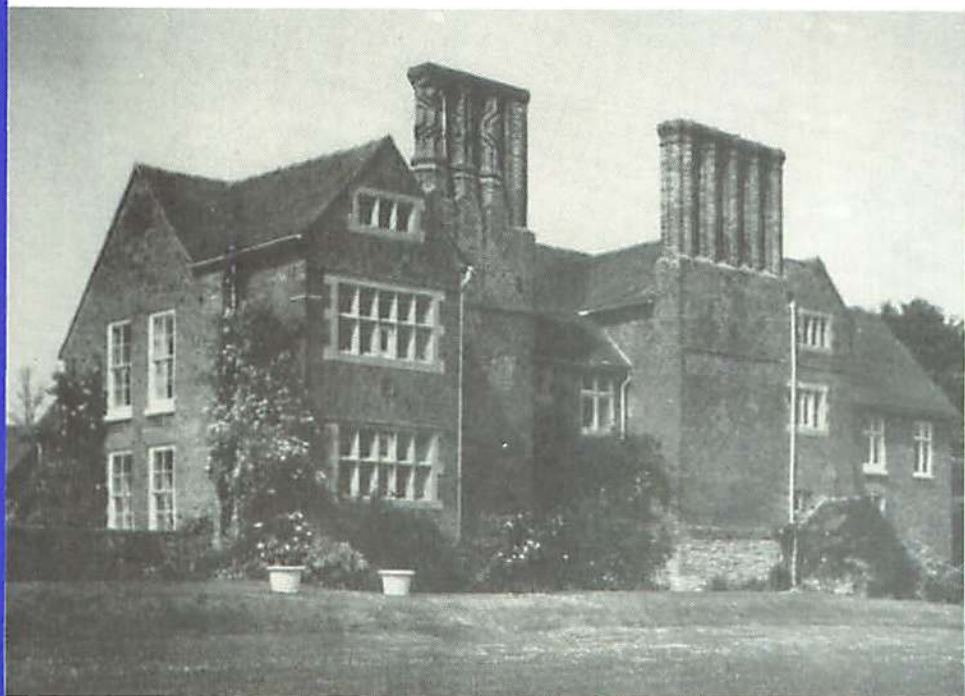


UPTON CRESSETT HALL

Near BRIDGNORTH, SHROPSHIRE



Mediaeval and Elizabethan Manor House
in remote and beautiful countryside

THE DE UPTONS AND CRESSETTS OF UPTON CRESSETT

FROM THE CONQUEST AND THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE WARS OF THE ROSES

The Manor of Upton Cressett was the ancient home of the de Upton and Cressett families. By intermarriage in the mid fourteenth century they held their estate of the Fitzalans in unbroken succession from the Norman Conquest in 1066 to the twentieth century.

In the thirteenth century, the de Uptons were Verderers of the Royal forest of Morfe and Knights and suitors to Holgate Castle, held of Richard Earl of Cornwall, King of the Romans and of the Knights Templar.

In the mid fifteenth century Hugh Cressett, a Lancastrian, was a Royal Commissioner along the Welsh March, the Constable of Mortimer Castle and on the Duke of Exeter's Council. He was a Member of Parliament for Shropshire in 1437 and 1447 and the Sheriff of Shropshire in 1434 and 1445. His son Robert was a Yorkist lawyer who played an adventurous part in the Wars of the Roses. He is frequently mentioned in Commissions of Array and was pardoned at the Devil's Parliament in December 1459 for rebellion after the Yorkists were defeated at Ludlow in October. He was made Sheriff of Shropshire by Edward IV in 1468 and again by Richard III in 1484-5. He was supplanted, after the battle of Bosworth in August of that year, by Sir Gilbert Talbot the Commander of Henry VII's right wing. There is a long standing tradition that the young King Edward V stayed at Upton Cressett on his journey from Ludlow, in April 1483, to his fate in the Tower. Some believe that it may have been on a journey from the Tower to some unknown destination.

