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Ephemera in Europe? The Lower Saxon Hall House
Vergänglichkeit in Europa? Das niederdeutsche Hallenhaus

Abstract
The Lower Saxon Hall House discussed here is a type of a farmhouse, which was built over centuries all over Northern Germany as well as the Netherlands. Its emergence reaches back to the Stone Age and was over centuries steadily adapted to new requirements. Its ground plan is organized such that there is only one, big hall, where living and working areas are united with stables and storage spaces.
In this contribution it will particularly looked at a region north of Lower Saxon's capital Hanover, which is called "Hannoversches Wendland". Here, not only are many of these hall houses to be found, a particular type of nuclear village was created around these houses as well, called "Rundling". Both, nuclear village and hall house arose under special social and economical as well as climatic circumstances and thus can be described as a unit.
Since hall houses are a timber frame construction, and additionally always had open fireplaces and no chimneys until recently, the hall houses did burn down frequently. Today only very few hall houses older than 200 years still exist. Interestingly, they were built up nearly stubbornly again and again always according to the layout of the previous houses. Over the centuries they were only expanded slowly as more space was needed and new construction methods were introduced. The layout of the ground floor did not change at all. The embedded ideas and the general structure remained unchanged and thus the hall house of today is very similar to the first emerged structures.
Living in an open structure with only one main hall comprising all functions of every day life for large families did involve a very special way of living in such a house. Once stuck to this very special concept of life with the hall house tailored around it there was no need to conserve the old buildings. Unfortunately, in the course of the 20th century many of the old farms were given up and are today uninhabited or used for other purposes. Additionally, new, small family homes are built in the old villages, which led to a rapid change of the nuclear village structure in the last decades. Besides, not only the morphological character of the villages changed, the logic of its use is fading, too. In this paper it will be discussed that an ephemeral structure such as the hall house can only be passed on to future generations if its inner logic of house combined with a very special way of living in it can be transferred to contemporary modern times.

Inhalt
Das hier beschriebene Niedersachsenhaus ist ein Bauernhaustyp, der über die Jahrhunderte in der ganzen Norddeutschen Tiefebene verbreitet wurde. Die Wurzeln dieses Hallenhauses gehen auf die Steinzeit zurück und der Gebäudetyp wurde über die Jahrhunderte stetig neuen Anforderungen angepasst. Das Niedersachsenhaus ist ein Hallenhaus, das heisst, dass Leben, Arbeiten, Stall und Lagerplätze in einer einzigen, riesigen Halle vereinigt waren. In diesem Beitrag wird das Niederdeutsche Hallenhaus der Region des Hannoverschen Wendlandes beschrieben, das nördlich der niedersächsischen Hauptstadt Hannover liegt. Hier sind nicht nur viele Hallenhäuser zu finden, es hat sich hier zusätzlich eine ganz spezielle Dorfform entwickelt, der „Rundling", ein Runddorf. Runddorf und Hallenhaus sind unter sehr speziellen landschaftlichen, klimatischen, ökonomischen und sozialen Rahmenbediungen entstanden. Dorf und Haus sind perfekt auf das Leben und Wirtschaften der Bewohner abgestimmt und können so als Einheit betrachtet werden.
Hallenhäuser sind Fachwerkbauten mit einer offenen Feuerstelle ohne Kamin. Durch das zusätzlich eingebrachte Stroh in Dachraum ist es nur zu nachvollziehbar, dass die Gebäude regelmäßig abbrannten. Daher gibt es heute nur sehr wenige Hallenhäuser, die mehr als ein oder zweihundert Jahre alt sind. Sie wurden also nie für die Ewigkeit errichtet, sonden man wusste, dass sie regelmäßig erneuert werden müssen. Trotzdem sind die Grundrisse und die Konstruktion über den gesamten, langen Zeitraum niemals sehr verändert worden. Sie wurden lediglich erweitert, wenn mehr Platz gebraucht wurde. Das Konzept des Grundrisses hingegen änderte sich nicht sehr und so ähneln die Hallenhäuser den steinzeitlichen Vorgängertypen sehr stark.
In einer offenen Wohnstruktur zu leben mit nur einer zentralen Halle, in der alle Funktionen des Alltags untergebraucht sind bewirkt auch eine sehr spezielle Art des Lebens in einem solchen Haus. So wie es aussieht, entspricht jedoch diese Art des Wohnens genau den Vorstellungen der Wenden, weshalb die Gebäude immer nach alten Mustern wiedererrichtet wurden; Denkmalpflege war nicht notwendig.
Leider wurden viele der alten Hallenhäuser im Verlauf des 20. Jahrhunderts nicht mehr als Bauernhöfe genutzt, sondern entweder ganz aufgegeben oder umgenutzt. Hinzu kamen neue Siedler aus benachbarten Großstädten, die nun die neue Struktur der Einfamilienhäuser in die Dörfer brachten, wodurch ein rascher Wandel der Siedlungsstruktur vollzogen wurde. Aber nicht nur die Dorf- und Gebäudestruktur veränderte sich dadurch, auch die Logik des Nutzens der alten Hallenhäuser wurde dadurch nach und nach aufgegeben. In diesem Beitrag wird darüber diskutiert, dass kurzlebige Strukturen, wie eben das Hallenhaus, nicht dadurch am Leben erhalten werden können, indem man sie nach außen konserviert, im Inneren jedoch gänzlich andere Wohnvorstellungen realisiert, sondern die Erhaltung der Gebäude und vor allem der Idee der Gebäude nur dann gesichert sein kann, wenn man die innere Logik des Wohnens in die Moderne übertragen kann.

