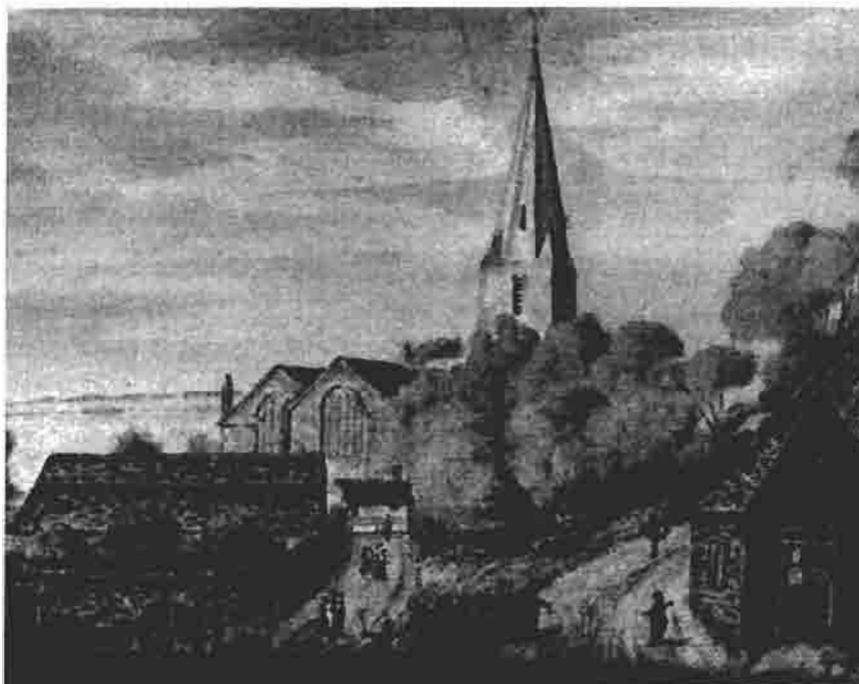


DEVON BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 21



Summer 2003

DEVON BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 21, SUMMER 2003

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Front cover: St George's Church, Modbury in 1830, showing the long Perpendicular east window (matching those of the aisles), before its Victorian replacement by a much shorter Gothic one: drawn by *Miss Charlotte Stackhouse*, daughter of the vicar.

A suggested reconstruction drawing of a church house in use: © *Norman Young*

Thatching sequence from the DCC leaflet: © *Michael Bull*, Keystone & DCC

Poltimore House, drawn by *Edmund Prideaux* before 1716

Poltimore House & Garden, drawn by *Edmund Prideaux* 1716

Poltimore House's new C18 front, drawn by *Edmund Prideaux* c1727

Poltimore House, drawn by *R Ackerman* 1827

Pegged boards *in situ* in the roof of St Nicholas' Church, Brushford, Somerset: © *David Yarham Associates*

A board salvaged from the roof of St Nicholas' Church: *Stuart Blaylock*

The mid C18 saloon at Poltimore House, with its rococo plaster ceiling and mirror frames, photographed c1990

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Annual General Meeting 2002

DBG's Seventeenth AGM was held at the Exeter Inn, Modbury, on Saturday 12th October, where the upstairs parlour used for the meeting provided architectural treats, in having an early C17 thin-rib decorated plaster ceiling – albeit one that had been picked out in gold paint – and an early C18 eared fireplace – also rather unfortunately treated, in having been stripped and stained dark brown and given an extra mantel plank.

Philip Andrews, of the Modbury Local History Society and whose family had come to Traine House in the C19, kindly came to welcome us and brought a selection of local leaflets and some excellent booklets on the town and the church, for members to buy.

Thirty members attended and conducted the business of the day. Members of the Committee still serving were: Ann Adams, Jo Cox, Dawn Honeysett, Jenny Sanders, Su Scotting and John Thorp. Stuart Blaylock, Oliver Bosence, Stewart Brown, Richard Parker, Peter Roseveare & Jeremy Sharpe all retired by three-year rotation but all except Jeremy were standing for re-election. Peter Child had been proposed for the Committee by Ann Adams and seconded by Peter Roseveare. The new Committee now consists of the old Committee, without Jeremy but we welcome Peter Child as the new member.

There was considerable discussion of DBG's future role in the protection of historic buildings – discussion opened on p7 of Newsletter No. 20 – and the different forms which it might take. It was noted that English Heritage is to produce a list of accredited craftsmen and engineers, which many should find useful.

At the close of business, Robert Waterhouse gave a 55min talk on the history of and current excavations at Shilston and the progress of the revelation of the late C17 and early C18 water gardens there. Shilston, from the mid C15, was the home of the Hill family. The judge, Robert Hill, seems to have built the first mansion there, with gardens of its own. (Members may remember seeing a 1611 brass to Elizabeth Hill of Shilston, wife of John Carew, at Hacombe church last year). The Savery family, of Totnes and Ugborough, seem to have bought or inherited Shilston, in the C17, and built a new seven bay mansion, overlooking an incredible landscape garden with elaborate water features. After Shilston, Robert showed us slides of the interior fixtures and plasterwork of the early C18 Chain House, which we should not be able to see except from the outside.

At 1pm members visited the parish church of St George, originally a Norman church absorbed into partnership with a small Benedictine alien priory, built adjacent to it in the early C12. This interesting church reveals much of its evolution – for instance in the stonework of a much higher, narrower chancel arch, above the present one, and in the widening of the south aisle, which respects the earlier porch and so gives a clear impression of the original proportions. St George's is one of that small group of churches (Thorverton is another) which possess probably C14 two-storey porches, with winder stairs to the upper floor. At Modbury, the floor itself no longer exists but the doorway in the west wall and the stair tower still do. This church also possesses a remarkable, though often damaged, collection of medieval and later effigies and other monuments, including an unidentified C13 knight, a C14 Prideaux (the family

was at Orcherton from at least the late C13 and for fifteen generations), C15 Champernownes (of the now demolished Modbury House), a splendid acrostic memorial slab to Oliver Hill of Shilston (1573), a pictorial wall panel to Nicholas & Anne Downey and their numerous children and memorials to late C17 Swetes of Traine (which they inherited c1520). There is also a floor slab to Humphrey Shiner, mercer, and his wife (1695 & 1696), demonstrating the importance of the wool trade to the town, which remained until the C19.

After lunch, Robert took us on a walk through the town, up Brownstone Street, to see the delightful Chain House, with its dentilled eaves, Portland string-course, cills and keystones and handsome lead rain-water down-pipes, also several other interesting buildings in the same street, including a handsome conduit head, formerly in the middle of the road but re-erected at the side in the C19, and New Train House, at the top of the road. Then we walked down to Poundswell and the exterior of the medieval great house there, much altered in the C17, then Georgianised and now divided (home of the Andrews family, who built New Train). The last destination of the day was, in packed cars, to Gate Farm, Brownstone. There its owner, David Neat, very kindly allowed us to explore the ground floor of his probably evolved longhouse – and particularly its C17 kitchen wing, with oven and corbelled-roofed smoking chamber, at the back of a very wide hearth.

Once again, DBG was lucky with some beautiful weather and we owe a special debt of gratitude to Robert, in whose professional patch Modbury lies, and on whose expertise we relied all day.

