.

Cellar 3 was narrower than cellars 1 and 2. The floor was of knapped flint set in sand. It sloped down slightly to a small drain in the east wall. This was a curious arrangement as any water on the floor would soak into the sand until it was completely saturated. The drain contained animal bone.

Cellar 4 had a floor of peg tiles and at least one red floor tile all set on edge. A door connected cellars 4 and 7.

The trench uncovered only the inner ends of cellars 5, 6 and 7. Cellar 7 probably occupied the whole of the southeast corner of the house. There appears to have been a fireplace in the northwest corner. Cellar 6 in the centre was narrow. Cellar 5 was somewhat wider and was connected to cellar 1 by a door which had been partially blocked by a low wall. None of these cellars was excavated to any depth, so nothing can be said about the floors except in the doors connecting to cellars 1 and 4. The former was the same as cellar 1 with knapped flint set in sand possibly with an earlier brick floor below (figure 18). The floor in the other door had gone.

The south wall of cellar 4 was also the outside wall of the house. The excavated section had been badly damaged by a large pit which had been dug after the house was demolished. The visible parts of the wall were brick.

To the south of this were the foundations of a porch and entrance steps. The east wall of this consisted of a massive brick foundation which was not quite aligned with the main north-south wall through the house. There were also three east-west aligned cross walls which were much less substantial.

The excavation exposed the foundations of two structures built against the north side of the house. One was a substantial north-south aligned wall which was almost certainly the

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<sup>3</sup> The median length was 220mm (32 samples), the height 58mm (49 samples) and the width 96.75mm (20 samples).

foundation of the east side of the entrance steps (figures 25 and 26). The other was part of the foundation of a structure against the east end of the north wall.

The northern outer wall of the house was of brick on the south side and stone on the north. It is possible that the stonework was the reused remnant of an earlier building, although it did include a few brick fragments (figure 25). A small sondage excavated against the north wall exposed the junction between an east-west and north-south wall (figure 30). This probably belonged to an earlier building, but too little was exposed to understand its context.

The foundations contained two cracks, which suggest that the building may have developed structural problems. One was in the north wall of cellar 4 (figure 14) and the other was in the south end of the east wall of the south porch (figure 23 and 24). The cause of these is unclear although an obvious possibility is subsidence into an area of soft ground.

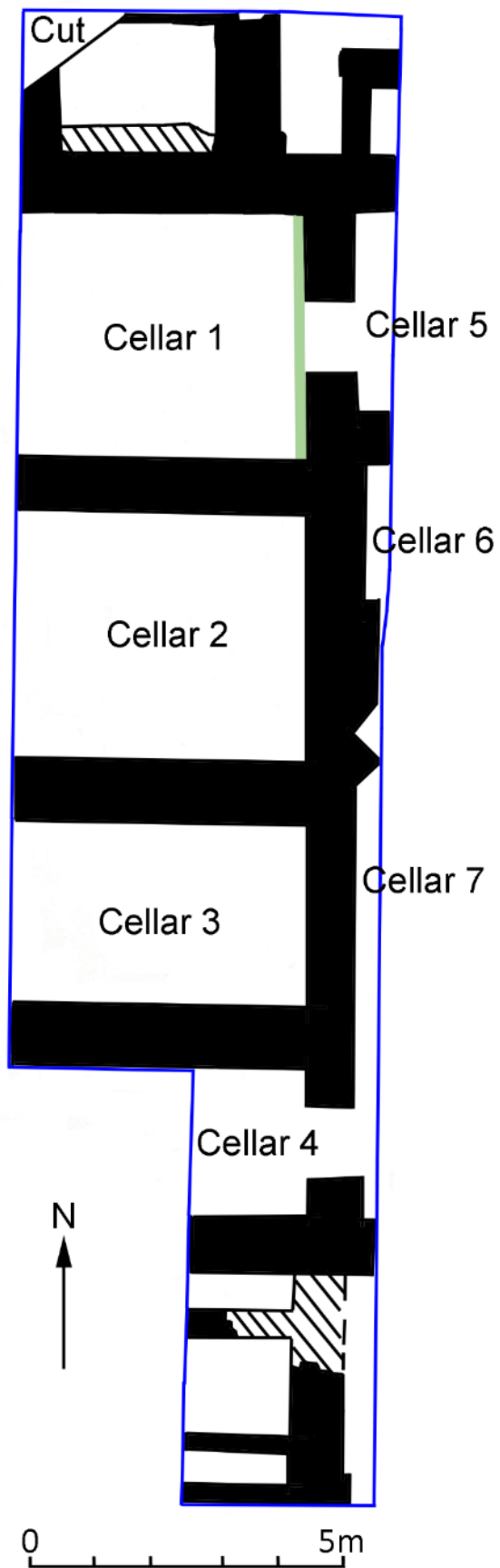


Figure 1. The walls and cellars exposed in the excavation.

