

DEVON BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 4

OCTOBER 1987

SECRETARY'S REPORT

In the course of the summer, the total of cases with which the Group has been actively involved reached fifty. To mark the half century, I have included a review of all these cases in the present Newsletter; as this covers most of the casework we have undertaken since the last issue, this Report can be somewhat briefer than usual. One case, however, needs fuller comment: members will not be surprised that it is that of Exminster Hospital.

In the spring, Exeter Health Authority applied for outline planning permission for residential development on part of the hospital site. Because these proposals included no mention of the future of the hospital itself, and because any development without reference to the hospital would inevitably affect options for its re-use, we objected. Teignbridge Council delayed any decision on the application and a Public Inquiry was fixed for July: we wrote stating that we wished to give evidence. With an Inquiry in the offing, English Heritage replied positively to the DBG's request for the funding of a feasibility study on future uses of the hospital site and its buildings. I discussed the case with Robert Chitham, head of the Listing Division, who decided that English Heritage should commission the report directly: at our suggestion he approached John Burrell, with whom the Group has worked closely throughout. The report, which was ready before the Public Inquiry, stressed the need for an integrated approach to re-development, emphasised the landscape importance of the site, and explored the possibilities for both commercial and residential re-use of the historic buildings. Meanwhile, the Health Authority had been making progress of its own. When it came to the Public Inquiry, to our welcome surprise, their case included detailed initial proposals from their architects, NWT, for the conservation of Fowler's hospital and its conversion to commercial and office use - the scheme to be financed by profits accruing from the residential development elsewhere on the site. As there was no opportunity for the plans to be examined by the DBG Committee, and as the proposals were not formally a part of the planning application, it was necessary to maintain our objections. Presenting the Group's evidence, however, I made it clear that we welcomed the Health Authority's initiative.

The Authority intends to clear away the clutter of later extensions and additions to Fowler's hospital, restoring the fabric as necessary according to

the original plan and elevations. The most intact of the six radial wings will be retained in its entirety, both internally and externally, as an architectural and historical document in its own right and with a view to its possible use as a museum. In the other wings - which are precisely similar - the original floor levels will be maintained, but the interiors gutted. This will give maximum flexibility for re-use as office and commercial accommodation, for which there is a growing demand in the Exeter area. After investigation, MVT decided against residential conversion, partly because there was unlikely to be sufficient demand for the type of property that would result, partly because quite considerable alterations to the exteriors of the listed buildings would be involved. The approach adopted in the proposals is very much in line with that advocated by the DBG since the beginning of the case, and MVT's conclusions are close to those of John Burrell's feasibility study, though he pays far more attention to the grounds and immediate setting of the hospital. Having discussed the plans in detail, the Committee has given them general support. We welcome the retention of one of the radial wings and the careful approach to restoring and conserving the exterior: indeed, once the elevations are freed of encumbrances and the original plan becomes clear, the hospital will look better than it has done for many years. In such circumstances, we are happy to accept the internal clearance of the radial wings. We are opposed, however, to the suggested gutting of the central administrative block which has some impressive interiors, still largely intact: in our view their destruction is unnecessary for their original administrative function should convert easily to modern commercial needs. More thought also needs to be given to the landscape context and we would like aspects of the plans reconsidered: in particular we think the assembly room, though not part of Fowler's original design, could be kept, and we would like to see the polygonal kitchen block, though much knocked about, retained and re-used. But these are details that can be negotiated: broadly, MVT's scheme makes excellent sense and shows considerable feeling for the quality and character of Fowler's hospital. If they go ahead a building of major architectural and historical importance will have been saved in a way that could set a significant conservation precedent.

Other cases have come up since the fiftieth. A few weeks ago the *Exeter Express and Echo* publicised moves to tarmac the main churchyard path at Crediton. This is of pitched stone and dates from the early nineteenth century: it is a delightful feature of major importance to the whole setting of the church. The DBG has written to the Crediton Governors, who have yet to consider the proposals, opposing the obliteration of the path and offering advice on its repair and conservation. We have also informed the Council for the Care of Churches and I have raised the matter with the Diocesan Advisory Committee. Among other cases, we have been concerned about two applications for listed building consent in West Devon. Rumleigh Farmhouse in Bere Alston retains parts of its original medieval fabric and a number of other interesting historical and architectural features: the owners have applied for permission to insert plastic windows. This would be most damaging to the building's character and we have objected. Chimsworthy Farmhouse, Bratton Clovelly, is listed grade II*; it was originally a medieval longhouse and still has its smoke-blackened roof. Repairs are proposed which, though generally sensitive to the building's historic fabric, include treating the roof with an artificial plastic sealant. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings has experience of a number of cases in which long-term damage has been sustained by historic buildings in which such substances have been used. We have written to West Devon expressing our concern and urging them to contact the SPAB Technical Panel to discuss the matter.

Relationships between the DBG and other bodies have been progressing well. The Committee were pleased to learn of The Devonshire Association's intention of setting up a Historic Buildings Section, which could well play an important role in architectural recording. The Group has been invited to talk to the meeting at which it is hoped formally to establish the Section and it seems likely that DBG members will wish to be involved in its work; we will be represented at the meeting by Jenny Chesher. Moves are also underway to establish a Devon Historic Gardens Trust: a preliminary list of historic gardens in the county has been compiled by English Heritage and a Steering Committee for the Trust has been set up and includes Veronica Chesher as the DBG's representative. If there are members of the Group who would like to know more about either the Trust or the Devonshire Association's new Section, I would be glad to give further information. The Devon Historic Buildings Trust has been a member of the DBG for the past eighteen months: at their recent AGM Jo Cox and I were elected onto the Trust's Council of Management; so also was Veronica Chesher, who has been a member of their Advisory Panel for some time. The opportunity to become involved in the Trust's activities is a very welcome one. Several organizations have also joined the Group over the last few months: the Devon Archaeological Society, with whom we have always had close links, the Devon and Exeter Institution, and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. In addition, The Society of Antiquaries of London has asked to subscribe to the Newsletter. In September the DBG was represented at the Local History Fair in The Prysten House, Plymouth, with a display organised by Jo Cox. The Committee felt it important for us to be there, not only because we were in support of the Fair's general objects, but also because it was being held in Plymouth. In terms of architectural conservation, Plymouth's record is bleak, and the extent to which the historic fabric of the city has been destroyed over the past twenty years is profoundly depressing. Little enough has been done to arrest the destruction, or even to protest against it: Plymouth does not even have a Civic Society. The Group has very few members in the city and establishing a substantial presence there must be one of our priorities: it is to be hoped that our appearance at the Local History Fair may have generated some interest.