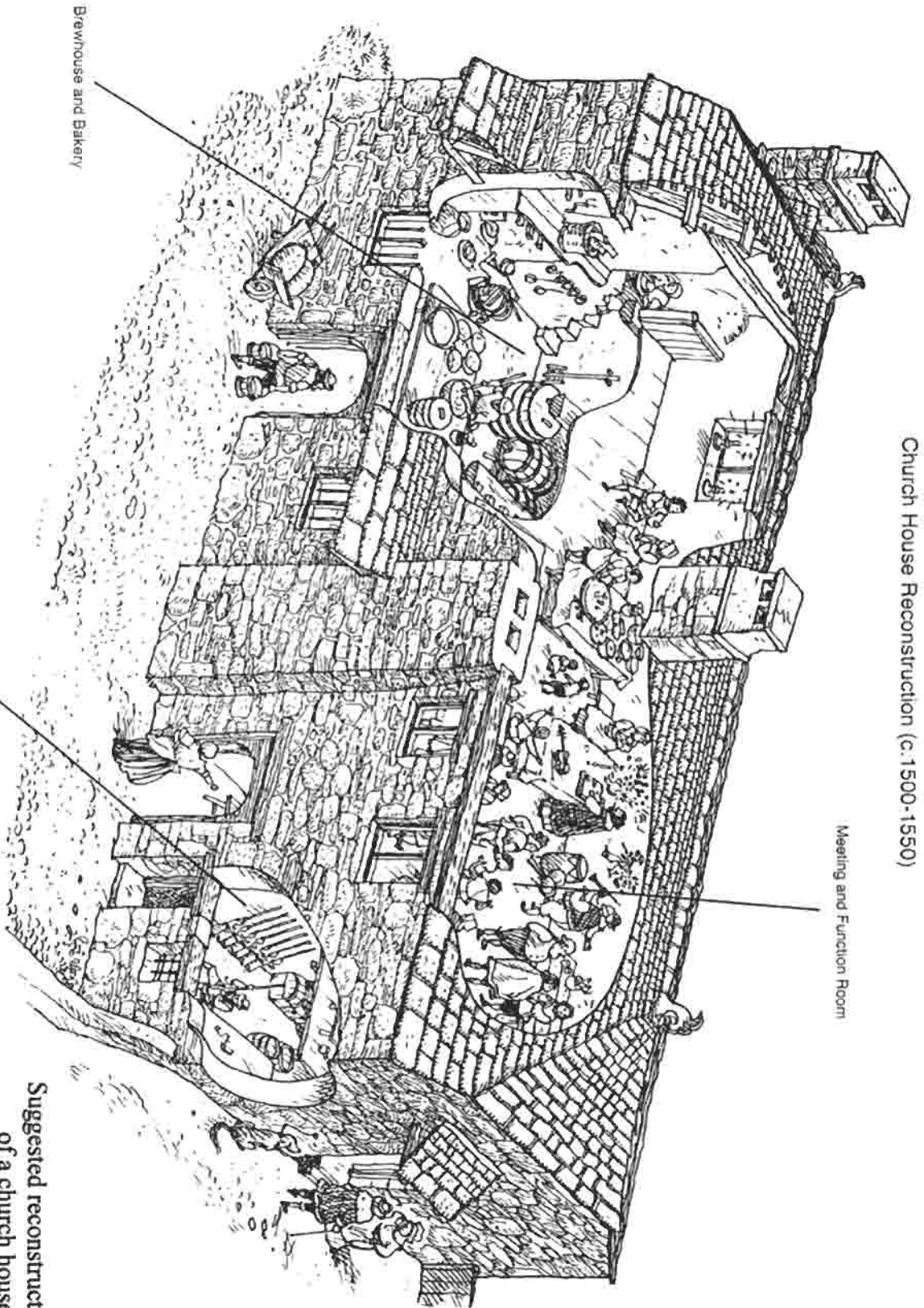
Summer Conference 2003

On Saturday 14th June 53 members and 4 guests attended DBG's 18th Annual Conference, at Sampford Courtenay. The topic was *Church Houses* and it was entirely appropriate that the venue was a late medieval church house, traditionally associated with the Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549, and where the upper room, probably uniquely, still retains one of its long tables, with benches and stool, all fitted through the floor to the beams below. The building stands facing out on the square, with its back against the churchyard and rear windows looking towards the great tower and south porch of the church – demonstrating the intimate relationship between the two buildings. DBG used the upper floor for the lectures and refreshments and the lower for displays of drawings and photographs and for a bookstall of Devonshire books, run by the Mint Press.

While making the preparations for the Conference, I was very much struck by the almost total lack of local understanding of the origins and function of these buildings, before the Reformation. Even Copeland's series of illustrated articles, in the Transactions of the Devonshire Association, only attempts to catalogue those that remain and nowhere actually addresses the specific purposes for which they were designed, after it was thought no longer appropriate for feasts and parish business to be conducted in the nave of the church.

Some of these buildings have since been demolished, some have been converted for residential use (often, at first, as poor houses), many retained their traditional association with brewing and hospitality and became inns, while a few have kept a parochial use and become church rooms, like Sampford Courtenay's and the two

Church House Reconstruction (c. 1500-1550)



Suggested reconstruction drawing
of a church house in use
© Norman Young

others, at South Tawton and Drewsteignton, which we also visited.

Our first speaker was John Thorp, who gave us a fascinating unillustrated talk, based on the very early churchwardens' accounts of Yatton in Somerset, which detail the rebuilding of the church house there, between 1471 and 1473. This unique document, among a wealth of other information, has enabled John to map the sources of the building materials used in the project. A copy of the resulting coloured chart was part of the notes provided on the day.

Unfortunately, the arrival of Dr Joanna Mattingly, who was expected to be our principal speaker of the morning session, was very much delayed. However, Stewart Brown gave a short talk on a medieval monastic building he has observed at Buckfast Abbey, during his ongoing survey of the site, which so much resembles the traditional layout of a church house that he wonders if it could have been the model for those later parochial buildings.

Robert Waterhouse skilfully expanded his expected contribution, an illustrated talk on some detailed studies of church houses in the South Hams, which he made some years ago for a thesis, and large drawings from which were displayed on the walls of the room below. In particular, these studies had shown certain characteristic positioning of door openings in the fronts of the buildings, which help so greatly in their identification.