THE TUDORS AND THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Robert Cressett's son, Thomas, was imprisoned by Henry VII in the Marshalsea, probably for conspiracy, but he escaped in 1503 and was pardoned in 1505.

Thomas did, however, supply soldiers for Henry VIII's French Wars of 1512-13 and the family were reconciled to the Tudor throne. In the reign of Elizabeth, Richard Cressett built the Gatehouse and encased the mediaeval manor house in brick in 1580. He inserted the fine oak panelling in 1600. He also made a substantial contribution to the Armada Fund, in 1588 — the second largest in the county.



Painting of Charles I

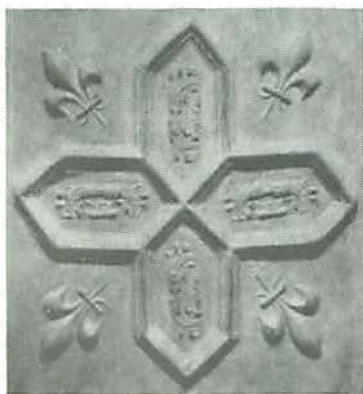
THE CIVIL WAR AND THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Edward Cressett succeeded Richard in 1601. Edward was a distinguished Royalist in the Civil War and was on the King's Council of War at Shrewsbury in 1643. He was killed at the battle of Bridgnorth in 1646. One of his sons, Sir Francis Cressett, was Treasurer and Steward to Charles I and one of those who tried to rescue the King from Carisbrooke Castle in 1648. He is known as 'A' in the coded messages from the Castle between Charles and Sir Henry Firebrace, his secret agent. It is recorded that a troop of horse was garrisoned at the house in the Civil War and Prince Rupert is said to have stayed in the Gatehouse. There is a legend that he hid at Upton Cressett while escaping from the Parliamentary army.

Edward's other son, Richard, inherited the estate. In 1648 information was laid against him as "having been in arms against Parliament".

THE HANOVERIAN SUCCESSION AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Edward Cressett's grandson, James Cressett, was Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Hanover in the reigns of William and Mary and Queen Anne and played an active part in the preparations for the Hanoverian Succession. Another descendant, also named James Cressett, was Tory member of Parliament for Shropshire in 1710 and 1713. He built Cound Hall near Shrewsbury in 1702, designed by the architect, Prince. A further descendant of Edward Cressett, the Royalist, also James Cressett, was confidant and secretary to Augusta, Dowager Princess of Wales and played a significant role in the negotiations between the Royal Household and Lancaster House in the 1750's during the minority of King George III.



Detail of Plasterwork

THE SETTING

The site of the Hall is ancient. It is recorded in the Domesday Book and in nearby fields there are the remains of a second century Roman settlement. There was a park around the Hall in the fifteenth century.

The Hall was originally encircled by a water filled moat and there are references to the existence of a drawbridge between the house and the Gatehouse. One half of the moat can still be seen to the north of the Hall. In the sixteenth century Saxton, the famous map maker, shows the park. Edward Cressett established a park pale in 1616 and in the wood adjacent to the house there are earthworks which are the remains of mediaeval fishponds.

In the fields surrounding the house there are grass humps indicating the site of a mediaeval village.

In the grounds, by the Gatehouse, can be seen a one-time horse drawn cider press and there is a smaller weighted press in the Gatehouse itself. By the side of the winding road to the Hall there is a line of Spanish Chestnut trees planted in 1815 to commemorate the battle of Waterloo.

Below the house and possibly on the site of an earlier Saxon church is the twelfth century church of St. Michael and All the Angels. It has a magnificent Chancel arch with four orders which is of exceptional size and dimension for so remote a place. The Church was originally the private chapel of the de Uptons and the Cressetts and contains a superb Norman font and a fragment of a twelfth century wall painting of an angel playing a flute. It is owned by the Redundant Churches Fund.

The Hall, Gatehouse and grounds were restored in 1971 by the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Cash, whose much loved home it is.