The DBG's Second Annual Conference, *Bideford: the historic town and its future*, was held on Saturday 16 May, and was attended by over forty members. Lectures in the morning session, held at the Royal Hotel, covered aspects of Bideford's architectural development and present planning policy. In the afternoon members had the opportunity to look in detail at the seventeenth-century houses of Bridgeland Street - an article on which is included in the present Newsletter - and this was followed by a walk around the town, focussing particularly on its nineteenth-century buildings. The afternoon finished with a visit to Weare Giffard Hall, particularly memorable for its magnificent fifteenth-century hall roof, and to Rendels Farm, Monkleigh. The whole day was a great success and particular thanks are due to Prue Phillips, Jo Cox, and John Thorp, who did most of the organising between them. Plans are already underway for the Group's 1988 Conference. The subject will be the future of Devon's farm buildings: an introductory article will be found in the current Newsletter. Agricultural buildings of all sorts feature constantly in the Group's casework - and the ones we see are only a fraction of the number that, in some way or other, are under threat. Their preservation, their future, their contribution to the very texture of the county, are vital conservation issues, and ones that the Conference will seek to address.

Chris Brooks

CASEWORK: THE FIRST HALF CENTURY

As I say in my current Report, cases handled by the Group have recently topped fifty - an opportune moment to review our conservation casework so far.

CW1 Crediton, 3 North Street

One of the surviving corner blocks from the pannier market of 1836; listed grade II, it is owned by Mid Devon District Council. Over the years they have allowed it to fall into disrepair, and we have protested about this. More recently they have produced proposals for knocking it down as part of a redevelopment scheme. We have objected, arguing that the building should be repaired and re-used, and have secured the support of The Victorian Society and The Ancient Monuments Society in fighting the case. As owners of listed buildings, legally responsible for enforcing the law that relates to them, local authorities are required by The Department of the Environment to set a good example to private owners: persistent neglect followed by demolition is not a good example. The case continues.

CW2 Bishopsnympton, Whitechapel Barton (Fig.2)

This distinguished house, originally sixteenth century, remodelled and refitted in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, is currently listed grade II*. The DBG has given historical information to the owners and advice on converting the building to an hotel. The conversion is still underway and is being done with great sensitivity and minimum disruption to the historic fabric.

CW3 Tavistock, Pannier Market (Fig.1)

Despite several representations, in which we were joined by The Victorian Society, English Heritage has refused to list the central market buildings of 1859-62 by Edward Rundle. This regardless of the fact that the market is surrounded by other listed buildings with which it is architecturally and historically integral. Although the market is still in use, its town centre site may be vulnerable to re-development and we continue to be concerned.



Figure 1. Tavistock Pannier Market, 1859-62 by Edward Rundle (CW3).

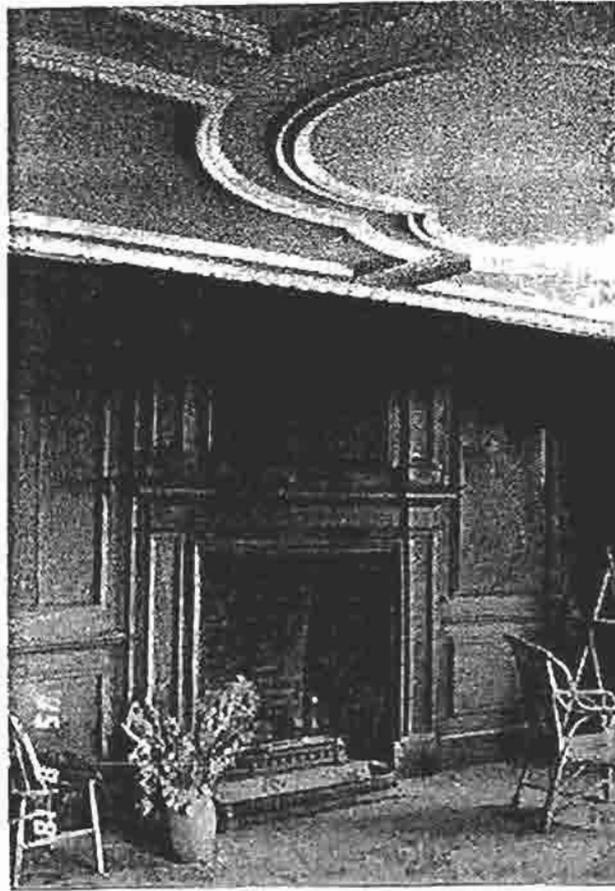


Figure 2. Bishopsnympton, Whitechapel Barton, The Library. Late 17th to early 18th centuries [CW2].



Figures 3 and 4. Mamhead House, by Anthony Salvin, 1827-38. The Sculpture Gallery, now empty of statues, and one of the two statues of 1838-42 by Charles Smith still remaining in the house [CW5].

CW4 Exminster, Exe Vale Mental Hospital

The most complicated case in which the Group has yet been involved: Charles Fowler's hospital, completed in 1845 and of national importance in the development of hospital design, was threatened with demolition when it was no longer needed by the Area Health Authority. Supported by The Victorian Society, with whom we have worked closely throughout the case, we were instrumental in getting the principle buildings on the site listed Grade II*. Recognising that this was only a beginning, we consistently urged the Health Authority to produce redevelopment proposals for the site in which the conservation and re-use of the historic buildings would be a central part. We discussed options with English Heritage and were successful in suggesting that they commission a feasibility study from the architect John Burrell, who has been particularly concerned with the future of redundant hospital buildings and with whom we worked closely. At a Public Inquiry in July this year the Health Authority put forward outline proposals for the site that have, as a major feature, the repair, preservation and re-use of the central hospital buildings. Although there are some aspects of the plan which we think need revision, the proposals are very much in line with what we have been advocating and with the Burrell feasibility study. This is a welcome and encouraging development that could well set a precedent for the sympathetic conversion and re-use of historic hospitals. We are currently responding in detail to the plans.

CW5 Mamhead, Mamhead House statues (Figs.3 and 4)

In common with national conservation bodies we objected strongly to the sale of the series of English historical statues from Anthony Salvin's Mamhead House, built 1827-38 and listed Grade II*. There is no doubt that the statues, executed by Charles Smith, were intended specifically for the Mamhead sculpture gallery; therefore, in our view, they were fittings and protected by the listing. The legal advice given by Teignbridge District Council and by English Heritage was, however, inconclusive and no official attempt was made to challenge the sale. Protests had no effect, and the statues were auctioned off in London. We were assured that the owner of Mamhead regretted the sale as much as we did. The whole case highlights the potential vulnerability of fittings and the need for legal clarification.