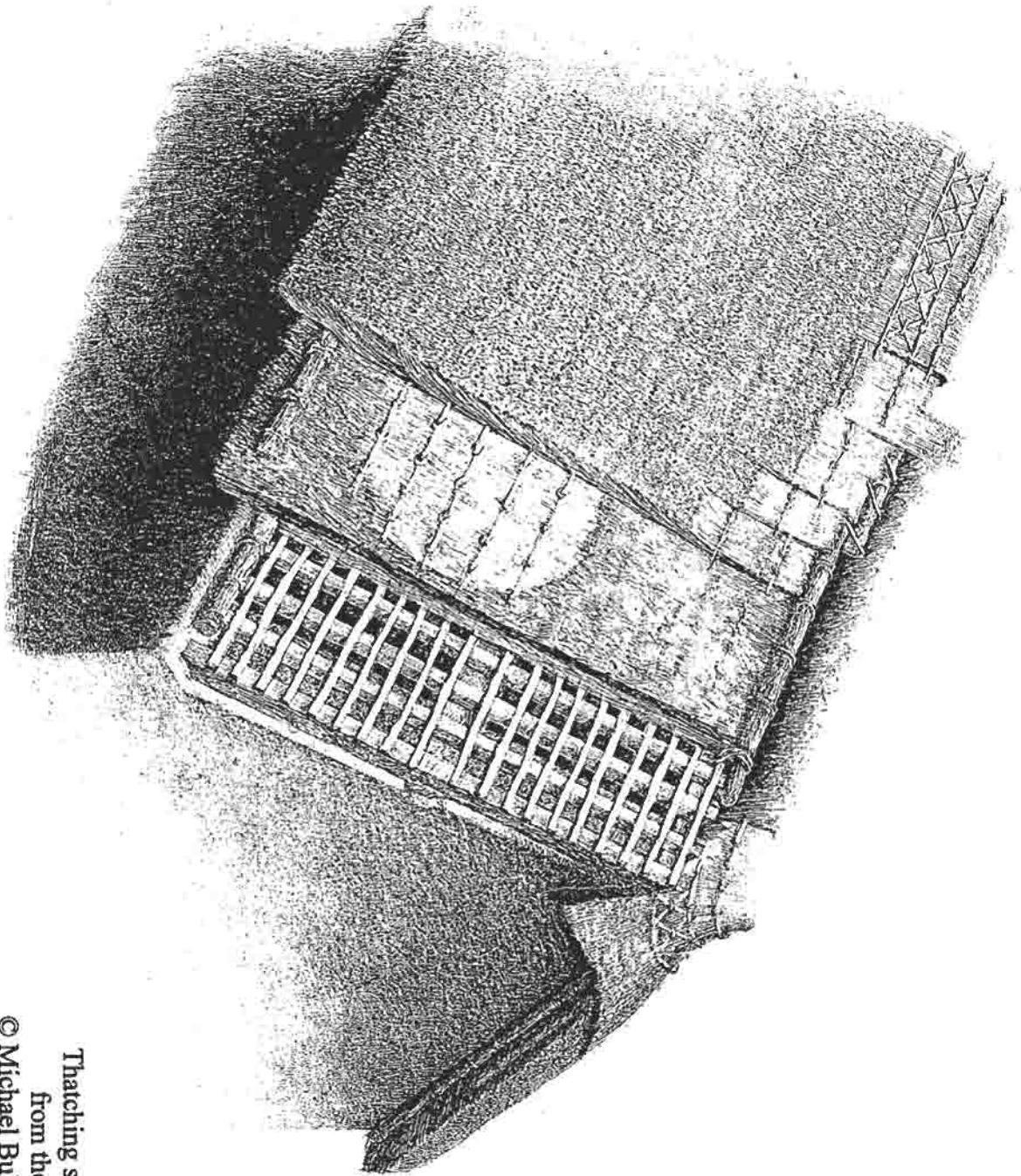
The morning session was rounded off by questions from the floor and general discussion, when Nat Alcock, who had made a study of Sampford Courtenay's church house many years ago, joined the panel of speakers.

Lunch was taken in the Oxenham Arms and the Kings Arms, at South Zeal, and afterwards we visited the church and church house at South

Tawton – by then accompanied by Jo Mattingly. John Thorp, who has been engaged in historic survey work there, in preparation for a lottery bid for vital repairs, described the building stages from its dramatic external stairs, before we went inside. Part of the roof of South Tawton's church house is smoke blackened and so must pre-date the complete flooring over and the chimneys. As at Sampford Courtenay, a number of members found time to visit the splendid adjacent church, which was also opened for us.

From South Tawton, we went to our final destination of the day, the church and church house of Drewsteignton. Here we again saw over the church house – this one still with a winder stair in the NW corner – and then Jo Mattingly gave us much of her promised talk of the morning, in the churchyard – her audience seated about among the graves. Jo has made a particularly wide-ranging study of surviving and/or documented church houses throughout England and Wales, attempting to identify and quantify them, county by county. Interestingly, although there are the greatest number of all in Devon, she has only been able to find a tiny number in the northernmost counties of England. (She very kindly provided a chart of these results, together with another of historic references to the donation of building plots, their positions, area and donors, for the Conference notes). In such a setting, in warm afternoon sunshine, the final talk was an unforgettable experience and a number of members actually managed to see the accompanying slides, holding them up to the sky.

The Conference finally dispersed after we enjoyed ice creams in the square, from Drewsteignton's excellent PO stores. Anyone wanting a set of the Conference notes may obtain one for £1.50, sent to me and made out to



Thatching sequence drawing
from the DCC leaflet
© Michael Bull, Keystone & DCC

Devon Buildings Group. And anyone wanting to know more about how church houses were used – for the social enjoyment of the whole parish and its neighbours and to raise most of the funds for the running of the church – should read Eamon Duffy's wonderful book, *The Voices of Morebath*: Yale 2001.

New Members

Since Newsletter No.20, we have welcomed the following new members
Miss Lynne Pardoe of Barnstaple,
Mrs Elizabeth A Thornthwaite of
 Ferndown, Dorset
Mr Peter C Townsend of Honiton
Mr Norman Young of Totnes
Mr James & Mrs Jenny Harries of
 Topsham
Ms Deborah Horton of Wembury
Mrs Bridget Gillard of Bratton
 Clovelly
Mr Philip E White of Christow
Mr Jeremy Cheshier of East Looe,
 Cornwall
Mr Christopher G Powell of Topsham

Annual General Meeting

DBG's 18th AGM will be on
Saturday 25th October at Winkleigh
(see enclosed notice).

Ann Adams, Secretary
Hayne, Zeal Monachorum, Crediton
EX17 6DE (01363) 82292

EXETER'S HISTORIC MAPS

Between 31st January and 17th April 2004, the Royal Albert Memorial museum will be displaying the temporary exhibition '*Circled With Stone*'. The exhibition has been designed to accompany Dr Mark Stoye's newly published book of the same name (see enclosed flier), which presents a study of Exeter's city walls

between 1485 and 1660. This will be the only occasion on which the city's outstanding collection of Tudor and early Stuart manuscript maps has been exhibited in one place. They include the charming and informative maps of John Hooker, in Elizabeth's reign, and the picturesque depictions of the city by Robert Sherwood, the city's C17 surveyor. The exhibition will be mounted as a collaborative venture between Exeter City Museums, the Devon Record Office, the Devon & Exeter Institution, Exeter Cathedral Library and the Westcountry Studies Library. It is hoped that maps from the British Library and the Corporation of London Record Office will also be included. Admission is free and the museum is open 10.00-17.00, Monday to Saturday. An exhibition not to be missed.

THATCH IN DEVON

This spring, Devon County Council has produced a leaflet on thatch and thatching, designed to provide advice and information for the owners of thatched buildings. The leaflet explains some of the history of the local tradition of combed straw (usually called 'combed wheat reed', or 'combed reed') and includes advice on finding a good thatcher, fire prevention in thatched houses, traditional local thatching detail and guidance on the need for Listed Building Consent to make alterations. The drawing shown here, by Michael Bull, is included in the leaflet. To the right the drawing omits the thatch so that the roof construction can be seen. Horizontal thatching battens are attached to the backs of the rafters. The rest of the drawing shows the practice of 'overcoating' new thatch on to old, the usual thatching technique in this county whether combed straw or water

reed is used. The overcoating method means that many Devon roofs preserve large quantities of ancient thatch. The drawing (© Michael Bull, Keystone and DCC) shows how the thatcher has stripped the old thatch back, but only far enough to provide a sound base into which fix the new overcoat. At the eaves he has fixed a bundle of straw horizontally to give the new coat a 'kick'. This contributes to the way the straw lies on the roof, the ends pointing slightly upwards. The thatcher has put a patch into the old thatch where he has found a hollow, to ensure that the roof is completely even for taking the overcoat. This is vital if water is going to be shed quickly and efficiently off the roof. The new thatch is put on in courses, as you can see near the top of the roof, the fixings concealed by the course above. The type of ridge shown here is made by wrapping a course of thatch over rolls of straw attached to the apex of the roof structure. The fixings of the ridge are exposed and it is completed by shearing it flush with the plane of the rest of the roof.