Introduction

Central Europe is not particularly well known for ephemera related to the built environment and architecture. Architecture is valued often enough only if buildings last for centuries, old city structures are appreciated to look at by both, tourists and inhabitants, and newer cities are stated to be more boring than older towns and villages. Basically everything old is good and all new is simply not. It seems that people in Europe want to live more in pastiche times rather than in the present and thus the built environment follows these requirements. However, with a closer investigation of exactly these old structures it turns out that such trains of thought were even not know in these glorified old times of ours. Very much like in other regions of the world, permanence of buildings was not known for all types of buildings, but rather only for the very prestigious representative ones, such as town halls or churches. The rest of the urban fabric in towns and villages was meant to last only for a very limited time. Most certainly, building materials of shorter lives was cheaper and most inhabitants could simply not afford having stone houses and constructions that last forever. Nevertheless, it, too, gave them the chance to update their homes and workspaces according to new requirements emerging as time passes by.

The here described hall house from the Hannoverschen Wendland is a very good example to demonstrate this. Since hall houses are timber frame constructions with an open fireplace and no chimney, they regularly burnt down. An indicator of how often this happened is that on each farmplot oak trees were grown as future building materials for the timber frame construction of the new house. The Lower German Hall House, or how it is termed in house research, the "Niederdeutsches Hallenhaus" or "Niedersachsenhaus", is a very old type of building, which can be traced back to the Stone Age. As stated above, the houses never lasted for too long. However, the construction and layout of the houses never changed too much and was only updated to new requirements, such as to provide more space for inhabitants, stable and storage areas and the like. Only recently, starting in the 1960's the hall houses were too small for new farms and thus today are not any more built newly and replace by farm houses with other concepts. Many of the existing houses are nowadays used for other things, such as studies of artists and architects or restaurants and pubs. As a reaction to the decline of the old farmhouses and with it also the dramatic change of old village structures, an active house research arose to observe and document the Lower Saxon Hall House. To date a long list of publications has been published dealing with the many aspects of it. On the one hand, many contributions deal with the construction of these buildings, and how these evolved over the centuries (Johannsen: 1997). Some publications focus on the various aspects of farm life and the circumstances that stamped it (Vonderach: 2004). Historic analyses of land, people, village and houses do exist as well (Landzettel: 1982). Besides, a large number of work deals with the question of new ways of using the old houses (e.g. Bombeck: 1998; Damm, Reimpell: 1974; Kamzelak, Pfeier: 2001). Finally, appropriate village design and village regeneration strategies are discussed, too (e.g. Attenberger: 2004; Kulke, Gruber: 1974). Parallel to these contributions from scholars, museums dealing with rural life arose in the area. On one hand, some hall houses, that were dismantled were put together in open-air museums, such as Cloppenburg or Detmold, both Lower Saxony, being one of the biggest. Here, not only the buildings can be visited, there are also activities around farm life launched to keep heritage alive (Kaiser, Ottenjann: 1998). Most of the material deals with the construction and evolution of it and highlights very much how little the hall house has changed over so many centuries. As will shown below, the layout of it seemed to be optimised for living in and work habits of its people, the Wenden. Its embedded "social construction" and the way of using it (e.g. Beckenrath: 1921; Vonderach: 2004) were perfectly adopted and as will be shown below people did not have to live in old structures, since the layout had such an inner logic that people handed down knowledge about it from generation to generation.

In this contribution it is not only aimed to demonstrate that even in very Central Europe ephemera was well known and used, but it is of core importance for the future as well. If it is possible to show the particular way of living in house and village, it seems to be the only way to not only keep old traditions alive in heritage terms, but also to transform these ideas to the future, where possibly new buildings following the concept of the hall house can be built up. This could lead to lively villages that still follow the old concepts. The main argument in this contribution is, that the only way to keep heritage alive is to not only conserve old buildings, but to find a contemporary form of the old building. Here, it will be looked at today's administrative district "Lüchow-Dannenberg", which lies north of Lower Saxony's capital Hanover. In this area hall houses are found in a very particular nuclear village, termed "Rundling". House and village form a unit in social and economical terms with a very concise socio-spatial construction. Especially here the particular way of life and the social logic of house and village are easily to be understood. Social reference systems, which take responsibility for the ground plan of the house, are transferable to other regions with hall houses, but appear here often in faded form.

The paper starts with a short introduction of landscape constraints that led to the development of village and house. Then, the particular cultural background of the population in the area will be discussed, followed by a description firstly of the village, then of the hall house. The following section will deal with the social logic of house and village; the paper will end with an outlook on possible ways of new developments that follow the principles of the Lower Saxon Hall House and not so much just conserving them.

