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THE EARLIEST SASH-WINDOW IN BRITAIN?

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The lodging which Charles II purchased at Newmarket in 1668 lies on the east side of the High Street. The main new work was designed by William Samwell and was complete by 1671.¹ It comprised a long red-brick range running back from the street frontage, with two attached pavilions, one on the south side and the other at the east end, each of which had a royal suite above a vaulted basement storey (Fig. 1). Although later buildings were built up against them, both pavilions survived until the palace was sold in the mid 19th century. The south pavilion was then demolished to provide the site for the new Congregational Chapel of 1863 and the east pavilion was bought by Meyer de Rothschild who began to add to and remodel it, a process which continued at intervals until 1926 by which time its original form had been largely obscured. After the Second World War the Rothschilds sold the house and it was often unoccupied through several owner-ships until, in serious disrepair, it was bought by the local authority, Forest Heath District Council, with help from English Heritage.

Restoration in 1996–7 revealed that, in general, only the brick carcass and some floor framing has survived from the the 17th century. It was therefore of great interest when an original window frame was found bricked up in the room which was once the closet behind the King's bedroom (Fig. 2). The window was at least in part closed off as a consequence of the building of a service stair which was in existence by the time of a survey which has been attributed to Thomas Fort, clerk of the works at

Newmarket from 1719 to 1745, although it was not finally sealed behind brickwork until that staircase was demolished in the 19th century.

The window frame is of oak and it is divided into four equal quarters by a mullion and a transom (Fig. 3). In the upper quarters the glass fits into a shallow rebate against the outer face of the frame; in the lower quarters there were rising sashes which were counterbalanced only on one side. One sash survives. The braided sash cord runs in a groove in the frame, and over a wooden pulley wheel. Three cylindrical lead weights, which are strung on the cord like beads, travel in a bored hole in the solid outer frame. A stop bead, which is held against the central mullion by two square-headed pins, facilitated the easy removal of the lower sash, which could be raised and lowered by means of two decorative knobs in the lower rail of the frame.

The left-hand upper light was blocked first, when a doorway to the new staircase was cut beneath it, and part of the original glazing has survived in the upper quarter. It is a 20 by 23 inch leaded panel of diamond panes which is held back to iron glazing bars and to nails in each corner by lead ties. There does not appear to have been any putty or other fixing on the outer face of the rebate. The right-hand light evidently remained in use for longer and was reglazed with rectangular leaded panes in larger panels which were tied back to iron bars in the upper quarter and to moulded horizontal wooden bars in the rising sash. Retention of the panels was assisted by occasional tacks in the rebate and the