Blue = trench edge.

Grey = low wall.



Figure 2. The wall between cellars 1 and 2 looking west.



Figure 3. The wall between cellars 2 and 3 looking east.



Figure 4. The north wall of cellar 1 with a line of inward sloping bricks which suggest that the cellars had originally been vaulted.





Figure 5. Cellar 1 looking east.



Figure 6. The northeast corner of cellar 1 looking north. The low wall across the east end of the cellar can be seen on the right. The trapezoidal slot in the wall is in the centre with the beginning of the sondage below it.





Figure 7. The top of the brick rubble in the sondage in the northeast corner of cellar 1. North to the right.



Figure 8. The north side of the sondage in the northeast corner of cellar 1.



Figure 9. The sondage in the northeast corner of cellar 1. North at the top.





Figure 10. The southeast corner of cellar 1 showing the low wall and the trapezoidal slot with stone (?) set in it.



Figure 11. Cellar 2 looking northeast.





Figure 12. Cellar 3 looking NE.



Figure 13. Cellar 4 looking northwest with the door to cellar 7 in the foreground.





Figure 14. Cellar 4 looking northwest.



Figure 15. Looking south along the east side of the trench with cellar 5 in the foreground, cellar 6 behind it, and then the suspected fireplace between cellars 6 and 7.



Figure 16. The suspected fireplace in the northwest corner of cellar 7.





Figure 17. The east edge of the trench with the suspected fireplace in cellar 7.



Figure 18. The door between cellars 1 and 5. The floor is of flint set in sand with brickwork below.





Figure 19. The south end of the trench looking south, showing cellar 4 partially excavated in the foreground, the south outer wall of the house largely covered by a block of dark soil, the site of a large pit beyond it, and then, in the background, part of the remains of the porch.



Figure 20. The south end of the trench with the outer south wall centre left. The innermost of the three walls forming the porch can be seen bottom left. The junction between the outer south wall and the porch had been largely destroyed by the excavation of a large pit, the dark fill of which is visible in the section.





Figure 21. The west side of the south end of the trench with a fragment of the porch structure on the left and the south wall of the house on the right. Both are truncated by the large pit in the foreground.



Figure 22. The south end of the trench looking north, showing the south outer wall of the house with a fragment of the porch on the far left.





Figure 23. The south end of the trench showing the east wall of the porch. Note the crack in the south end and the two thinner walls at right angles.



Figure 24. Detail of the crack in the south end of the east wall of the porch. North at the top.





Figure 25. The north outer wall of the house looking east.





Figure 26. The north end of the trench looking west. The north wall of the house is on the left. The foundation of the building against the east end of the north wall is in the foreground and the foundation of the entrance is further back.



Figure 27. The junction between the north wall of the house (right) and the porch (left).





Figure 28. The northeast corner of the trench looking south showing the foundation of the building against the east end of the north wall, and the cut which exposed the foundation shown in figure 30.



Figure 29. The northeast corner of the trench looking east. The north wall of the house is below the mesh fence. The foundations in the background to the left of it are the remains of a structure built against the north side of the house. The foundations of the entrance steps are in the foreground.





Figure 30. Foundation exposed in the cut excavated in the corner formed by the north wall of the house and the extension built against the north end. The cut appears near the mesh fence on figure 29. Looking west.