CW6 Barnstaple, Shapland and Petters Works

The DBG protested against the proposed demolition of this distinctive factory group, purpose designed in 1888 by W.C.Oliver and occupying a visually critical riverbank position. The owners responded with threats of closure and mass redundancies: as they presumably calculated, this succeeded in frightening off most of the opposition and we were unable to carry the argument alone. The characterful Victorian works will be replaced by a modern factory of anaemic design - which is presumably much more to the taste of the Shapland's personnel manager who said that 'nobody in their right mind' could think the old buildings attractive.

CW7 South Molton, Local Plan

The Group made representations to North Devon District Council on some of the implications of the South Molton Local Plan for the town's historic buildings.

CW8 Venny Tedburn, Neopardy Farm

We objected to the residential conversion of this fine mid-nineteenth-century farm group, listed grade II, because the proposed alterations were too extensive and would destroy the distinctive identity of the buildings. Although the

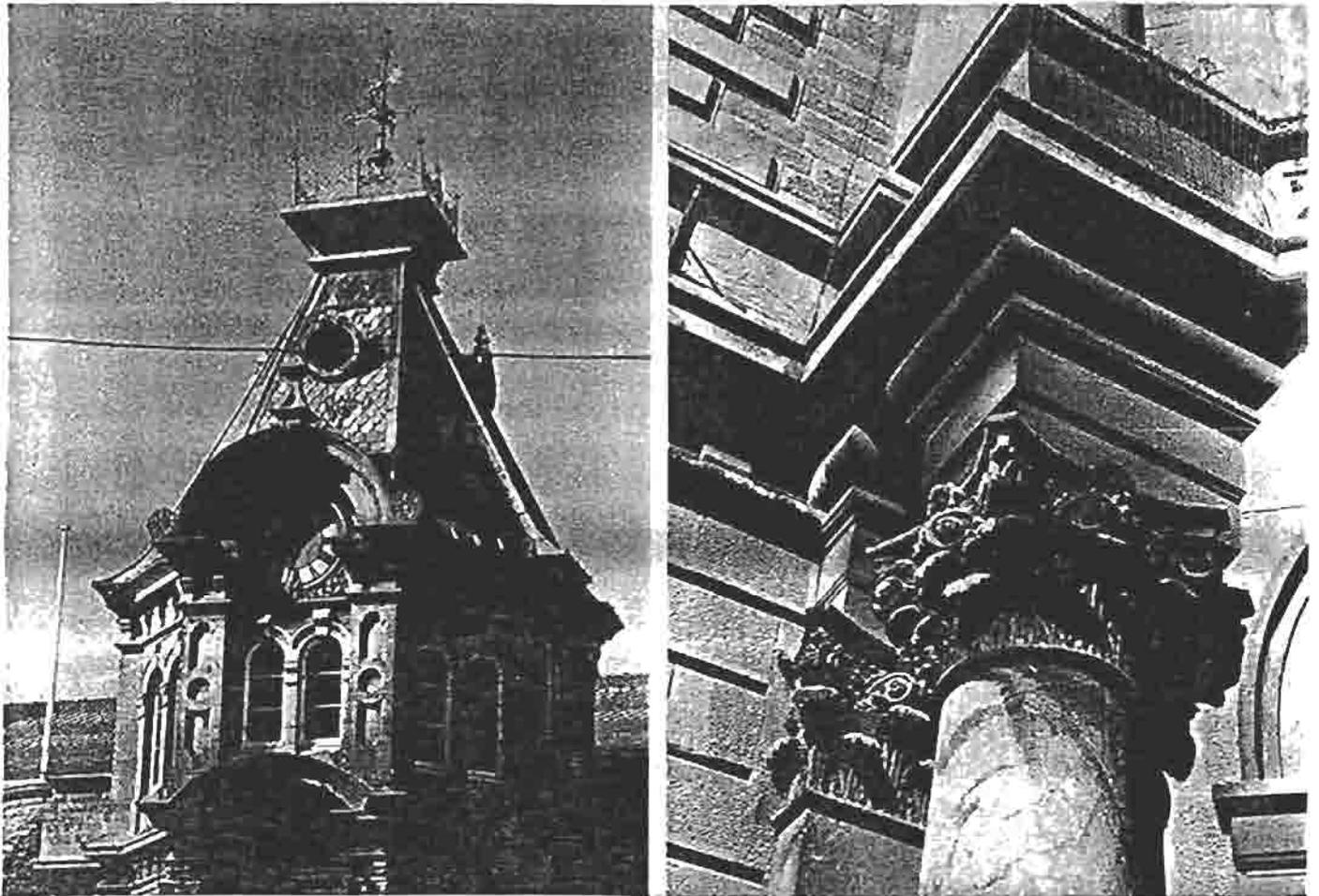
application was allowed by Mid-Devon Council, it was later withdrawn. To our surprise, and pleasure, proposals subsequently submitted showed a far more sensitive response to the character of the farmstead.

CW9 Exeter, 45-47 The Quay: the transshipment shed

When archaeological investigation of the Exeter Quay revealed the unique survival of a seventeenth-century transshipment shed, the DBG joined The Devon Archaeological Society in urging the Quay and Canal Trust to abandon plans for substantially altering it. New proposals were drawn up and the building has been conserved and is now in use as an information centre.

CW10 Tiverton, Town Hall (Figs.5 and 6)

Following representations from the Group, English Heritage agreed to a grade II listing of Henry Lloyd's exuberant Town Hall of 1862-4, previously omitted from statutory protection. A vital element in the architectural texture of Tiverton, the Town Hall is one of the most emphatic assertions of Victorian civic pride in the county.



Figures 5 and 6. Tiverton, The Town Hall, 1862-4 by Henry Lloyd:
the clock tower and detail of the main entrance [CW10].

CW11 Broadclyst, Newlands Farm

Listed grade II, Newlands is an outstandingly complete farmstead of 1850 on the National Trust's Killerton estate. Following the absorption of the farmland into adjacent holdings in the general cause of economic management, the Trust proposed residential conversion. Throughout the county, too many robust and distinctive farm buildings have been blandly prettified and we felt strongly the Trust had chosen the wrong option for Newlands. Securing the support of The Victorian Society and The Ancient Monuments Society, we argued that the farm buildings should remain as unaltered as possible and that an agricultural use should be sought for them. As a result, the Trust changed its plans: Newlands will be worked on a small-scale agrarian basis and the architectural identity of the farmstead preserved.

CW12 Crediton By-Pass

In common with many other bodies the DBG commented on the by-pass proposals, advocating the adoption of an outer route that would avoid any threat to the historic town centre. This route has now been adopted, with an amendment that minimises damage to the setting of Downes, the eighteenth-century house of the Buller family.

CW13 Paignton, Barcombe House [Fig.7]

With the support of Torbay Borough Council we made a strong case for the listing of this interesting house, which is threatened by re-development. It was designed

in 1838 by Soane's pupil Edward Davis, and was the first free-standing villa to be built in Paignton. Despite repeated efforts, English Heritage have unaccountably refused to grant it statutory protection.