Geological and cultural constraints of the observed area

The distribution area of the hall house generally lies in the whole area of Northern Germany and stretches up to the Netherlands (Fig.1, Fig.2). Certainly, an old type of building such as the discussed one that dates back to the Stone Age (Johannsen: 1979) has developed local sub-variants. In this contribution the administrative district Lüchow-Dannenberg north of Hanover is observed, where not only hall houses are largely

found but, too, a particular village form arose, the "Rundling". Landscape, climate, as well as cultural background of the population in this district, seem to be responsible for the appearance of house and village. Therefore, it is important to look at these factors more detailed in order to understand the unique socio-spatial pattern.

Fig. 1

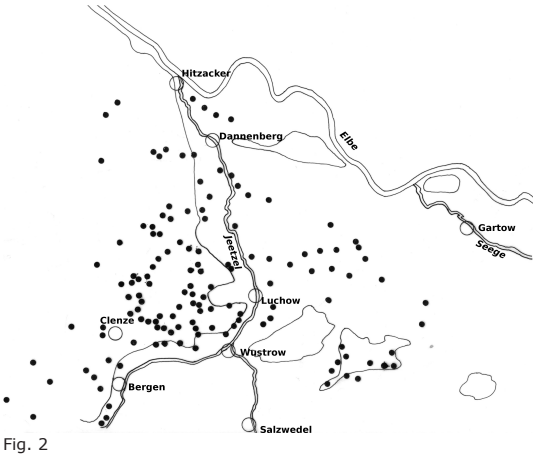

Fig. 2

Landscape conditions in Lüchow-Dannenberg

The roughly triangular administrative district Lüchow-Dannenberg north of Lower Saxon's capital Hanover lies west of formerly Slavonic areas. It is bound by two rivers namely the Elbe and the Jeetzel. Seen geologically the district is part of the deposit area of the Hall Ice Age, the second to the last (Johannsen: 1979). In the following Warth Ice Age two glacier tongues pressed forward into the Elbe valley from east to west, through which Hanover's moraine was deposited between them. Due to the force of the pushing glaciers high and low "Geest" was formed. The "High Geest" today appears as an accumulation of rounded hilltops with arroyos in between them. The "Low Geest" is flat with altitudes of ten meters at most (Kulke: 1969). Both "Geest" areas are very dry due to the sandy or loamy soil here, where rainwater immediately seeps away. These "Geest" areas contrast the very wet marshlands lying in between them. The marshlands surround the river Jeetzel with its low descent. There are both, summery and wintry floods and thus an area of approximately 10 000 hectares of forests and fields were flooded regularly. For some 200 days a year (117 in winter, 83 in summer) most villages that were perched on top of small hills had no connection by land (Johannsen: 1979).

Cultural background of the population in Lüchow-Dannenberg

Around Christi today's administrative district Lüchow-Dannenberg was inhabited by Langobards (Kulke: 1969). In the time of the migration of nations Slavs pressed westwards into the East German lowland plain and moved on west in several stages during the 5th and 6th century. They probably crossed the River Elbe by 800 and entered the observed area. The "Lüneburger Heide " was the western bound of the migration movement in first place; however, it was not sufficient to stop the Slavonic immigration waves over the decades. The latter is obvious from a "Capitular" of 805 that Karl the Great enacted. Here, eleven German-Slavonic border-settlements where declared to be trading points in order to hold back Slavs. However, the act did not suffice in the course of history and Slavs kept moving on west and could only be held back by force at the end of the 9th century (Johannsen: 1979).
By that time already immigrated Slavs, later called the "Wenden", settled down in the observed area where they preserved a certain cultural independence. The "Wenden" practiced their old language up to the 18th century, their cultural heritage and their preferred way of farming, namely cattle racing. Today, the area is called "Hannoversches Wendland", although today native population is well integrated in the German one. Today, only some names of villages, corridors and landscapes remind of the original residents.

The nuclear village

In the "Wendland" a special form of nuclear village was developed, which seems to reflect the social, cultural and economical way of life in the very peculiar natural environment. As described above, the marshlands provided on one hand fertile soil, but had the disadvantage of regular floods. Therefore, nuclear villages were perched on small artificial or natural hilltops, surrounded by forests and fields. Thus, nuclear villages often appear as islands in forests and grassland, occasionally only in water. According to landscape conditions, the nuclear village had a very peculiar shape, since it's outer form is round. These round villages, or "Rundlinge", are distributed in the whole observed area.