### 3 SIGNIFICANT ARCHITECTURAL FRAGMENTS

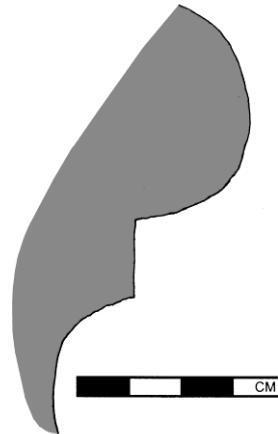
The deposits in the cellars and above the foundations consisted of demolition rubble, a covering of top soil and the soil fill of a large pit which had been dug at the south end of the trench, most likely for garden planting. This section deals with the small finds from these deposits which are relevant to the reconstruction of the house. It does not cover plasterwork or other evidence for interior decoration.



### 3.1 Stone

<120> from [1]

Portland stone with moulding. 205g.



<124> from [1]

Reigate stone. The moulding is blackened. The back roughly cut possibly from reuse. 75g.



<147> from [8]

Reigate stone with moulding. Surface weathered. 177g.



**<145> from context [2]**

Part of a slab of hard heavy shelly limestone with one surface worn smooth. Underside rough fracture. Thickness varies from 30-45mm. 551g.

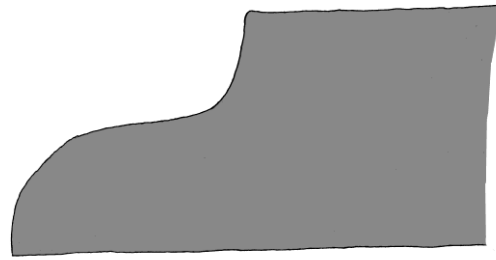
There were also a number of pieces of soft grey slate which may have come from the roof.



### 3.2 Cut and moulded brick

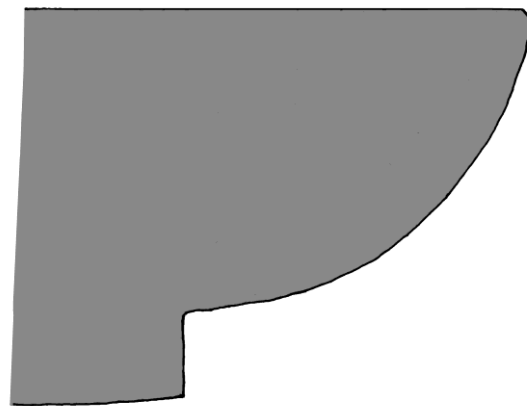
<123> from [1]

Part brick 95mm wide by 64mm high with S-shaped moulding cut on the header end. Mortar layer 12mm thick on the underside and 8mm thick on the side. 880g.



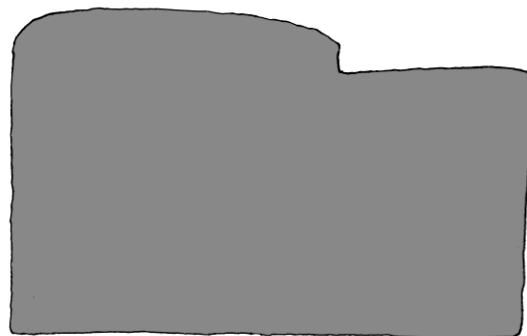
<134> from [6]

Part brick 93mm wide by 45mm high with moulding cut on the header end. 438g.



<135> from [6]

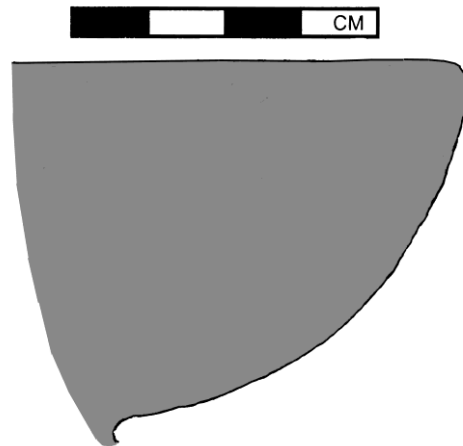
Part brick 102mm wide by 65mm high with a moulding on the top shown in drawing. The moulding was made when the clay was wet and may simply be an exceptionally deep impression caused when the brick was stacked wet in the hack. If so the stacking was longitudinal rather than diagonal. 807g.





<136> from [6]

Part brick with cut curved moulding similar to <134>. 262g.