Figure 7. Paignton, Barcombe Hall, 1838, by Edward Davis: the north west tower [CW13].

CW14 Abbotskerswell, St Augustine's Priory (Fig.8)

This striking group of buildings in robust High Victorian Gothic was designed in the 1860s by J.A.Hansom; his talented pupil Benjamin Bucknall later added a tower to the chapel to house an elaborate high altar and tabernacle. Having argued successfully for upgrading the buildings from II to II*, we supported English Heritage and The Victorian Society in negotiating with developers planning to convert the Priory into a retirement complex. Although there are several aspects of the completed scheme with which we are unhappy, it was possible to prevent some of the crasser proposals - such as destroying the high altar and turning the chapel into a swimming pool.

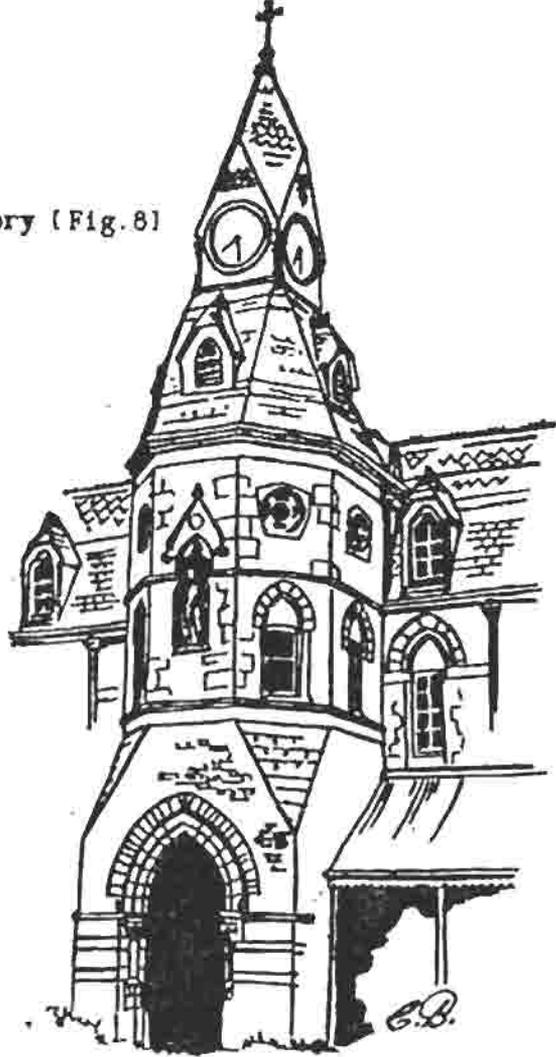


Figure 8. St Augustine's Priory, Abbotskerswell, 1861-2 by Joseph Hansom: main entrance [CW14].

CW15 Exeter, Digby Mental Hospital (Fig.9)

Now redundant, the hospital, built 1882-5 to the designs of R.S.Wilkinson, was listed grade II following representations made by the Group acting with Exeter City Council and The Victorian Society. The Health Authority's plan to turn the site into a monster - and monstrous - shopping complex involves demolishing most of the hospital, swamping what little is left with over-scaled new building, and marooning the final agglomeration amidst an ocean of car parks. despite which English Heritage somehow has found it acceptable: like The Victorian Society we remain vigorously opposed. The hospital's fate depends on the decision of a public inquiry held earlier this year into out of town shopping in Exeter.

CW16 Plymouth, Crownhill Fort

The DBG supported moves to preserve and give public access to this splendidly intact Palmerstonian fort, built during the 1860s and no longer required by the Army, who were very much in favour of finding a buyer who would utilise the fort's historical interest. Its subsequent purchase by The Landmark Trust was particularly welcome.

CW17 East Budleigh, Coxen

Listed II*, Coxen was designed in 1910 by Ernest Gimson and is one of the most important Arts and Crafts houses in Devon. We wrote to East Devon District Council criticising proposed alterations to the house: with the Council's advice, the owner has adopted a more sensitive approach.

City of Exeter. Lunatic Asylum.