Looking at geographical and economical factors it has to be noticed that round villages arose only in areas with Slavonic population, which were integrated into the German national territory. For a long time scholars discussed whether its origins could be traced back to German or Slavic influence. Contemporary research in house research state that round villages were formed in late medieval times, long time after Slavic population settled down here. Since such round villages did not come up in other regions with Slavic population, German administrative aspects seemed to play

Fig. 1 The situation of the examined area Lüchow-Dannenberg in Central Europe

Fig. 2 The administrative district Lüchow-Dannenberg. The black points mark the villages with characteristics of a "Rundling". The lines describe the edges of the Geesten.

an important role as well: round villages merge farming ideas from Slavic groups, namely cattle racing, with agriculture, preferred by German authorities (Johannsen: 1979). Additionally, the availability of fertile field floor seemed to be important in the process of creating round villages. The tax system of German landlords in the 12th and 13th century led to the necessity of a higher density of the villages. Presumably, Slavonic natives lived once in scattered hamlets. The tax system of German landlords led to the necessity of a higher density in the villages in the 12th and 13th century. Over the decades, these were more and more regulated, adapted to the area and merged to short rows or bows, which resulted in a relatively densely populated district (Meibeyer: 1964).

According to this, early round villages consisted of only three to four farm courts, each equipped with an economically important grassland (Fig.3). Thus, cattle ranching had not to be given up; nevertheless agriculture was made possible as well. The latter was important to German sovereigns. This first round village type is termed "Halbrund", semi-round village. The three to four farms were set up around a semi-circular village green, edged by the gable facades of the hall houses. Nowadays, this village form is primarily found at the "Hohe Geest", where they alter with hamlets.

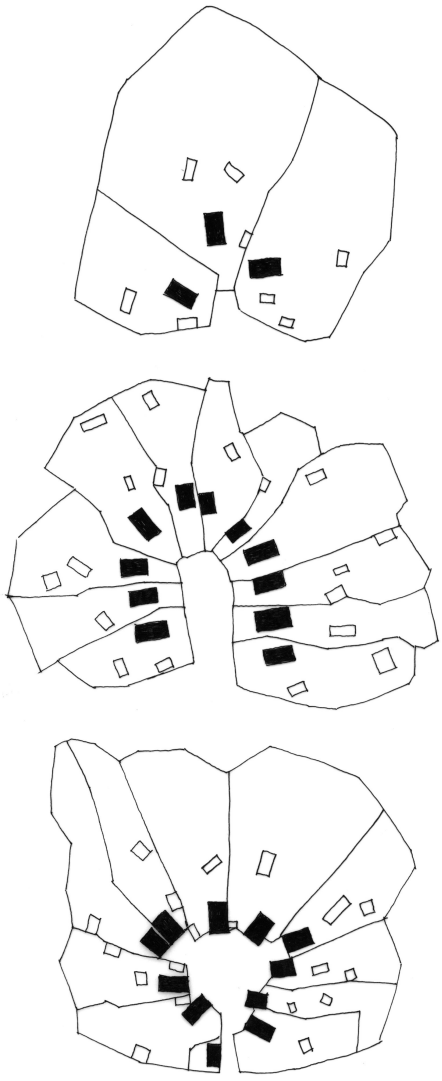

Fig. 3

Fig. 3 The development of the round villages.
1. a typical half-round with three courts, that enclose the small village green. 2. a Cul-de-Sac with the courts which are arranged around a broad lane. 3. a "Rundling" with courts around an almost round village green and a narrow access road. The lane is narrowed by a Kosaterstelle (little farm) (on the left below).

Fig. 4 Typical "Rundling" (Großrundling Lübeln)

In a next step of development a semi-round village green and a broad lane leading to it are the main features. This type is called "Sackgasse", or "Cul-de-Sac- village. It consists of four to eight courts with main hall houses facing the central area. The "Sackgasse" is nowadays mainly found in the lowlands of the river Lucie where the lack of fertile agricultural land prohibited a higher density (Johannsen: 1979).

Classic round villages, the "Rundlinge", as they appear in literature, were formed by further densification of above described transition forms. Rural population generally was excluded from municipal guilds, and thus was not allowed to live in towns and cities. In the turn descendants had to share land of their ancestors and divide courts. From 1500 on this process started everywhere in the Wendland, and led to relatively small farms. It seems that fat pastures and meadows were responsible for a higher population that still could earn their livings. Therefore, "Rundlinge" appear only in the central Wendland, the marshlands, where natural conditions suffice a survival of the farmers.
Court dividings also forced that the hall houses were condensed around the central village green, with a narrow lane leading to it. Small courts, so called "Kosaterstellen" arose on both sides of the lane, thus forming an entrance to the nuclear village. The development of the "Rundlinge" was fulfilled by the 16th and latest 17th century, with its characteristics that stamped the "Rundling" (Meibeyer: 2001).

Characteristics of the typical "Rundling"

The village plan is the spatial expression of the ideas for working and living of the "Wenden". Their particular way of living together on the one hand and the natural conditions, as well as the fact that the rural population was excluded from living and working in towns and cities, shaped this extraordinary village (Fig.4).