#### 4 HISTORICAL MAPS, PLANS AND DRAWINGS

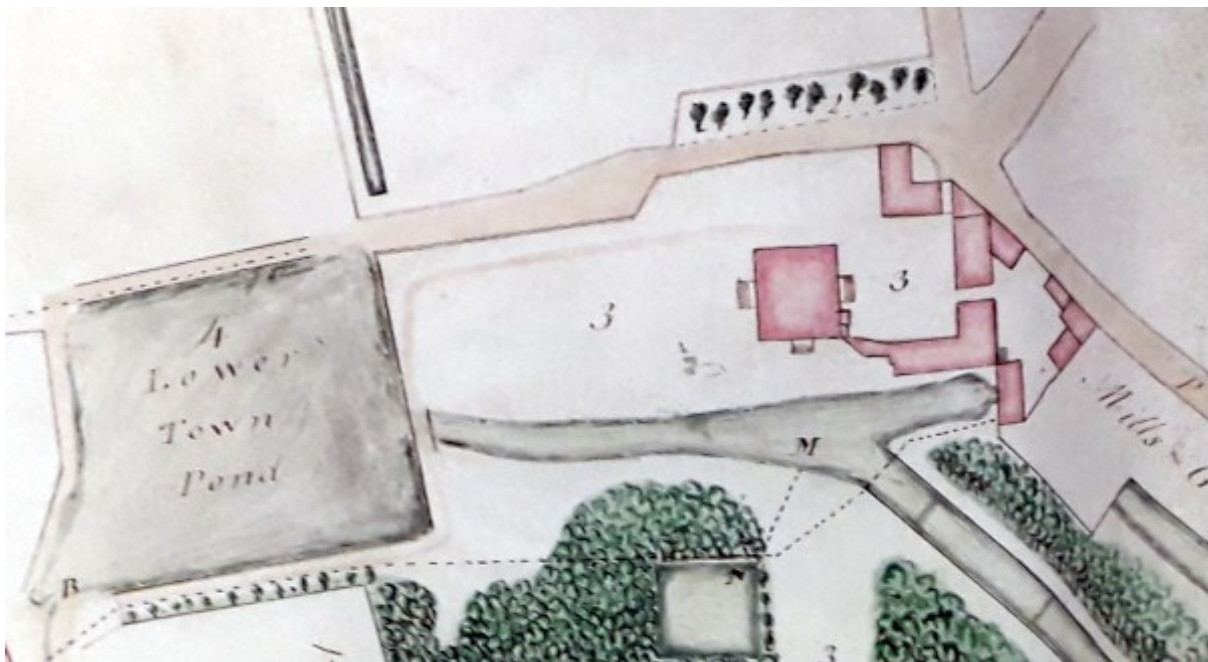


Figure 31. The Stone Court Mansion House from the conveyance from Scawen's to Andrews in 1785. Sutton Archives 2361/1/1.