The leaflet is obtainable from: The Historic Buildings Section, Environment Directorate, County Hall, Exeter EX2 4QW (01392) 382261.

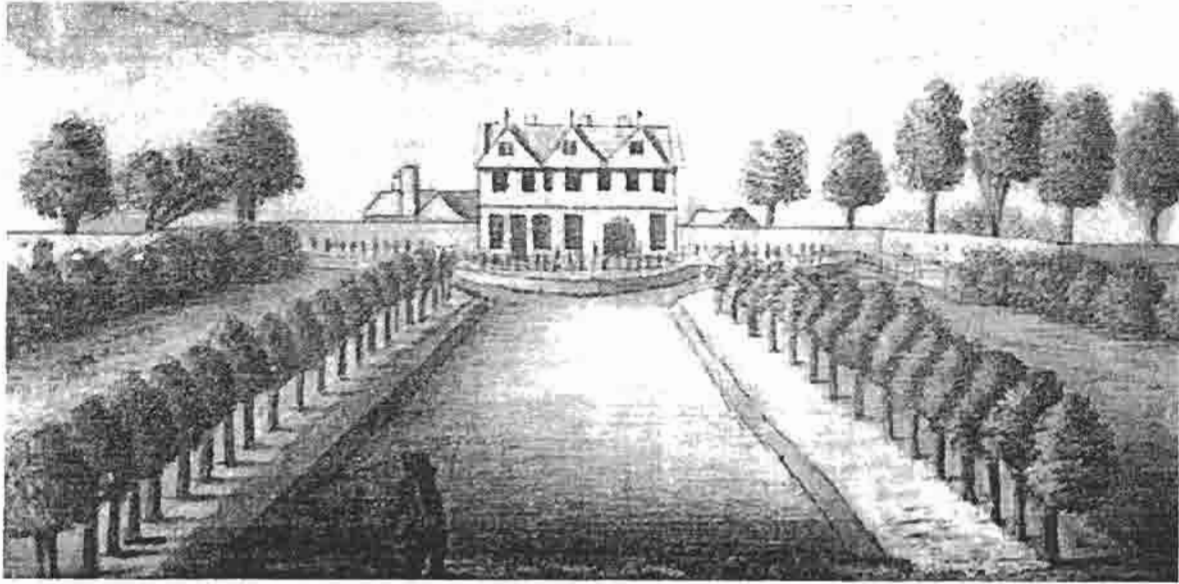
POLTIMORE HOUSE

Poltimore House just east of Exeter and close to the M5 is arguably Devon's most important Building at Risk. In the manner of many of the County's great houses, it has been enlarged from its original form by successive generations so that the original Elizabethan building survives in an envelope of building of later periods, in particular the early 18th century, the date of the main front, and the early 19th century, when an

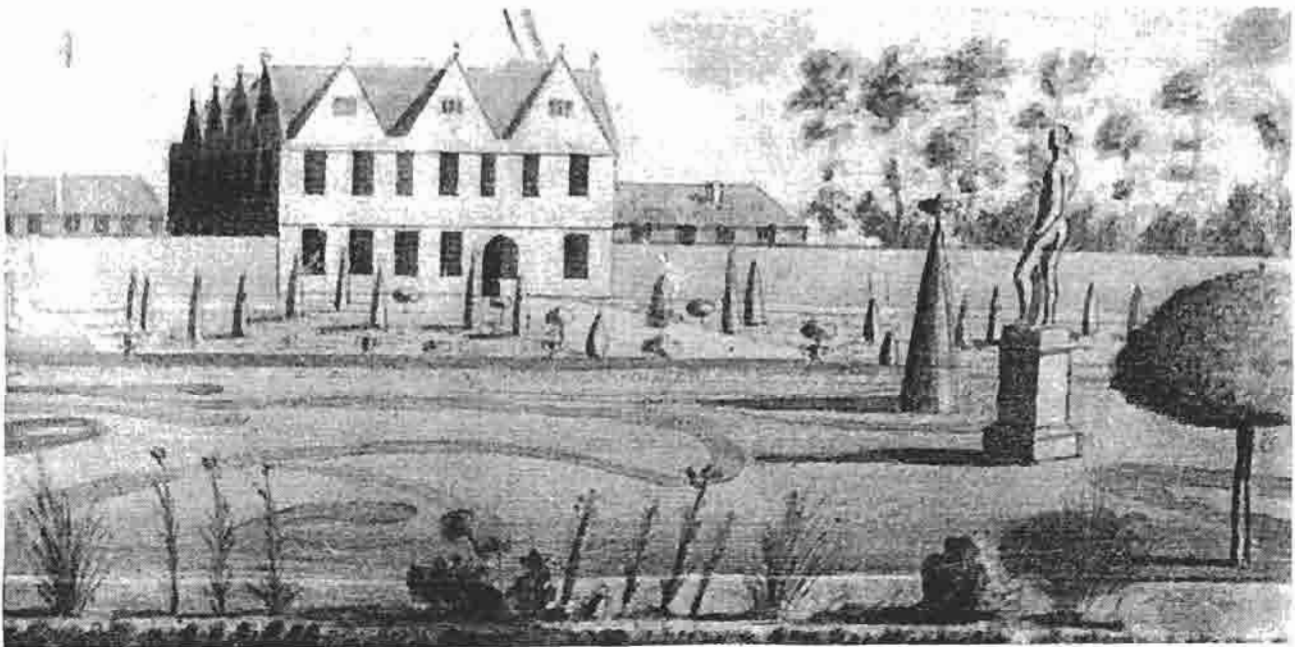
imperial staircase was inserted into the central courtyard. The mid 18th century saloon is notable for its plasterwork.

It was the seat of the Bampfylde family (later Barons Poltimore) until the 1920s when it became a boarding school, then a hospital from 1945 to 1975, after which it was a residential home which became bankrupt in 1987. It then passed into the hands of developers who in their turn went bankrupt and was then escheated to the Crown, which enjoys immunity from the listed building processes, precluding the Local Authority from taking any action to secure its condition. The Crown did not release its hold until 1996, when it passed, thanks to English Heritage, into the hands of the Buildings at Risk Trust, a national organisation with a remit to take on very difficult buildings. They subsequently handed it on to a local body, the Poltimore House Trust who are the current owners. When the house was empty from 1987 onwards it suffered appalling vandalism and was stripped of many of its period features. Two door surrounds even turned up for sale in Ireland! However, heroic efforts, especially by East Devon District Council helped by English Heritage, got the house reasonably secure and weatherproof, although the *temporary works carried out then now need renewing.*