THE MANOR HOUSE

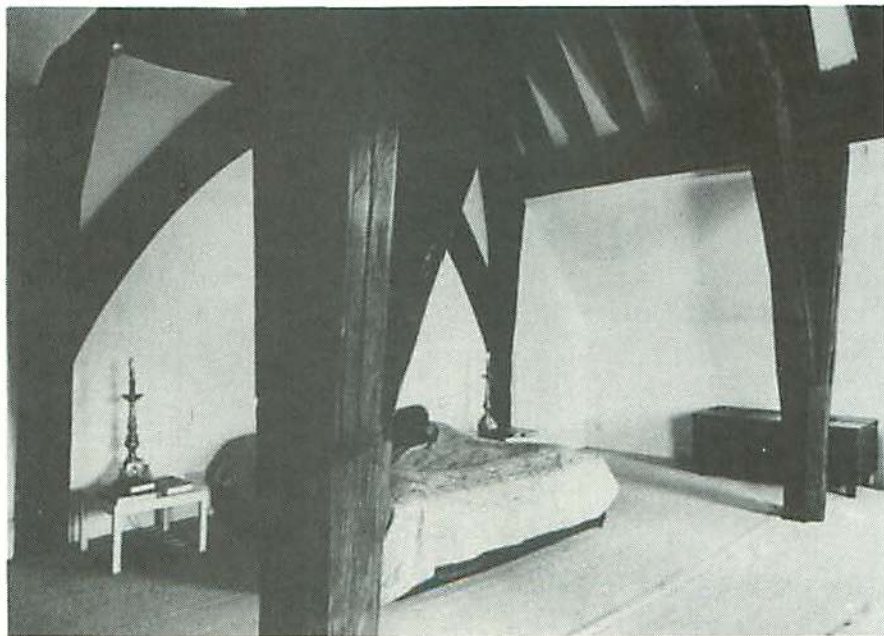
You enter the mediaeval house by passing through the grass courtyard between the main building and the Gatehouse into the lower part of the fourteenth century Great Hall. This is now the dining room and contains a Jacobean chest, exceptional crewel work curtains, a Jacobean cross banded draw-leaf refectory table and on the panelling there is a tapestry of dogs chasing game on a lake. The vertical timbers of the Great Hall are clearly visible.

Leading from this room to the right is the drawing room with Elizabethan panelling and fireplace. Behind the fireplace, which is served by tall twisted chimneys, there is a secret door originally hidden by panelling, leading to what may have been a hidden passageway to the upper part of the house and linking up with a secret tunnel to the Gatehouse and the Church. There is a fine contemporary portrait of Charles I and an early eighteenth century laquered cabinet.

Passing back through the panelled doorway of the dining room and thence to the right there is the kitchen with its thirteen foot wide fireplace. The timber framed wall immediately to the right of the door as you enter (mind the low doorway and the step!) is part of the original exterior of the fourteenth century core of the house.

From the kitchen and back into the rear hall you climb the winding solid oak newel staircase. At intervals within the framework of the stairs are cupboards originally used for storing food and linen. On the landing itself you enter the upper part of the Great Hall which now overlooks the enclosed rose garden. Constructed in the fourteenth century. Probably on the arrival of Thomas Cressett and Constance de Upton, its massive timbers stretch up into the roof space forming a mighty arch, with a fourteen foot span, across the width of the room and joined together by a decorated Crown post above the collar beam.

Above and to the left of the Great Hall is a cross wing built in the early and later parts of the fifteenth century.



Inside of the Great Hall

THE GATEHOUSE

Across the courtyard stands the redbrick Gatehouse constructed in the sixteenth century by Richard Cressett. The brick was almost certainly fired from the clay soil of the grounds itself. It has two octagonal turrets on either side of the central archway and twenty six transomed and mullioned windows made of ovolo moulded brickwork, mortared over in the fashion of the time. The exterior walls are criss-crossed with vitrified brick in diapering pattern, as in the Hall.

Entering the turret to the right from the archway facing the house you climb the circular newel staircase of solid oak steps.