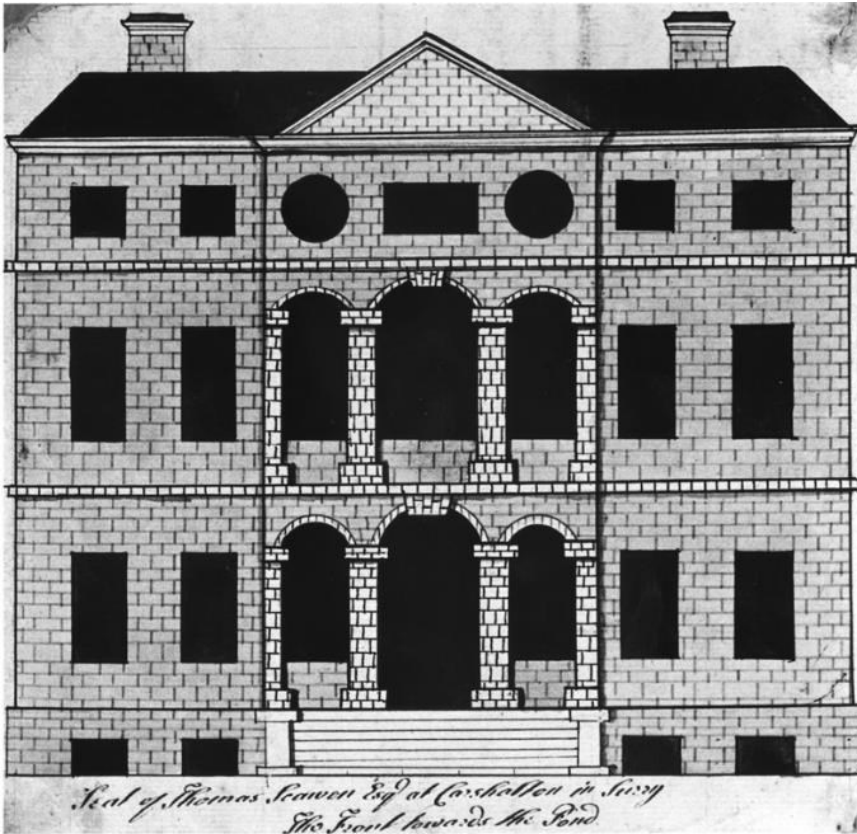


Figure 32. The south or pond-facing front of the Stone Court Mansion House from a drawing in Sutton Archives.

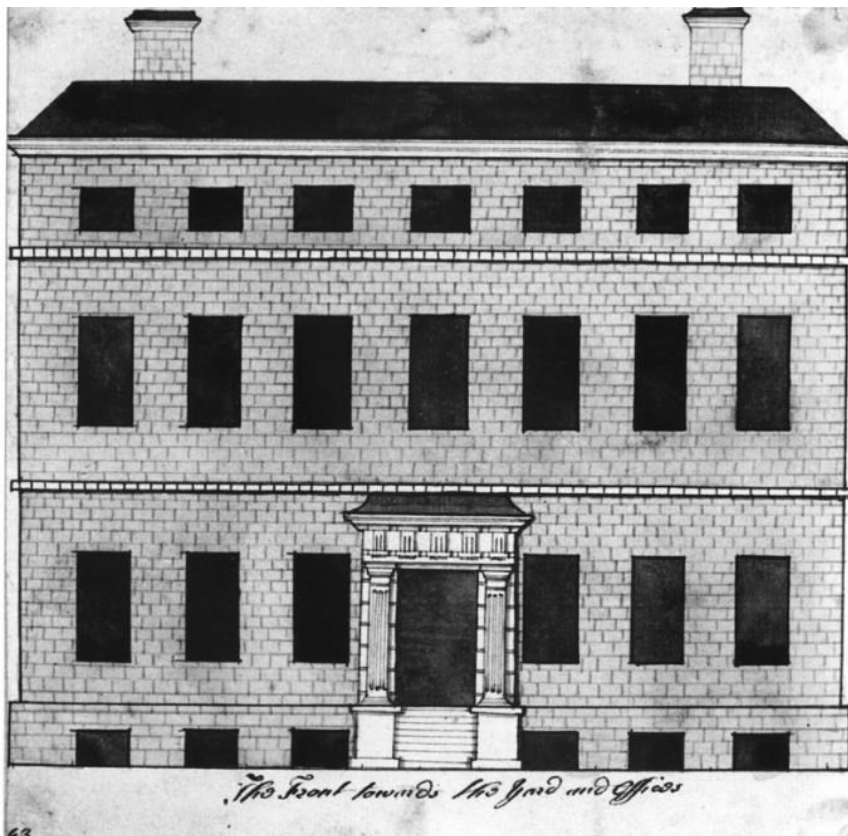


Figure 33. The north side of Old Stone Court from drawings in Sutton Archives.



## 5 THE 1726 INVENTORY

An inventory made after the death of John Cator in 1725 mentions the following rooms:

- The Garrett
- Servants Rooms
- The Best bedchamber
- The Great Room
- The Room No 4 (a bedchamber).
- The Passage and Long Room
- The Deceased's bed Chamber
- The First Floor in six rooms
- The Kitchen and other offices
- The Gardens, Outhouses, Stables and Barns.<sup>4</sup>

## 6 THE FORM OF THE HOUSE AND WATER LEVELS

The foundations exposed in the excavation show that the house had cellars and that there was a south and a north porch, the former larger than the latter. It also shows that there was some kind of structure against the east end of the north side of the house. These things are all consistent with 1785 plan and the two rather crude undated elevations reproduced in section 4. This suggests that the archaeological and documentary evidence can be combined to attempt a reconstruction.

The 1785 plan shows a square building. The excavation showed that the building was 17.7m (58ft) from north to south excluding the steps and porch.