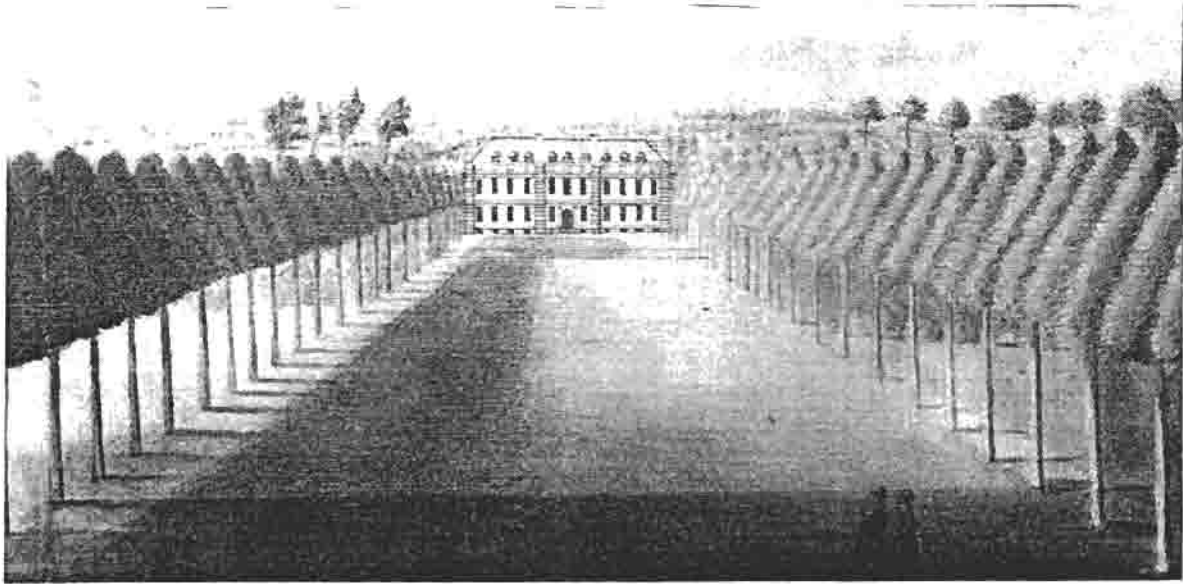
Shortly after the house was acquired by the Poltimore House Trust, the latter was approached by Clive Adams, who had obtained substantial funding from South West Arts, to put together a bid to Arts Lottery for a project to create the 'Centre for Contemporary Arts in the Natural World' (CCANW). The house and its grounds were to be used as a gallery, research base and studios for this project, and a detailed proposal was drawn up over the next two years for the restoration of the house in



**Poltimore House, showing its Tudor gables (three of which remain at the rear)
drawn by Edmund Prideaux before 1716**



Poltimore House & garden, drawn by Edmund Prideaux in 1716



The new C18 front of Poltimore House, drawn by Edmund Prideaux c1727



Poltimore House drawn by R Ackerman in 1827

conjunction with the construction of a new gallery wing on the west side. The architects for the repair work were Simpson and Brown, and for the new wing Richard Murphy, both from Edinburgh. Although the new work involved significant alteration to the house, general agreement was reached that the final result would have given Devon an outstanding new piece of architecture while at the same time rescuing the historic house. The Trust were enthusiastic about it as it provided a use for the house which would have given a viable use, while also offering full public access, something that schemes for business or domestic use would not readily provide.

The Arts Lottery scene is, however, ever-changing and by the time a joint application was made in 2001 to it and Heritage Lottery for £7,000,000, towards a total cost of £11,000,000, despite its previous support, it rejected the bid. Disgracefully, it would not even explain why it thought the project unsuitable. Heritage Lottery not unreasonably also turned down the parallel application as it felt the matter was essentially arts led. A further bid to Heritage Lottery alone in 2002 was also turned down, this time because it was not persuaded that the scheme was now viable. Although CCANW, as a concept, is still alive and a new business plan is being drawn up to assess the viability of an amended proposal, the Trust feel that they must start to explore other possible uses, to ensure that work to save the house can start in the foreseeable future. In the meantime English Heritage have made a generous grant offer to enable the construction of a temporary roof over the house to try to hold further deterioration from water penetration. Such a roof will also enable the house to dry out, something that would have to happen anyway before any work

could be commenced. It is hoped that this roof will be erected shortly.

The saga of Poltimore House in recent years has been a sad one. The failure to date to secure funding for the CCANW scheme, which would have given the house a most appropriate public use together with a major piece of contemporary architecture, is particularly to be regretted. Its future is at the moment wholly obscure but not actively threatened. A new use will be found!

Peter Child

EVIDENCE FOR SHINGLED ROOFS IN SOME DEVON & SOMERSET CHURCHES

A recent find of some heavily pegged oak boards in the roof of the church of St Nicholas, Brushford, Somerset, has led to investigation of the evidence for shingled roofs in Devon churches. This has allowed a more certain interpretation of similar items previously observed elsewhere. This note aims to draw attention to the former ubiquity of shingles as a roofing material, and to the nature of typical surviving evidence for shingled roofs, to evaluate some sources for former roofing materials, and to appeal for further information, in order to increase knowledge of this little known roofing material.

Background and context of this note:

There is no doubt that shingles once formed an important type of roofing material, and equally that very few examples survive. Some extant shingles are known to be preserved beneath thatch in a domestic roof at Cottles Barton, North Tawton (Cherry and Pevsner 1989, p292). This is the

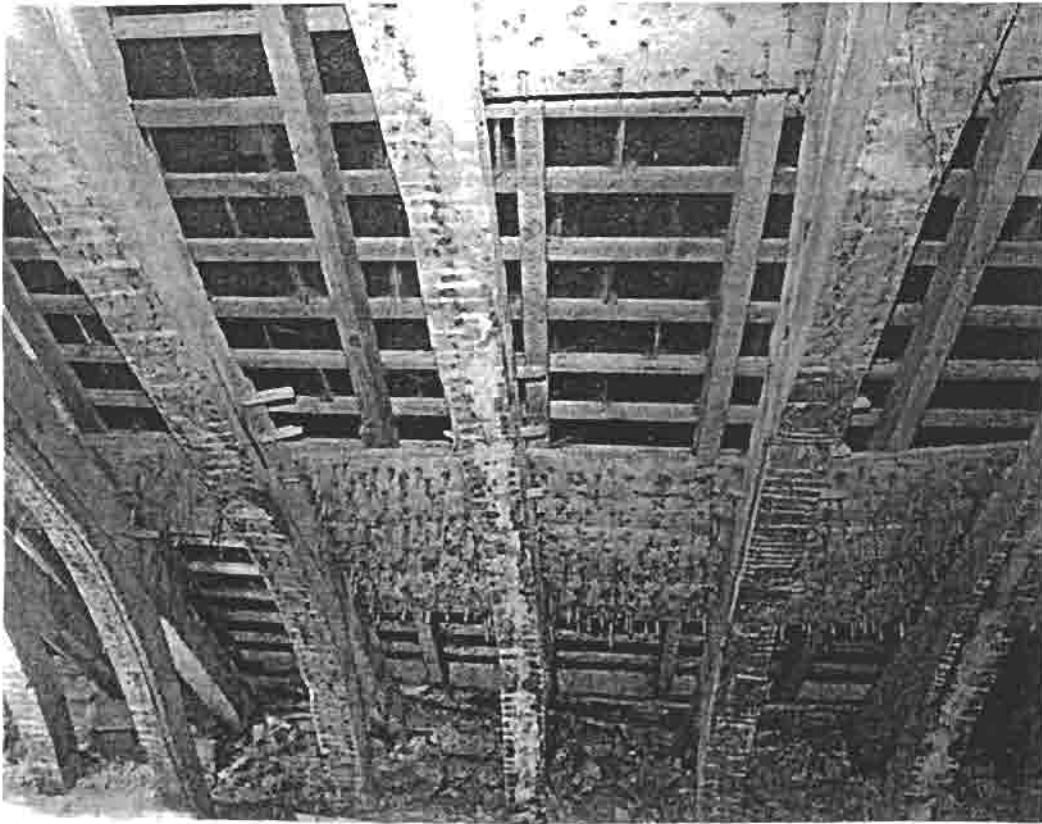
only domestic example of shingles *in situ* known to the author at the time of writing. One type of structure where shingles do survive is on church spires, at Hatherleigh, North Tawton and West Worlington in Devon, (*ibid.* pp475, 604, 904); Porlock in Somerset: (Pevsner 1958, p275; Edlin 1949, p94). Shingles have probably proved more durable on spires than on mainstream roofs because their much steeper pitch promotes rapid run off of water, and thereby impedes the damp and rot, which are the main threats to the longevity of the timber.