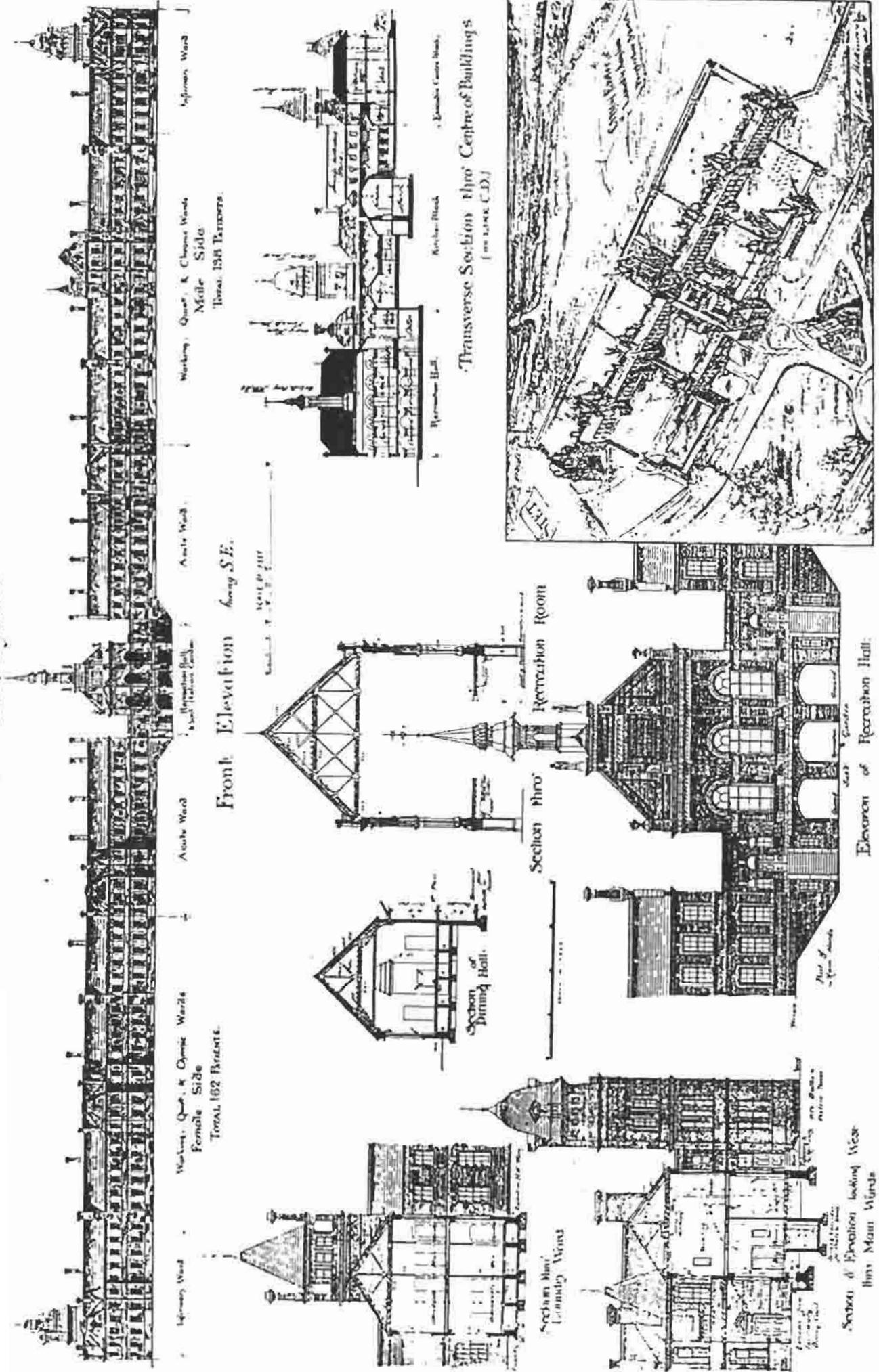


Figure 9. Digby Hospital, Exeter: R.S. Wilkinson's original designs, *The Builder* vol.43, 16.9.1882.

CW18 Buckland Brewer, Orleigh Court carvings

In common with other groups the DBG protested against the illegal removal - and intended sale - of carvings from the Court's magnificent late medieval hall roof: fortunately, unlike the Mamhead statues, there was no doubt that these were fixtures. The owner was subsequently prosecuted by Torrington District Council and the carvings have all been returned and refixed.

CW19 Broadclyst, Wishford Farm

We gave informal advice to the National Trust on alterations to this farmstead on the Killerton Estate.

CW20 Exeter, Quay Warehouses (Fig.10)

The Quay and Canal Trust applied for outline planning consent to convert the Quay's two fine warehouses, built in the early nineteenth century by Robert Cornish and listed grade II, to an hotel. This was quite the wrong use for these buildings, necessarily involving the reduction of their historic fabric to a mere shell, and we objected. Regrettably, Exeter City Council has granted consent, though with the assurance that the work will be closely monitored. Even so, it seems inevitable that the character of two of the Quay's most distinctive buildings will be destroyed. A case in which in which the economic possibilities of 'heritage development' seem to have outweighed the interests of conservation.

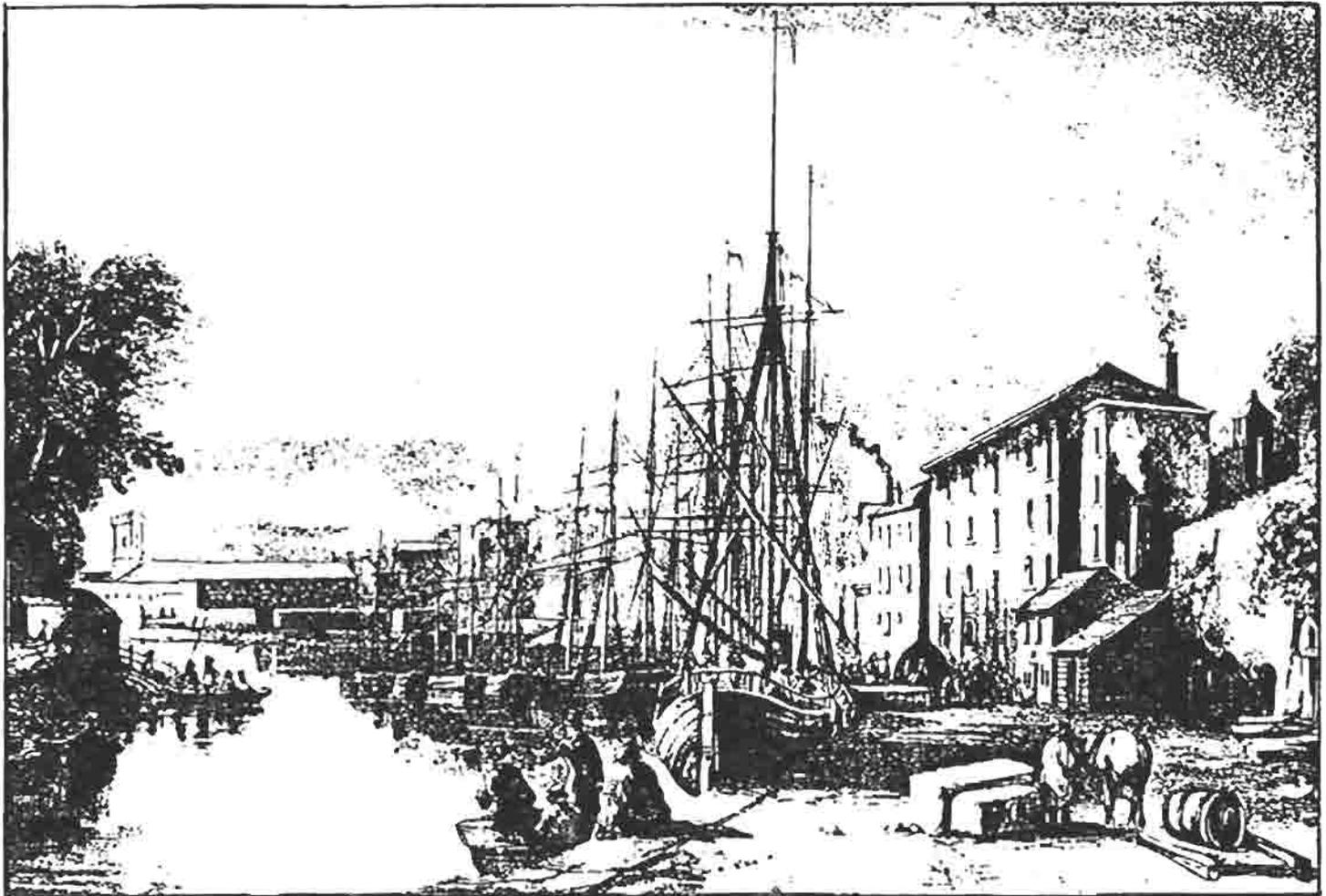


Figure 10. Exeter Quay, from a lithograph in C.F. Williams, *Views of Exeter*, c.1835: the warehouses by Cornish are on the right of the picture [CW20].