The elevations suggest that it was constructed of large blocks perhaps stone or lined out rendering. The outer part of the north wall was of stone but this may have been a fragment of an earlier foundation. If the upper part of the structure had been faced in stone or rendered there would surely have been many fragments in the excavation even if most of the material was salvaged for reuse. However, there were few pieces of possible facing stone and no brick with external render, so it is likely that the outer walls were brick.

The elevations show semi-basement windows for the cellars, with two main and one subsidiary floor above. A line of inward-sloping brick along the inner side of the north wall suggests that cellar 1 was vaulted. The angle of the brick is consistent with a vault that was semi-circular or nearly so, rather than low and segmental. A high arch would be necessary to make sufficient space between it and the floor.

The north-south wall runs right through the house to one side of the entrances. It seems likely that this was the east wall of a hall. There is a degree of ambiguity about which side of the building was the front. The south elevation is more elaborate and faces the garden but there is no known carriage entrance on that side. The north elevation has an elaborate door but it opens to the service court which appears to have had only narrow entrances to the road. A main approach from this side would be almost medieval in character and surely

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<sup>4</sup> From Andrew Skelton who cites PROB 31/52/582; John Cator Esq, 31st July 1725.



inappropriate in the 1690s. The 1785 map shows a marked kink in the North Street wall. Was this the site of a carriage entrance providing access to the south side of the house? It would have made an easy approach from the Ponds side but a difficult turn when coming from the north.

If a house had a central hall with the rooms on either side of it the fireplaces could be built on either the hall wall or the outside wall. The latter would spoil the symmetry of the side elevations, which was often accepted on houses of this period. However, there would be a strong reason not to do in this case as the east elevation faces the garden. There is evidence for only one corner fireplace against the east side of the north-south aligned wall. This suggests that the chimney stacks were located to the east and west of the hall, which is consistent with elevations. One was probably between cellars 6 and 7. An angled piece of brickwork suggested that there was a fireplace in the southeast corner of cellar 7 which could then feed into the main stack. The chimney stack would then be south of the east-west centreline of the house, which is likely to have been the site of a valley gutter. The inventory says that there were six rooms on the first floor. It is easy to see how two stacks could heat four of them but the arrangement of the other two is unclear. The big chunky chimneys shown in the elevations were probably rather old fashioned in the 1690s.



Figure 34. The garden front of the Villa Aldobrandini, Frascati.



The massive foundation for the east side of the projecting structure on the south front must be for a porch. The three east-west walls are far less substantial and were probably for steps. The elevation is consistent with a projecting porch with two loggias above the door. This seems to look back to the entrance bays which were a common feature of major houses in the first half of the 17th century. It is also rather reminiscent of the tower-like block in the centre of the Villa Aldobrandini at Frascati (figure 34). This is not to suggest that Stone Court was inspired by the villa – rather that they shared a common purpose by providing a viewing point. The loggias at Frascati provide a commanding view up the axis of a very elaborate garden: at Stone Court they provided a view over the ponds.

The cellar floor cannot be much above the present water level in the river which is set by the height of the weir just downstream. This retained the water which turned the wheels in Upper Mill. When the Arundel map was made about 1620 the mill pond was largely within what now The Grove Park. Lower Pond did not exist and most of its site was above water level. The pond could have been created by either excavating the ground until it was low enough to flood or by raising the dam so that the water backed up behind it, or a combination of both.

There were some inconclusive signs that the cellars had an earlier floor below the flint and sand. The latter could have been added to accommodate a higher water level caused by the creation of Lower Pond. If so, the house must be older than the Pond. However, the loggias in the south porch imply that there was a view to admire, and the Pond is the key part of that view. It is possible that the house was constructed with the intention of making Lower Pond but that the implications were not properly thought through.

Knapped flint set in sand seems an odd choice for cellar flooring. It can't have been easy to keep clean and rats and mice could probably burrow in it. Knapped flint must have cost more than cobbles but would have been non-slip when wet.

If the house drains discharged into the canal above Upper Mill they would have had a very low gradient. The river drops about 2m at the mill, so any discharge below that would give a good gradient for the drainage of both the house and the outbuildings. Was there a problem of water leakage into the cellar which was managed by seepage through the sand to a drain outside the excavated areas?