The Brushford find

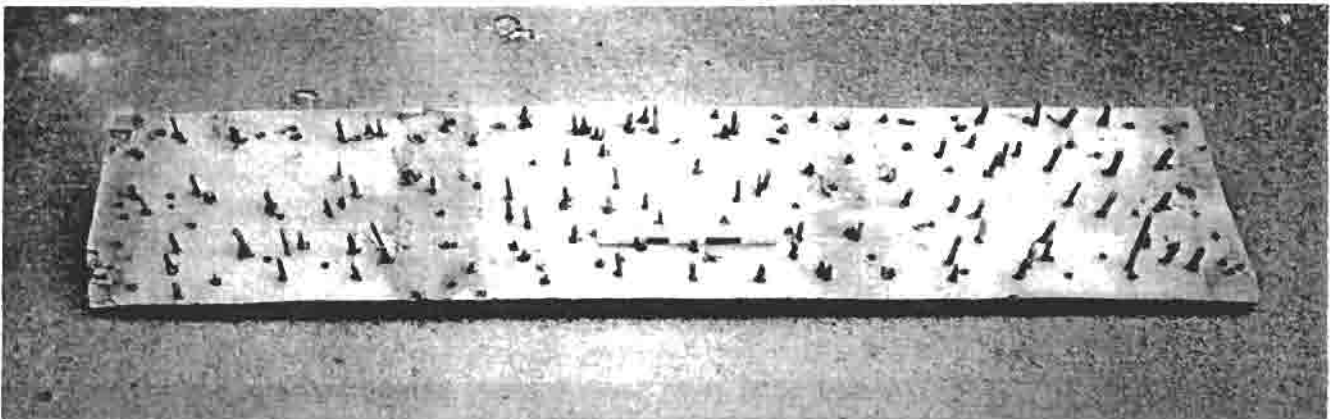
The material from Brushford available for study consisted of four lengths of oak plank removed from the church roof during repairs in 2001-02. Of these, one, the largest to survive (1595 x 320 x 25mm; almost 5'3" x 12½" x 1") was much the most informative; the others represented smaller or less well-preserved examples with similar features. The plank was studded with numerous long oak pegs, square or faceted in section, driven into drilled holes. Many of the pegs protrude through the underside of the timbers, but lie flush with the upper side (and were presumed to have been knocked through when re-roofing took place in the past). The positions of common rafters were visible as darker stained areas on the underside of the plank, and only in these areas were the pegs not knocked through (presumably because the presence of the rafters beneath prevented this). Here they had been cut off flush with the upper side of the board. The pegs averaged 25-50mm (1-2") in length, but occasional examples were up to 100mm (4") in length. The numerous pegs, spaced so closely together, strongly suggest evidence for more than one phase of use. There is a tendency for the pegs to be grouped in pairs, which also might

encourage such an interpretation (especially since many of these appear to have been too close together to have been contemporary double pegs for fixing individual shingles).

Interpretation: Viewed objectively, the boards could have been used with roof coverings of either shingles or slates. But a number of examples have been found in contexts where there is evidence of some sort for association with shingles (below) and no examples have yet been observed in association with a slated roof. There are many examples of pegged slate roofs where the slates are hung on laths (the standard technique). Nevertheless, in theory at least, there is nothing against the possibility that such boards could have been used for slates, if the builder wished to impart a smooth undersurface to the roof covering (albeit one heavily 'spiked' with pegs), and one example of slates pegged to boards is reported by Cox and Thorp (1991, p5). Since all of the other known examples of this type of feature seem to relate to shingles, or are associated with surviving shingles or fragments thereof, it would seem reasonable on the presently-available evidence to accept that the Brushford boards represent a shingled roof on the church for a substantial period, prior to its re-roofing with softwood and slate in the 19th century. The main function of the board is to provide a solid bed for the roof covering - a more important function with shingles than with heavier slates. Shingles need the more rigid backing provided by planks such as these; slates remain in position through inertia (even where not helped by the adhesive properties of mortar bedding) and have considerably more resistance to wind lift than similarly-fixed shingles. A technical objection to fixing slates to boards relates to ventilation: slates so fixed would be prone to trapping condensation



Pegged boards *in situ* in the roof of St Nicholas' Church, Brushford, Somerset
courtesy David Yarham Associates



A board salvaged from the roof of St Nicholas' Church,
showing the underside with several phases of protruding pegs for shingles
(note the discolouration, indicating the positions of the common rafters)

between the (relatively impermeable) slate and the boards, where normally evaporation could easily take place when slates were hung on laths; shingles would have been exempt from this problem, since the timber was that much more absorbent. The Brushford boards are thus interpreted as representing pegged shingle roofs.

Date: The timbers are of unknown date (although they are being sampled for dendrochronological dating by Ian Tyers of Sheffield as this note is written). They could belong to the late medieval re-roofing of the church, or to any period thereafter up to a generation or two before the addition of the softwood roof now on the church (i.e. leaving a sufficient interval, prior to this latest re-roofing, for a shingled roof to be installed and decay to the point where replacement was necessary. Estimates of the lifespan of a shingled roof vary from 60 to 100 years [Clifton-Taylor 1972, p331] and would probably be substantially more if a period of neglect is included in the reckoning). Shingles were certainly widely used as a roofing material in the medieval period (Salzman 1967, pp228-9), and single shingles have been excavated from medieval contexts in London and Winchester (Egan 1998, p31).

Parallels and distribution of shingled roofs

Other observations in church fabric

Boards of this sort have been recorded in a handful of church roofs in Devon. Numerous similar boards were removed from St Bartholomew's, Cadeleigh during repairs to the roof in 1993 (these were apparently discarded other than one specimen now in the possession of the author). Similar fragments were recorded *in situ* at St Mary's, Cheriton Bishop by Michael Willis of Lucas, Roberts and Brown of Exeter (to whom I am indebted for

notes and a photograph of this observation). Other, very similar, examples were retrieved from the roofs of St Mary the Virgin, Bishop's Nympton, removed during repairs in 1994 and now displayed in South Molton Museum. There is also the example of shingles in a surviving domestic roof at Cottles Barton, mentioned above. Shingled roofs are mentioned by Beatrix Cresswell in 1927 at the churches of North Tawton and West Worlington, in Devon, both of which also have surviving shingled spires (above). Miss Cresswell commented on the great rarity of these survivals at the time, which had been so common until the 18th century, and on the care with which they had been preserved in both these instances (Cresswell 1927, p155 [see also further discussion of the former frequency of shingled roofs in *idem* 1921, pp322-3]). Although Miss Cresswell's notes were finally compiled in the 1920s, they were based on her knowledge and observations accumulated through several decades, and the implication that the roofs survived with shingles until the 1920s is not borne out by photographic evidence. The main roofs of both churches appear to have lost their shingles by the time of John Stabb's photographic record in the early 20th century (Stabb 1916, p65 and pl.60, pl.132 and pl.110 respectively). One further instance where both spire and the main roof were probably roofed with shingles is known at St John the Baptist, Witheridge (Cherry and Pevsner 1989, p914; Cresswell 1924, pp258-9). Four oak shingles were recovered by the author during an archaeological recording exercise in the nave roof of this church in 1998, suggesting that this part of the church at least, had a shingled roof. A valuable description of Witheridge in the mid. 18th century by William Chapple, derived from the

replies to Dean Milles' *Topographical Queries* (below), records that both the church and the spire (lost in a storm in 1840) were roofed with shingles. One other example of uncertain significance is a specimen board or test piece consisting of a loose plank with shingles pegged to it, recorded at Churchstanton in Somerset by Chris Webster (personal communication, 05.12.02).