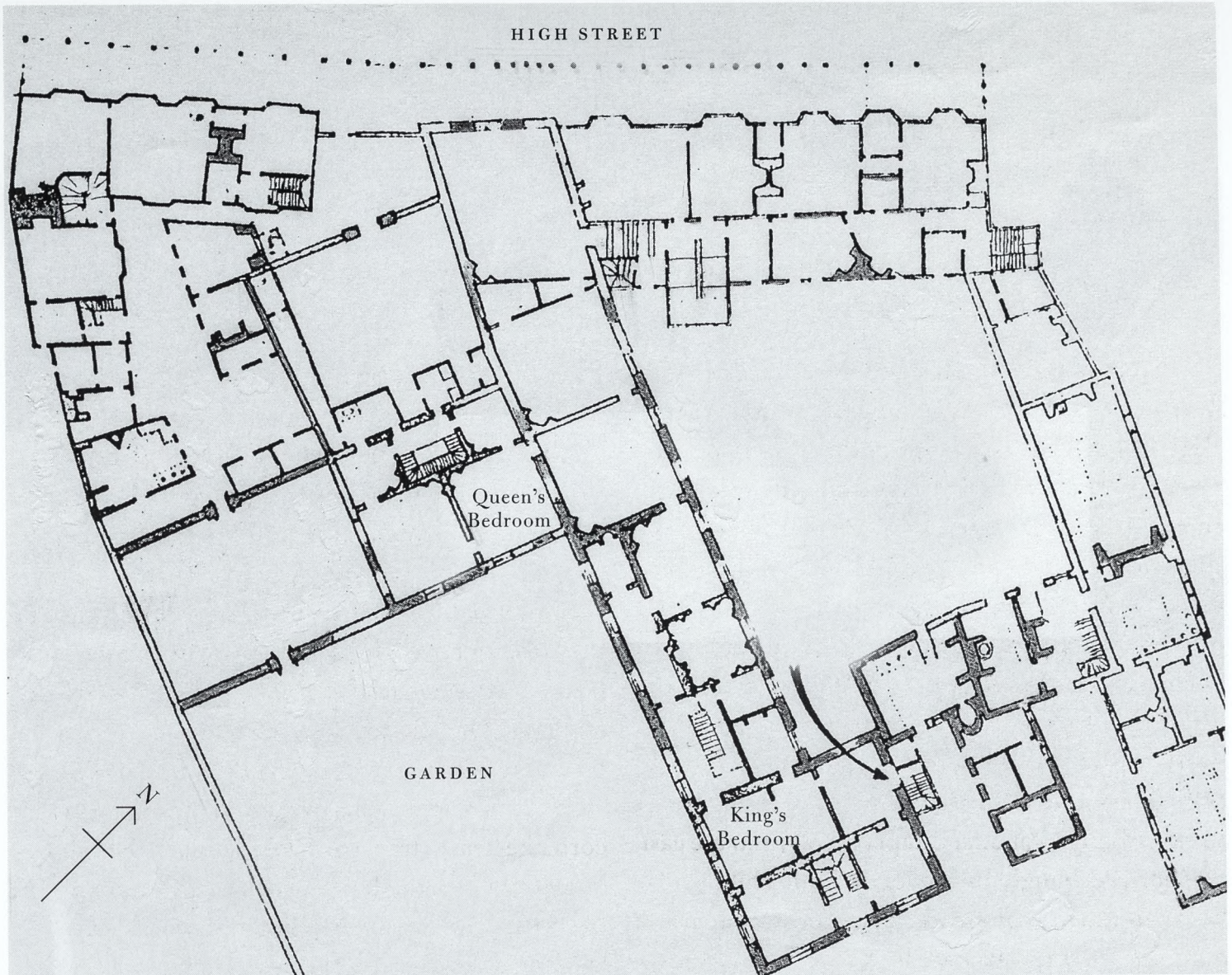


Figure 1. Thomas Fort (attrib.), Newmarket Palace, survey plan of first floor, between 1719 and 1745. The position of the window discussed here is indicated by an arrow; by the time this plan was made the window had been in part replaced by a door. *English Heritage*.

L-shaped iron brackets which stiffened the corners of the rising sash were also set so that they held the lower corners.

More than £8,000 was spent on the work at Newmarket between 1668 and 1671 and it would seem likely that the window was made during that period. That would place it at a critical point in the history of the rising sash. Vertically sliding sashes are known to have been in use in France from about 1630,² and the earliest dated example to survive is in Troyes, believed to have been made in 1660.³ The earliest surviving examples in Holland date from 1686,⁴ and in England date from c.1687–90

(at Boughton), c.1692–3 (at Hampton Court) and c.1693 (at Trinity College, Oxford).⁵ But sashes are known from documentary sources to have been used at Whitehall Palace from 1662,⁶ although almost certainly held up by pegs. The earliest reference to lines, pulleys and counterweights occurs in 1665.⁷ Samwell used 26 sashes in the refronting of Ham House in 1673. Nothing else as early as the Newmarket window is known to have survived and the arrangement of one-sided counterweights in a solid frame was presumably soon replaced by paired weights in a boxed frame.



Figure 2. Newmarket Palace, first floor window from the outside.
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England.