CV21 Barnstaple, Church of the Immaculate Conception

This Neo-Norman church was built in two stages between 1844 and 1855, the executant architects being Gideon Boyce and J.F.Gould but the initial design probably originating with Pugin. It is listed grade II* and there is an English Heritage grant available for its conservation and repair: its treatment by the Roman Catholic authorities over the last few years amounts to little short of downright negligence. They applied for permission to demolish it six years ago and were turned down after a public inquiry. Last year they applied again and we sent written evidence in support of the opposition mounted by English Heritage and The Victorian Society: permission was again refused. The church now stands desolate and increasingly vandalised; the owners give no indication of either re-using it or being willing to sell it. In conjunction with the North Devon Civic Society and national amenity bodies we are urging North Devon Council to issue a Compulsory Repairs Notice with the object of getting the church sold on to an owner who will be prepared to act in the interests of the building and in compliance with the findings of two public inquiries. We have alerted English Heritage to the situation.

CV22 Crediton, Market Street development

The Group made representations to Mid Devon Council about the design and materials of proposed new building in Market Street, part of a conservation area. Work has yet to begin.

CV23 Woodbury, Nutwell Lodge Hotel

We were worried about the effect of a large extension to this Georgian house, listed grade II*, and asked East Devon Council to monitor the work closely: this has now been completed, apparently without damage to the historic building.

CV24 Dawlish, Lower Rixdale

The DBG reported for The Ancient Monuments Society on an application to demolish a badly delapidated wing of this seventeenth-century farmhouse; demolition was accepted as inevitable.

CV25 Dolton, North Ham

Another seventeenth-century farmhouse, listed grade II, and another case undertaken on behalf of The Ancient Monuments Society. We met the owners and discussed their proposed alterations to the house: these were sensitive to the historic fabric and presented no difficulties.

CV26 Barnstaple, 73 High Street, 8-11 Holland Walk

We protested against the proposed demolition of these buildings which, though altered externally, were still recognisably seventeenth century internally - some of the relatively few such remaining in the town. Despite this, North Devon Council allowed their destruction: another blow to Barnstaple's fast-disappearing architectural heritage.

CV27 Exeter, St Bartholomew's Cemetery

An extraordinary case: this picturesque and important cemetery, laid out in 1834 and including an Egyptian catacomb, was tidied-up under a Manpower Services scheme. Unfortunately, this also included cutting a couple of new paths, so spoiling the cemetery's historic plan, and demolishing some original structures. We wished to protest, but it proved impossible to find out which Agency had carried out the work or even who had authorised it. The idea of this apparently anonymous MSC team finding another historic site to tidy up is not reassuring.

CW28 Cheriton Fitzpaine, village slaughterhouse

The DBG objected to Mid Devon Council about the proposed demolition of this unpretentious but historically interesting little building, set in the middle of the village conservation area. Built of local materials in the later nineteenth century, the slaughterhouse was attached to the village butcher's shop, now part of the large, adjacent house of Lower Saunders. The owners wished to demolish in order to build a back wing. Although the initial plans were withdrawn, revised plans were accepted and the slaughterhouse has now been swallowed up in an extension - a pity, because it has impoverished the texture of the village.

CW29 Ilsington, Ingsdon Convent

Reporting to The Ancient Monuments Society, we accepted the demolition of what was left of this formerly-listed house, which had been gutted by fire and was beyond saving.

CW30 Germansweek, Pauls Shop

This late fifteenth or early sixteenth century house in a highly sensitive position in the village centre has been badly neglected. It is listed grade II, and we have tried to encourage West Devon Council to issue a Compulsory Repairs Notice in order to get the building sold on, either to an individual owner who will look after it or to The Devon Historic Buildings Trust. The Group remains actively concerned.

CW31 Exeter, The Guildhall

The DBG became very alarmed about Exeter City Council's repair and conservation programme on what is, after all, one of Devon's most famous historic monuments, when we found out that a complete seventeenth-century moulded plaster ceiling had accidentally been destroyed and when the extent of the intended replacement of exterior stonework became evident. In company with The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings we met the architect responsible and discussed proposals for the next stage of work. We were not wholly reassured that future repairs will be carried out in a more conservative spirit, and we will be watching developments closely.

CW32 Bovey Tracey, Riverside House

Critically positioned in the Bovey Tracey townscape, this very intact early nineteenth-century vernacular house, listed grade II, was threatened with demolition to provide an access road to a new bungalow. With The Victorian Society, we objected to the application, which Teignbridge District Council has since refused.

CW33 Torquay, Babbacombe Road, Methodist Church

Designed in 1873 by G.J.S. Bridgeman, the church stands next to Torquay museum, its distinctive spire making an important contribution to the skyline. It is in a part of the central conservation area that is still mercifully complete - most of it, of course, is in the process of being flattened to make way for mega-stores. It no longer has a congregation and an application was made to demolish which was opposed by the DBG along with The Ancient Monuments Society and The Victorian Society. Permission was refused by Torbay Council, but a future for the building still has to be found.

CW34 Torquay, Torwood Gardens, First Church of Christ Scientist

Another threatened church in the centre of Torquay, almost opposite the last. A quirky late-Victorian building with crow-step gables and chunky Gothic detailing.

it was similarly threatened with demolition. We objected, again with The Ancient Monuments Society and The Victorian Society; as in the previous case, Torbay Council turned down the application. Again, however, the building's long-term future still has to be secured. This case and the last indicate the pressure that is now mounting on historic buildings around the edge of central Torquay: the churches, in particular, have been closed or are in trouble. What role will be found for such buildings once the centre of the town is whole given over to chain-stores and consumerism?

CW35 Dawlish, Stonelands

The owners of this small house of 1817 possibly by John Nash, listed grade II*, proposed to build an extension, ostentatiously positioned and far larger than the original building. We found this unacceptable and objected. Despite Stonelands' high grade and the self-evident destruction of scale the new work would involve, Teignbridge Council granted the application.

CW36 Bishopsteignton, Cross House

Another late Georgian villa, currently listed grade II, Cross House has a distinctive two-storey verandah and occupies an important position in Bishopsteignton village. Owned for some time by a firm of property developers, the house was allowed to deteriorate and applications to demolish the building and re-develop the site were eventually submitted. We objected strongly, both to the proposed demolition and to the calculated policy of neglect that we believed the case revealed. There was considerable local opposition to the scheme, and we secured the additional help of The Georgian Group in fighting it. Teignbridge Council proved sympathetic to the conservation argument and the owners withdrew the applications. Amid assurances of good faith, they have promised new proposals that will include the conservation and re-use of Cross House itself: we will wait and see.

CW37 Exeter, 9 Colleton Crescent

Built around 1805 and probably designed by Matthew Nosworthy, Colleton Crescent is one of the finest remaining Georgian terraces in Exeter, retaining its garden and original setting largely intact. It is listed grade II* and is in the middle of a conservation area. The owners of one of the houses applied for permission to build a separate residential block at the rear. The DEB objected both because of the harm that would be done to the immediate context of the crescent and because any such development would set a potentially damaging precedent for new building in the conservation area. Exeter Council rejected the application; the owners have appealed and we have maintained our objection. Interestingly, the applicants are the publishers Webb and Bower, who bring out *The Diary of an Edwardian Lady* and other such 'heritage'-conscious products.