Churchwardens' accounts

Churchwardens' accounts are a potentially enormously valuable source of information, in general, on the fabric of churches, which has received comparatively little attention from transcribers, when compared to, say, parish registers. Where such accounts have been examined and transcribed, a great deal of useful information on the construction and maintenance of church fabric has come to light. A recent example can be drawn from Zeal Monachorum, where a parish history published as this research was being written shows that the church had a shingled roof from at least the 17th century until as late as 1860 (Adams 2002, pp48, 52-53). This is backed up by the survival of two fragments of carved panels re-used as the planking for a shingled roof (*ibid.* p52 and Fig. 9). Ann Adams has also found many references to roofing and repairing with shingles in the churchwardens' accounts of Nymet Tracy (Bow) in the period 1633-59 (personal communication, 18.07.02). Another church where shingles are attested to by other documentary sources and where churchwardens' accounts have been transcribed is Chagford, where shingles are mentioned, *inter alia*, in 1517 (Osborne 1979, pp49-50). Further references to shingles, drawn almost at random from published accounts, occur at Morebath (Binney 1904,

pp242, 251), and Hartland (Gregory 1950, p4, 6, and throughout).

Other written sources

The story of the repair of the church roof at Morwenstow in north Cornwall, related by Sabine Baring-Gould in his life of the long-standing vicar of the parish, R.S.Hawker (Baring-Gould 1949, pp185-6), corroborates the prevalence of shingled roofs in the 18th and 19th centuries and the fact that they had often degenerated to a very poor state of repair by the mid 19th century. The church had a shingled roof 'in the most deplorable condition of decay' in 1849. The parish wanted to replace this with a Delabole slate roof, but the vicar consistently argued for replacing the shingles and eventually prevailed. The new shingles, however, quickly failed, according to Baring-Gould, because they were made of 'oak cut in spring for barking, and therefore full of sap', rather than 'from heart of oak cut down in winter' (*ibid.* p186), and the parish eventually got its roof of slate. John Thorp has observed (personal communication, 02.06.02) that there are several pegged boards re-used in the roof of the lych gate at Morwenstowe, and these are presumably derived from the shingled roof of the church. Baring-Gould also makes the point that the former popularity of shingles as a roofing material was probably more due to other more durable materials not being available, or (more likely in Cornwall because of the ready availability of slate) affordable.

Dean Milles' Questionnaire

For purposes of obtaining an overview I have chosen to use the returns to Dean Jeremiah Milles' Questionnaire as a convenient and quick means of assessing the incidence of shingled roofs in the mid 18th century.

Milles was successively precentor and dean of Exeter (1747-62 and 1762-84 respectively), who planned to write a history of Devon (Cotton and Brooking Rowe 1891; Cresswell 1921). The Milles manuscripts are held in the Bodleian Library (MS Top. Devon bI/II); the Westcountry Studies Library has a microfilm copy which provides a locally-accessible source of the information, although is cumbersome to use and some of the manuscript is difficult to read in this copy). The printed questionnaire was sent to the incumbent of every parish in the diocese. It asked questions about all aspects of the history, natural resources, agriculture and industry of the parish, amongst which was one relating to the church, simply reading: 'With what materials built and covered?' Many recipients seem not to have replied (one can envisage mid 18th century parsons treating this as junk mail!). Many of those who responded did not answer given questions (as the printed form enjoined them to leave blank or cross out questions to which they did not know the answer), others wrote long and rambling ms. letters in reply, instead of sending back the printed form. A surprisingly large number seem not to have known or been able to ascertain the building materials of their churches. Amongst other pitfalls there are occasional deeply frustrating replies such as 'see my church notes' (Aveton Giffard) or 'known to Dr Milles' (Okehampton). Despite all this the questionnaire provides a very convenient cross section of the churches of the diocese at that time. There are returns for 249 parishes, representing about half the parishes in Devon, and these represent an immensely useful 'snapshot' of conditions in Devon in the mid 18th century (Stanes 1969). Of these, 39 contain no answer to the question on

building materials, 56 churches (22.5%) were roofed in whole or in part with shingles (listed below in the appendix). The geographical distribution is noteworthy, as the incidence of shingles is lower where slate is local, plentiful, or easily transported (the southern and western parts of the county, the east Devon area, especially coastal, and the north coast). In contrast the distribution is noticeably concentrated in mid Devon north of Dartmoor, in the area of the Culm Measures, where transport would have been by road, and there are fewer accessible sources of slate. There are individual examples of churches roofed with shingles all over the county, including the slate-producing areas where one might have thought this material redundant (in the Newton Abbot area at Denbury and East Ogwell, for example). But the great majority of churches recorded as having been roofed with shingles in the Milles returns lie within the restricted area north of Crediton and Okehampton, west of Tiverton, south of South Molton, and west of Great Torrington.

A potential problem in the interpretation of answers is that 'shingle' or 'shindle', could mean stone slate. The OED defines 'shingle' as 'a thin piece of wood having parallel sides and one end thicker than the other, used as a house tile' and recorded uses from as early as c.1200. The dictionary notes that 'shindle' is a local variant of shingle and defines it firstly as 'a wooden roofing tile'; but also notes the use of 'shindle stone', meaning 'thin stone from which slates are cut', and specifically notes this usage in Devon. Entries in the Milles' returns for churches in the South Hams, for example, suggest that in this homeland of slate, the term probably did refer to stone slates (see terms used under the entries for Bigbury,

Modbury and Sampford Spiney in the appendix). The Ashburton churchwardens' accounts show this in the late 15th and 16th centuries, where references to slate are made using the terms shindle stone, schyndell stonys, shyndell stone, etc. (Hanham 1970, pp7, 208, and throughout). Other sources, as well as the occasional use of the term 'shindle stone' in the returns to Dean Milles' questionnaire, show that this usage was current in the mid 18th century.

After considering the internal evidence of Milles' returns, I have concluded that, in most cases, the use of the word implies timber shingles (notwithstanding the occasional use of a formation such as 'shindle stone' [e.g. at Bigbury, Clyst St Lawrence, Modbury, Sampford Spiney] and the possibility that occasional instances could mean a slate roof). There is also the possibility that a formation now read as ambiguous, was originally used to imply more than one roofing material on one church (e.g. 'blue slate or shindle' at Sampford Spiney). There are enough instances where the incumbent thought that qualification was needed (such as Gittisham, North Huish, Knowstone, Bishop's Nympton, Portlemouth, West Putford, Roborough), or that shingles and slate are mentioned together in one entry, to convince that the word was not generally used as an alternative for slate. Another factor inspiring a confident identification of usage to mean timber shingles is that those churches mentioned already as having evidence of shingled roofs are so described in the returns (where one exists for the parish): e.g. North Tawton, Witheridge, West Worlington, Zeal Monachorum.