On the first floor there are two rooms, each of which contains exceptional plasterwork ceilings and one of which has a plasterwork overmantel as well. The motifs include the Tudor rose, portcullis and Beaufort feathers and the word Jesu is embossed on what appears to be a sacred heart surrounded by a symbolic cross.

The same workmanship can be seen nearby at Wilderhope Manor, the home in the seventeenth century of the Catholic Smallman family. From the second floor there are panoramic views of unspoilt countryside, of the Hall, its grounds and of the twelfth century Norman Church.



The Gatehouse

TIME PRESENT AND TIME PAST

"The Cressetts first appear as lords of Upton towards the close of the fourteenth century . . . its chequered gables, bronzed, lichen-clad roofs and wrinkled chimneys rise with charming effect against the dappled blue of the sky . . . Beyond a green courtyard rises the Gatehouse . . . with ivied gables and quaint angle turrets apparently coeval with the mansion and like it constructed of fine time-worn brickwork of a pleasant mellow hue . . ."

The westering sun, glistening through the trees spreads the shadows broad athwart the quiet green graveyard surrounding the Norman church. The drowsy hum of insects pervades the autumn air, the hovering rooks make a pleasant sound in the tall elms beside the Hall, and the distant lowing of cattle comes faintly to our ears."

Timmins. Nooks and Corners of Shropshire (1899)

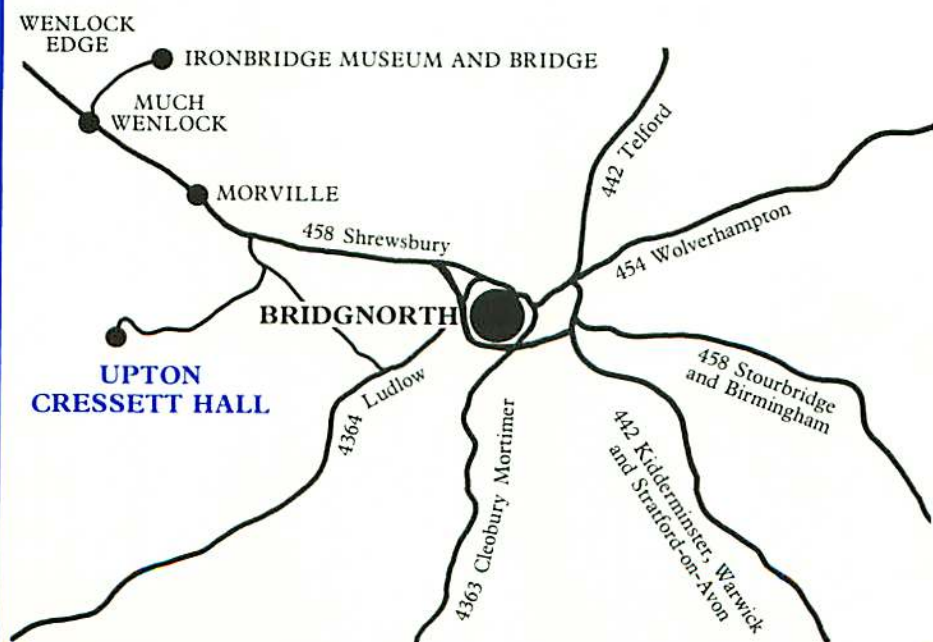
- ★ 14th Century oak timbered Great Hall.
- ★ Exquisite Elizabethan Gatehouse with octagonal towers.
- ★ Fine 16th Century ornamental plasterwork and oak newel staircases.
- ★ Twisted Tudor chimneys, stone fireplaces and oak panelling.
- ★ Mediaeval home of Knights and Sheriffs of Shropshire in Wars of the Roses.
- ★ Royalist stronghold in the Civil War.
- ★ Close to the Historic towns of Ludlow, Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth.

Gardens and Picnic Area.

OPEN

May to October, Thursday afternoons, 2.30 — 5.00

Parties anytime by appointment — Tel: 074 631 307



Photographs by J. A. Spears