CW38 Shirwell, Youlston Park

This grade I listed house, medieval in origin but outstanding for its early eighteenth-century decorative plasterwork, came on the market earlier this year. Among the house's most important features is the eighteenth-century Chinese wallpaper in one of the main reception rooms. We were alarmed to discover that the wallpaper, which is fixed to wooden frames, had a price tag of £100,000 and was being offered for sale as a separate item: here, potentially, was a case parallel to the Mamhead statues. We protested to the agents, pointing out that the alienation of fittings from a listed building without listed building consent was illegal. They did not reply, but we understand that the wallpaper and house have now been sold together.

CW39 Plymouth, Harwell Street Vicarage [Fig.11]

Built for the now-demolished church of All Saints, the vicarage, dating from 1885, is a key domestic work of the *doyen* Arts and Crafts architect John Dando Sedding. Listed grade II, it is owned by Plymouth City Council: it is also empty, in an advanced state of disrepair, and has been vandalized. We have written to the Council expressing our concern and asking what plans they have for the future of the building: they have not yet got round to replying.



Figure 11. Harwell Street Vicarage, Plymouth, 1885 by J.D.Sedding [CW39].

CW40 Barnstaple, North Devon Infirmary Lodge

Along with the North Devon Civic Society, the DBG objected to the proposed demolition of this nineteenth-century classical lodge, which is in a conservation area. Conservation area or not, North Devon Council has agreed to its being destroyed - yet another hole in the historic fabric of Barnstaple.

CW41 Talaton, The Old Post Office

This sixteenth-century vernacular house, now much dilapidated, is critically sited in the centre of the village. Having withdrawn from negotiations with the Devon Historic Buildings Trust, the owners applied for permission to demolish. We contacted English Heritage and asked for the building to be spot-listed, which was done with commendable speed. The building has now been offered for sale, and we are hopeful that new owners will produce plans for its repair and preservation.

CW42 Holsworthy, Wesleyan Day School

A modest but attractive school of 1851 that forms an important element in the streetscape; neglected for several years, the building badly needs remedial work. Due to a planning tangle, Torrridge Council were threatening to demolish it as a dangerous structure just as a new owner was putting together plans to repair it. We wrote to support the owner and to try to help sort out the confusion; we have

also asked English Heritage to consider spot-listing. Happily, Torrington has now reviewed the case and we understand that the school will be repaired and re-used as part of a residential development.

CW43 Nembury, Luggs Farm

Listed grade II*, this seventeenth-century farmhouse in the Yarty valley has had a fine - and unusual - history of sensitive, careful repair. Alas, no longer: the Group objected when new owners applied for consent to make alterations that were both out of keeping and in unsuitable materials. East Devon Council gave consent - a particularly disheartening decision that will have the effect of spoiling a whole inheritance of good work.

CW44 Woodbury, Oakhayes

Oakhayes is a mid-nineteenth-century gentleman's villa listed grade II, the only one near the centre of Woodbury left with its original grounds, the enclosing wall of which is similarly listed. The village is fast filling up with new houses and we have opposed an application to build a bungalow in the garden and to knock an access road through the boundary wall.

CW45 Plympton St Maurice, The Old Grammar School (Fig. 12)

The school where Joshua Reynolds' father was headmaster and where he was himself a pupil. Built 1663-7 by John Avent, with the main school room on the first floor over a fine seven-bay loggia, it is listed grade II*. It is disused at present and appears somewhat forlorn. We are in touch with the Hele Trust who own the building and who are seeking a new educational use for it.

CW46 Newton Abbot, 20 Forde Park

A substantial mid-Victorian house probably designed by J.W. Rowell, who was responsible for the villa development of this area of the town in the 1850s and 1860s. Alleging structural defects, the owners applied for permission to knock it down and build a couple of imitation Victorian villas instead - two pastiche examples for the price of one original. We objected quite simply because we thought the whole application was nonsense: so did Teignbridge Council, who refused permission.

CW47 Chudleigh, Culver House

We argued that this large, somewhat untidy late Georgian and Victorian house was of sufficient interest to merit retention and conversion as part of a sheltered housing re-development planned for the site. Teignbridge Council, however, has given permission for it to be demolished, no doubt the simplest solution, but one that does not show much imagination.

CW48 Exeter, Wynard's Almshouses

Founded in 1430 by William Wynard, the red sandstone almshouses are attractively grouped around a courtyard in the corner of which is the chapel, an especially rewarding building which has an elaborate late medieval chancel arch, polychromatic Victorian decoration to the sanctuary, and an important sequence of monuments to the Kennaway family. The whole group, which houses a variety of social services, deserves to be better known. In a very welcome initiative, the City Council is thinking of undertaking a programme of repair and conservation, particularly on the chapel, and of improving public access. They invited the DBG's comments on the initial proposals, which we were very glad to support: we look forward to seeing more detailed plans and hope to be able to provide historical material to back up the work.