Conclusion

The scarcity of surviving examples of shingled roofs and relative paucity

of knowledge of this roofing material belies its frequency in the past. The scarcity is reinforced by the lack of investigation of church fabric, and research and transcription of churchwardens' accounts and other sources that might provide information on shingled roofs. The dearth of surviving examples emphasises the fragile nature of this vernacular roofing technique, and thereby the importance of recording any surviving evidence for its former existence and the varied crafts and processes associated with it.

Scrutiny of the Milles' returns for this one issue has demonstrated that this source contains valuable information for the construction and materials of Devon churches in the mid-18th century. One surprising fact that emerges is the absence of evidence for thatched roofs in churches, despite the ubiquity of this material in secular buildings in the county. This echoes the ecclesiastical-secular divide seen in other materials and techniques, for example the design and techniques of roof structures (in which methods seem to have been mutually exclusive). These records also emphasise the radical changes in the appearance of a typical Devon church in the last 250 years: typically changing from shingled or local-slated roofs and rendered walls to stripped (and invariably restored) masonry and imported slate roofs.

This is very much work in progress and I would be very pleased to hear from any member of the Devon Buildings Group who knows of further examples of pegged boards in or out of position, and with or without an association with extant shingles. Equally I would like to hear from anyone who has come across documentary references to shingled roofs in churches or other buildings not mentioned in this note.

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Appendix: Churches recorded as having shingled roofs (in whole or part) in Milles' Parochial returns (spellings are those of the ms.)

Ashreigny	'shindles'	East Ogwell	'shingle'
Ashton	'shingle'	Monks Okehampton	'shingle'
Beafor	'shingle'	Portlemouth	'shingles and stone'
Bigbury	'shindle stone'	Poughill	'shingles'
Burrington	'shindel'	West Putford	'slate and shingle'
Chagford	'shingle'	Pyworthy	'shingle (i.e. laths or [slates: reading uncertain] of wood and partly with thin slate'
Cheriton Fitzpaine	'lead most part, remainder with shindle'	Roborough	'slate and shingle'
Chulmleigh	'shingle'	Rose Ash	'shingle or timber cut in the shape of healing stones'
Clannaboroug	'shingle'	Romansleigh	'shindle'
Clyst St Lawrence	'covered with blue tile, commonly shindle stone'	Sandford	'slat or shingle'
Coffinswell	'shindle stone and slate'	Sanford Spiney	'blue slate or shindle'
Cotleigh	'shindle'	Saterleigh	'shindle'
Countesbury	'shingle'	Shobrooke	'wooden slates'
Delbridge [Thebridge?]	'shingle'	Sidbury	'shindles'
Denbury	'shingle'	Spreyton	'shingle'
Dolton	'shindles'	Studley [Stoodleigh]	'slates of oak'
Gittisham	'slate [lately covered with shingles in oak, cut into the shape of slate]'	North Tawton	'shindles'
Hartland	'shindle'	Little Torrington	'shingle'
High Heanton [Heanton Punchardon]	'mostly with shindle'	Upottery	'lead, slate and shindle'
Hewish [N]	'timber or shindles'	Wellcomb	'partly shindle and stones'
Honiton	'partly with lead, shingles and slate'	Wemworthy	'covered with timber slates, as is the spire'
Iddesleigh	'shindle'	Widworthy	'shindles [crossed through and replaced with] slate'
Kingskerswell	'slate and shindle'	Witheridge	'shingle'
Knowstone	'roof of oak timber and shindle of the same'	East Worlington	'shindle (church), slate (chancel)
Mariansleigh	'shingle'	West Worlington	'shindle (church), slate (chancel)
Meshaw	'shingle'	Zeal Monachorum	'covered with timber cut in the manner of slate'
Modbury	'stone shingles'		
Morchard Bishop	'lead and shindle'		
Byshop's Nymet	'partly slate, partly shingle'		
King's Nympton	'shindles'		

Total 56

Stuart Blaylock

AUDREY ERSKINE

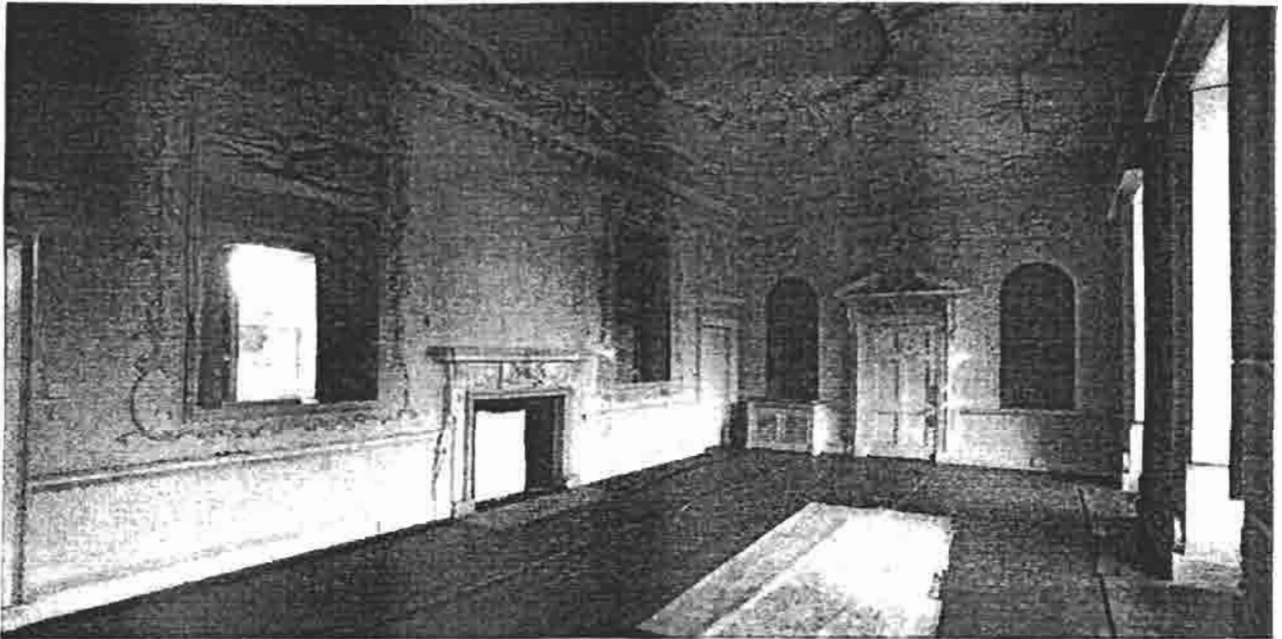
We much regret to record the sudden death, earlier this summer, of Audrey Erskine, distinguished medieval Latinist and, with her husband, a founder member of DBG. Her funeral was at the cathedral in Exeter, of which she was archivist for many years. Right up until her death she regularly attended historical lectures and events in Exeter and she will be much missed. We extend our sincere sympathy to her husband Reginald.

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The mid C18 saloon at Poltimore House, with its rococo plaster ceiling and mirror surrounds, photographed c1990