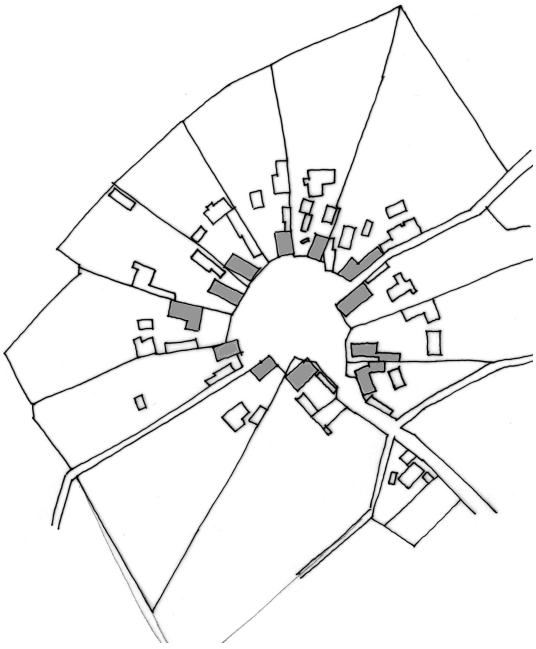

Fig. 4

The layout of the nuclear village as a whole follows the model of concentric rings within which

the various functions of work and living have designated spots (Fig.5). A nearly circular village green forms the centre of the "Rundling". There are high trees, mostly oaks, to be found here; further buildings, shelters or other furnishing are, however, missing. The huge hall houses edge this village green, with their gables facing the centre. The hall houses screen off the private areas of the courts. Occasionally gatehouses are set up alongside the border to limit undesired glimpses. The courts are wedge-shaped, with the narrow side to the village green and the other as a limit to the surrounding countryside. Gardens with the hall houses and outbuildings are, too, following the principle of concentric rings. The inner ring adjacent to the village green is reserved for the massive hall houses, followed by – as much there is a lack of space inside the hall house – stables for horses, barns for equipment and storehouses as well as baking houses. Further away sheep-boxes and pigsties are arranged, according to the gradient of odour emissions (sheep dung was collected in the boxes during the winter and taken from there in spring, for example). In a next ring beehives were set up close to the fields. The outmost ring of the courts was the border of the farms, sometimes marked by a gate barn, or by simple fences. Woods, gardens and fields that lead into the open countryside enclose the village as a whole. Locations for primarily smell and noise intensive outbuildings, such as hay dry plants of silo containers, are not determined after farm membership but to the main direction of wind. These facilities are to be used by all members of an entire village and thus farm membership is of no importance (Meibeyer: 1964).

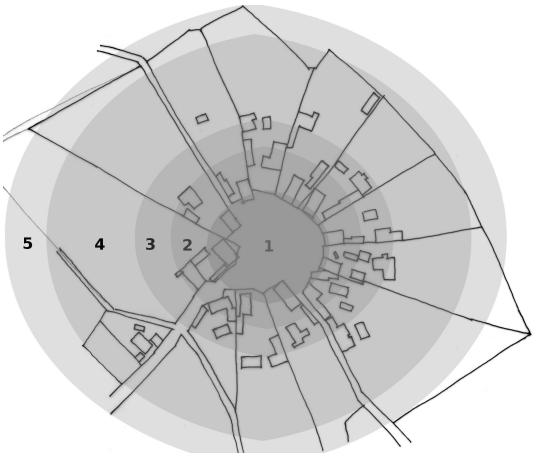

Fig. 5

The Lower Saxon hall house

In house research a building corresponding to a single-room strategy is described as a hall house, and – according to its appearance – "Niederdeutsches Hallenhaus", "Niedersachsen Haus", or Lower Saxon Hall House. It is a wooden frame building filled with clay, loam or bricks and consists only of one single, big hall. The various functions of every day life of a farmer's family, such as living, working, storing and keeping livestock are done in designated places within such a hall house. Although the areas are not divided by partition walls or similar from each other, the inside of the house is organized strictly and thus not chaotic at all.

Archaeological findings confirm that Slavonic immigrants had already found an archaic form of the hall house when settling down in the region. Findings at the mouth of the river Jeetzel prove that hall houses with three naves were already in use in prehistoric times. From this prehistoric type the "Eisnwander" and "Hodorfer" hut like construction was developed in the 3rd and 4th century. The oldest house, which is termed "Lower Saxon Hall House", is the so-called "Zweiständerhaus", or "two-stand house". The constructive framework of the two-stand house consists of two rows of supports, which lie inside the building. Eaves therefore lie very low, from what a stout picture of the outside arises (Fig.6).