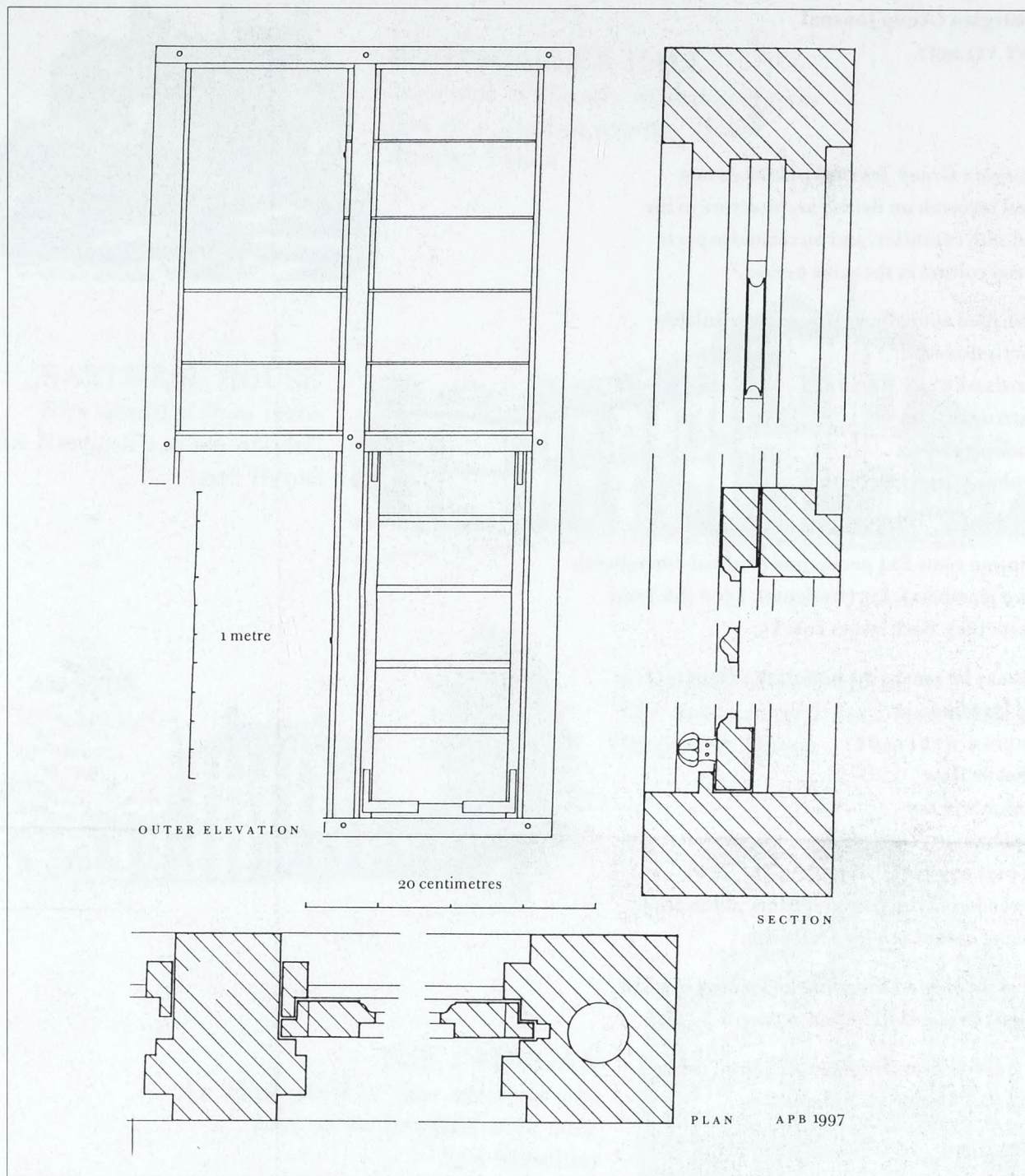


Figure 3. Newmarket Palace, first floor window, outside elevation, section and plan. *A. P. Baggs*.

NOTES

- 1 H. M. Colvin (ed), *The History of the King's Works*,
v, London, 1976, 214-7.
- 2 H. J. Louw, 'The origin of the sash-window',
Architectural History, xxvi, 1983, plate 29a.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 51
- 4 *Ibid.*, 56
- 5 *Ibid.*, 65
- 6 *Ibid.*, 60
- 7 *Ibid.*, 63
- 8 *Ibid.*, 64