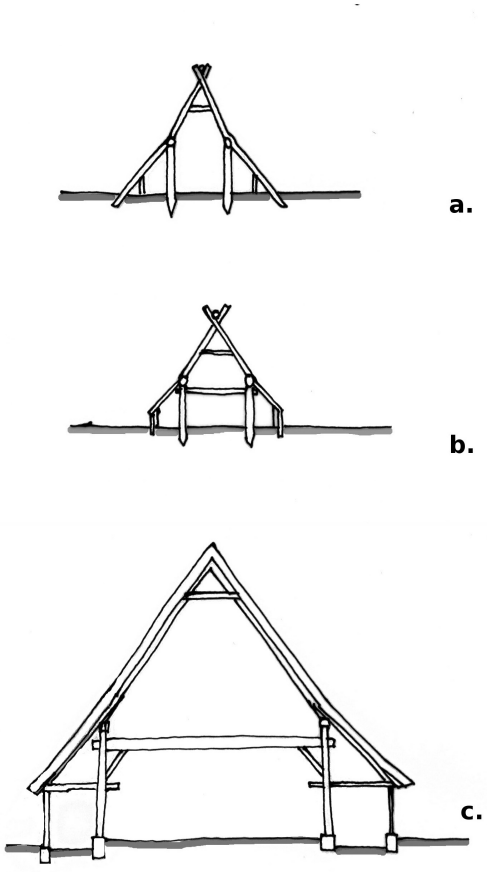

Fig. 6

In a next development step the main roof strap was prolonged to one of the outer walls. Therefore this wall was used for the support of the carrying construction, through what the edge of the eave was raised on this side. The constructive system of this house is one with three support rows and consequently is described as a "Dreiständerhaus" or "three-stand house". The additional space under the roof was used as an extra storage area.
In the middle of the 18th century the second main joist was prolonged to the other outer wall and is described as a "Vierständerhaus", or "four-stand house" according to the constructive system. This building has higher eaves and is generally bigger than his predecessors. By the rise of the eaves enough space was available to implement a gallery on top of the stable area. This provided more loft space for additional storage (Johannsen: 1979) (Fig.7, Fig.8, Fig.9).

Fig. 5 Scheme of a round village with the different use areas laid out concentrically: 1. village green, 2. hall houses, 3. outbuilding, stables, shed (without smell emissions), 4. gardens and stables for small animals (smell intensive), 5. outside area for noise and smell intensive uses (fermenting food facilities, etc.). In this sector buildings are laid out to the main direction of wind and not according to court affiliation.

Fig. 6 The main development steps to the hall house.
a. cross-section of an "Einswander" type (approx. 200 bC.), b. . cross-section of a "Hodorfer" type (approx. 300 a.C.), c. cross-section of a two stand house (17th century)

Fig. 7, Fig. 8, Fig. 9

These development steps were accompanied by the increasing requirements of the residents. Grain harvests on the one hand were bigger since farming was intensified. Number of cattle also got larger in the course of the time and more space became necessary generally. At the end of the development, reasonable stable areas could no longer be provided inside the hall house. Thus, several outbuildings became necessary, such as stables, granaries and barns for various uses. But not only economic conditions were responsible for the steadily further development of the hall house. In the early hall houses, namely the Two-Stand Houses, no chambers or rooms were built in. Every day life took place in the "Flett" called part of the hall. But several factors made these chambers and rooms necessary. Cooking and heating claims had grown; ideas of how to live were adopted from cities, too. The emerge of the domestic linen production was another factor which led to the development of small chambers since this activity was only possible in year-round heated rooms. Linen production came massively up in the 16th century, being an additional and very profitable source of income. To produce linen also during the cold periods, small chambers that could be heated up quickly became necessary. Thus, chambers alongside the Flett were included, which is termed "Kammerfach", or chamber-area. Around 1700 the fireplace was transferred from the open hall into the "Kammerfach". A chimney built with mortar finally became necessary at the latest in 1744, forced by a decree of Karl I. Finally, the hall houses got extremely massive, and only one fireplace could not sufficiently heat up the big hall. Besides, lofts were converted into storage spaces and extra chambers for domestics. Four-Stand Houses are far common as of the middle of the 18th century because of the availability of extra space on top of the stable area alongside the "Groot Däl" called part of the hall. They could hold chicken-coops, the chaff ground, and storage space for all sorts of tools. Later, a gallery and some chambers or sleeping boxes were included in this area. This was a process that converted the hall house into a full two-story building. The "Groot Däl" lost its original multipurpose function and was transformed into a huge entrance and distribution space. Both, "Flett" and "Groot Däl" lost their original significance and logic of use.

The inner organization of the Lower German Hall House

The development of the hall house went completely different ways than the cell type houses of the adjacent regions. As discussed above, the hall house is a single room house in which all functions of life and work are summarized: threshing place, milking place, meat-smoking place, stables, stores and storage areas for equipment, next to areas for living and house working, are not only unified in one building but in one hall. From a central point, namely the fireplace, all is well overlooked, like belongings, cattle as well as the work and hustle and bustle of the residents. This principle of overlooking all has proved to be very sustainable and, as it seems, was given up re-willingly.

The massive dimensions of the hall house indeed stamped the appearance of the nuclear villages, "Rundlinge" in particular. But nor only outlook and design influenced the characteristics of such villages, a particular way of life was introduced as well. It can be argued that the design of a ground plan is responsible for a certain use of the building generally, and that a social structure is forced simply by it. This is obviously seen in the Lower German Hall House, since there is a tempting logic of the use within these buildings. This "social structure", as termed here, will be examined in the following paragraphs.

The inside of the building is formed by a big, open space, which has no partition walls or other fittings in the beginning (Fig.10). The interior is nevertheless subdivided in various areas. The big hall is divided into two areas, the "Groot Däl" and an orthogonal lying "Flett". The "Grot Däl" is means and pivot for all farming activities that can be done indoor, such as milking place, fodder place, storage space or harvest processing place (Fig.11). The "Flett" is the area for residents with domestic and daily routines. Alongside both sides of the "Groot Däl" stable areas are detached, divided by rows of poles, but still is open to the central area. Orthogonal to this part of the hall lies the "Flett". It is the place of living, coming

Fig. 7 Main façade of a two stand house with the Groot Dör (Hof Hoffmann, museum village of Cloppenburg.) The eaves are far down according to the constructive system of the two stand house.

Fig. 8 Garden façadeof the same building (Hof Hoffmann, museum village of Cloppenburg). Flett and chamber area lie behind this façade.

Fig. 9 Main façade of a four stand house (Wehlburg, museum village of Cloppenburg). The eaves here are fundamentally higher than at the previous example.

together, eating, sleeping, and washing as well as the space for housework. Centre of the house forms the open fireplace, which is in early examples only a small sinking in the ground where firewood is then put. Since there is no chimney or other smoke outlet and smoke is distributed in the whole house, this building type also is called "smoke house" (Lindner: 1999).

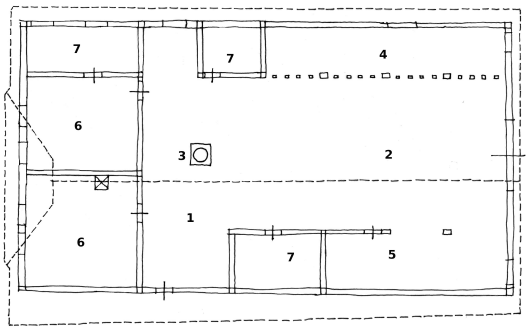

Fig. 10


Fig. 11

Centre of the country economic production is the "Groot Däl". This part of the hall is provided for milking and fodder place, storage space or place of the processing of harvest and other activities. On both sides of the hall lie the open stable areas. Cattle and horses are accommodated here, probably to benefit from the body heat of the animals, at least in the first place. In later examples, when dimensions of the hall houses got bigger, this factor did not play a role no more, nevertheless cattle was not banished from the hall house for a long time.
The second part of the hall, the "Flett", is mainly the living area for the farmer's family and their domestics. It is the places to live, come together, sleep and do housework. Kitchen area, washing place, sitting- and eating areas are strung besides each other however without a spatial separation (Fig.12). It can be assumed that the complete domestic life took place here in the open of the hall. Only the beds are put in wall closets with sliding doors (Fig.13). These "Schlafluchten" seem sensible when considering that only one open fire was the only source of heating. During the nighttime it would be dangerous to hold the open fire. The small "Schlafluchten" could be held warm by body heat, at least tolerably. Besides, the beds "disappear" during the day and do not block the space in the "Flett" - a solution that could add to the use also in modern loft conversions. Merely farm hands had their beds in another place of the house. Their sleeping boxes lay close to the stable area for the horses, which gave them the ability to watch the horses on one hand, but also to prevent "immoral" activities during the nighttime.


Fig. 12


Fig. 13

The fireplace is of special significance. It is certainly the hearth and cooking place as well as the only source of heat, at least in the early examples. The fireplace was an open one with no chimney (Fig.14). This seems to be not very comfortable when the smoke distributes in the whole house. It, too, was dangerous in the latently fire endangered buildings: the wooden framed construction on one hand was endangered itself. Besides, crops and hay were put up to the loft area of the houses. This all was responsible that the hall houses regularly burnt down. However, the open fireplace was only given up re-willingly. The benefits of a "smoke-house" predominated. The escaping smoke protected harvest from pest and insects. Besides, meat and sausages were hung up on top of the fireplace and thus were conserved by smoking. Therefore, chimneys where included relatively late (Fig.15).


Fig. 14

Fig. 10 A typical ground plan of a hall house (here a three stand house). 1. Flett, 2. Groot Däl, 3.fire place (without smoke outlet), 4., 5.stable areas, 6. room (heatable), 7. chamber (non-heatable).

Fig. 11 Stable area and Groot Däl of a four stand house (Wehlburg, museum village of Cloppenburg)

Fig. 12 Fire and cooking area in a hall house without smoke outlet

Fig. 13 Closet for sleeping ("Schlaflucht) in a hall house

Fig. 14 Detail of a fire place at ground level. The lattice serve for holding embers and heating material. Above the boiler hook and hanging facilitiesfor smoking meat and sausages.

Fig. 15

Perhaps this also can be explained by the fact that the fireplace not only was used for every day purpose. The fire was the centre of the rural life. Besides sitting together for the meals and in the evening (this is why benches and chairs are grouped around the open fire) all important events were also held here. Contracts were sealed; the bridegroom led his wife around the boiler hook as a sign that she could participate in his possession as of now. The domiciliary rights were passed on from father to son and from mother to her daughter-in-law. Victims of persecution were protected from pursuers by touching the boiler hook (Beckenrath: 1921). The borders of villages were closed from boiler hook to boiler hook. The fireplace consequently lies at a special point of the hall house, namely at the crossing of "Groot Dör" and "Flett". Being the most important area of the hall, the fireplace was decorated richly with decorative dishes made of loam, wood or brass, all splendidly ornamented. Besides further representative elements, such as an oak table, chairs and boxes all ornamented with woodcarvings. One chair was placed directly next to the fire, provided only for the wife of the farmer. From here she not only could watch the fire but also could control the events and activities in the whole house.

As shown above, the concept of the hall house is highly organised and not chaotic at all, although all is happening in only one big hall. This inner organisation is, too, continued in the outside of the house. It can be stated that the hall house is logically connected to the court. The "Groot Dör", the main entrance lies at the end of the "Groot Däl" (Fig.16). It is big enough to move livestock, harvest and machines in and out. It is, too, the highly visible because decorated element of each farmhouse, facing the village green. In many other regions within central Europe, the gate where such farming activities take place are believed to be minor ones, dirty and anyway not worthy to be in the main façade. Stables in the adjacent regions will be oriented to the dirty back street and thus the work related entrance is a simple gate. In "Rundling" villages this is different. The representative main entrance is combined with the working and farming related gate that connects house and village green. An explanation may be found in the logic of the ground plan, as well as the natural environmental factors: the farming related area, the "Groot Däl" lies close to the main entrance to avoid long ways with the heavy equipment and livestock. For activities carried out in the further off "Flett" longer ways are of subordinate importance. It too, seems to be a sensitive plot to place the "Groot Däl" next to the village green when looking at the natural environment: "Rundlinge" are built in a permanently flood endangered area, where only villages are perched on small hilltops. Therefore, livestock is led to the village green in first place, to then bring them to the pastures.

Fig. 16

As pointed out above, the plan of the nuclear village, the "Rundling", is also subject to a special spatial concept. The strategy of the nuclear village is not arbitrary but extremely organized according to its various social functions. The roughly round village green forms the centre of both, the built village and the social nucleus. The gable sides of the hall houses, which give the village green its characteristics by displaying the richly ornamented facades, enclose it. In concentric rings the various areas are attached, arranged by their social and economical importance. The border to the surrounding countryside is formed by a greenbelt, with adjacent fields, pastures and meadows. The social logic of the "Wenden" is mirrored in the ground plan of the hall house, the court and finally in the layout of the entire village. House, court and nuclear village thus can be seen as a unit paying respect to the traditions of living, working and social ideas of the "Wenden".

Conclusions

The Lower Saxon hall house had an inner logic, with a ground floor plan suiting perfectly to people, landscape, cultural identity of inhabitants, and finally to the farming methods in this area. This inner social logic between house and needs of people was so obvious for anyone that there was simply no need to conserve old buildings or have plans prepared by architects; moreover, its layout was easily understood by all and thus new buildings always followed the concepts of the old days. There was simply no need to for conservation.

Fig. 15 Fire place with chimney built with mortar in front of the open fire. Above the fire place the boiler hook is visible.

Fig. 16 Entrance area of a four stand hous (Wehlburg, museum village of Cloppenburg)

However, in the last few decades, starting in the 1960ies, farming became more intensified and more space was needed for both, stables and storage spaces. The new requirements of space forced people to build extra stables and sheds. In the turn, the hall house was simply too big to live in. Besides, the group of people living in one household was smaller than in previous years. By then only nuclear family occupied one house, sometimes accompanied by grandparents, but no more farm hands and maids.
Secondly, the decline of farmers generally and the appearance of many new settlers not involved in farming were too responsible factors that changed not only the layout of farms and houses, but also transformed many villages completely. The new settlers, mainly from nearby cities, introduced new standards of living. The concept of a cell type house with easily heatable small rooms for the many purposes seemed to be more suitable for living in the 20th century. These mostly detached houses on small gardenplots for just residential use for a nuclear family working elsewhere are much smaller, there is no need for stables or sheds to store crops, garden plots are very small and for recreation of the families only.

This transformation of the appearance of the villages took place rapidly, and therefore it is more than comprehensible that soon after conserving and protecting the few remaining old buildings was a major issue in many villages in the area. The change of the appearance of the old villages was a major driving force to somehow conserve and keep old structures in the villages and thus also the hall houses. A vivid discussion arose and many strategies were launched to somehow re-use old buildings. Today, new uses are found for many of the still existing hall houses (they still tend to burn down and are not made for finiteness). Many are used as pubs and restaurants, studies of architects, designers, or small enterprises of the creative economy, and some also for residential purpose. Unfortunately, many of the new uses need other layouts of the ground floor plan, particularly cells and rooms. Therefore many old buildings are nowadays subdivided into several sub-units, comprising kitchen areas, sanitary facilities, and small rooms of all sorts. In the end, facades and basic construction are still old, but do not correspond to the ground floor plans any more. The procedure of just conserving facades but denying the organisation of the building has hardly anything to do with real conservation and keeping heritage alive. Heritage should also mean to not forget about the way of living, the social logic of a house and ideally transform this particular way of living in such a hall house into the future. Only if it is possible to transport the very special lifestyle to the future and allow some changes of the building to foster new needs, heritage and cultural identity of the region can stay alive.

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