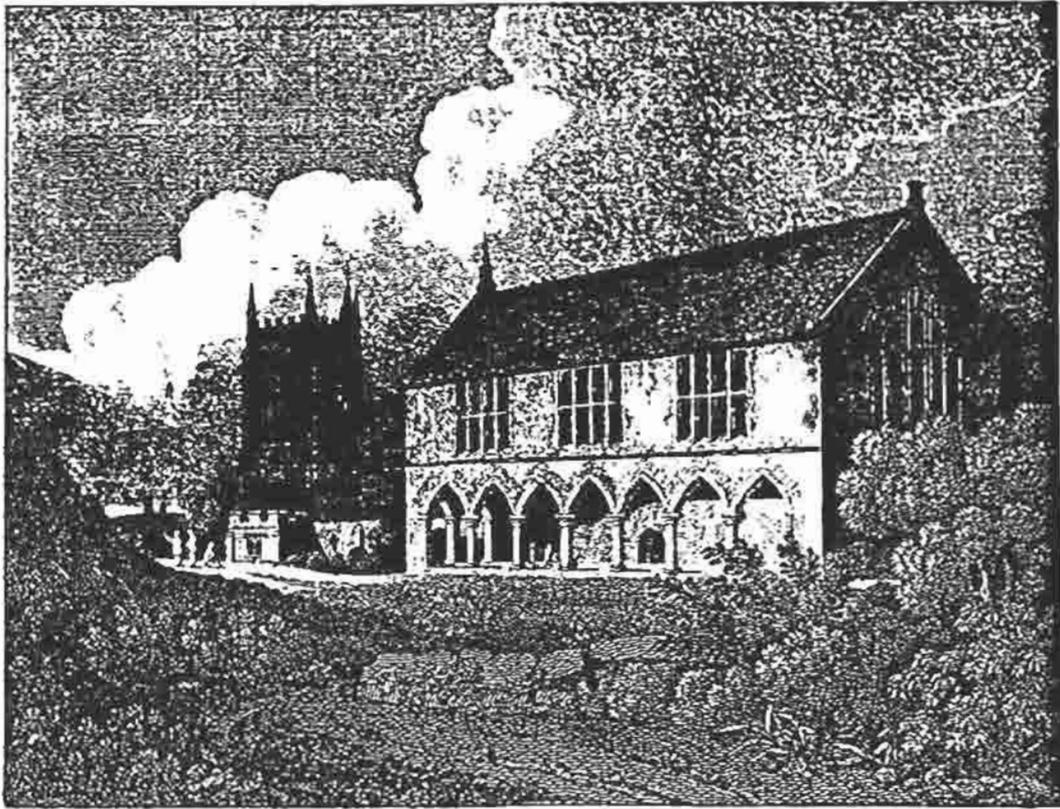


Figure 12. The Old Grammar School, Plympton, 1663-7.
Engraving of 1813 after a painting by Samuel Prout [CW45].

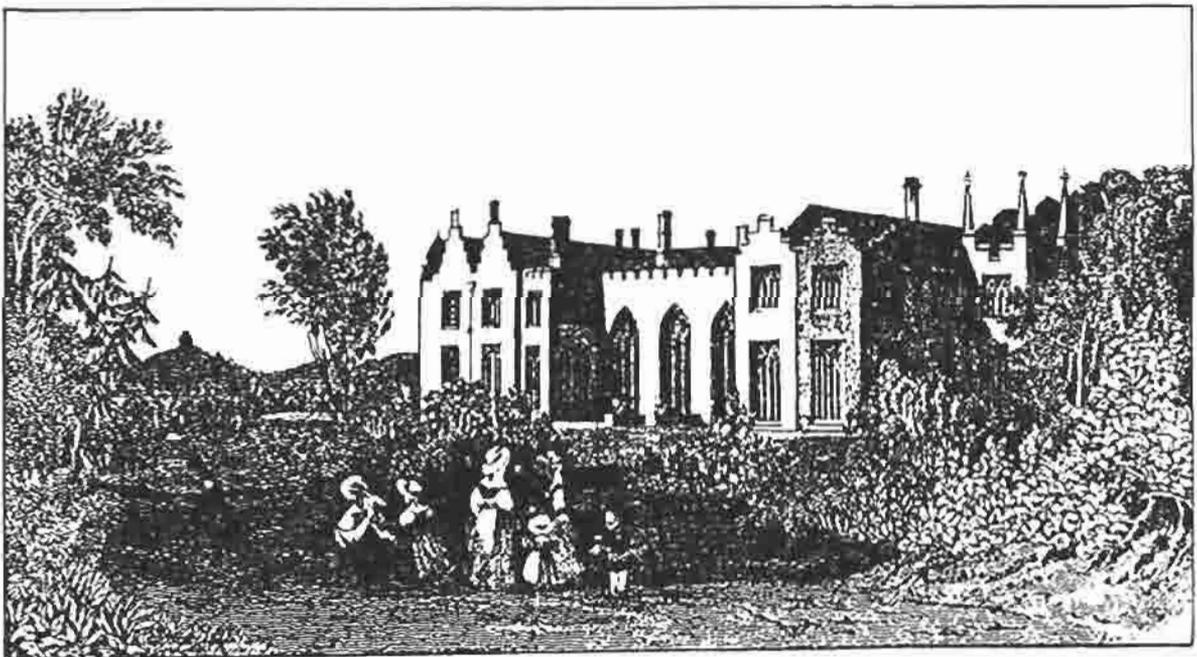


Figure 13. Hayne Manor, Stowford, begun 1810.
Engraving of c. 1830 [CW49].

CV49 Stowford, Hayne Manor (Fig. 13)

The sad story of an unwanted mansion, built for the Harris family on an ambitious scale in the Gothick style at its most picturesque. Work began in 1810 though building was not completed until 1865. Listed grade II*, Hayne is a wonderful assemblage of traceried windows, pinnacles, buttresses and battlements: though little known, it is one of the most romantic country houses in Devon. It is also woefully derelict; neglected for years, many parts are now semi-ruinous, and although the house is on the market its condition has so far deterred prospective buyers. With the support of the County Conservation Officer we have asked the Threatened Buildings Division of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments to undertake a recording survey of the building as a matter of urgency. Even if Hayne is sold, the scale of work necessary to render it habitable again will inevitably mean the loss of many of its original features, so proper recording is historically essential.

CV50 Newton Abbot, Clay Cellars

Brick-built, with massively battered walls, the cellars stand to either side of the now filled Hackney canal. Built in the early nineteenth century, they are among the few surviving architectural memorials to the Newton Abbot ball clay industry and are listed grade II. They are owned by the Ugbrooke estate, which would like to redevelop the site and has applied for permission to demolish. We have objected; these are unique buildings of considerable historical interest, still performing a useful function by housing small repair businesses and workshops: redevelopment should incorporate them, not obliterate them.

Chris Brooks .

INSIDE STORY

When a house is deemed to be of sufficient architectural and historical interest it is 'listed'; that is, placed on a statutory list of protected buildings. The protection this affords a building applies to the exterior, the interior, and the curtilage: the owner of a protected building must apply for listed building consent before undertaking any work that could affect its architectural character. Compiling the lists, which have been comprehensively revised and up-dated over the last three years, is one of the responsibilities of English Heritage. When the newly-revised list for any given area has been passed by English Heritage and accepted by the Department of the Environment, it is signed by the Secretary of State, at which point it becomes legally binding. The owner of a property that has been listed is then informed of the fact by post, and reacts with pride or chagrin according to his - or her - feelings about old buildings.

But whatever the individual reaction, does the owner comprehend the full implications of such statutory protection? There is plenty of evidence to suggest that there is more misapprehension than comprehension, and that possibly the most damaging result of this concerns house interiors. Many owners of listed buildings are under the impression that the listing only applies to the exterior of their property, and that it is only the exterior that the statutory protection seeks to preserve. They may act scrupulously on this assumption - and still play havoc with the interior.

One reason for this is that although exterior features such as small mullioned windows, a low arched doorway, or even a classical porch, may be inconvenient, they do not interfere with chosen lifestyles in the way historic interiors can. That old timber screen between the two living rooms, for instance: one could take it away and have a really good-sized room, and one does need a big room in which to entertain. And then there are those very inconvenient (and quite dangerous) stone steps winding up to the bedroom in that really *pokey* little alcove: get those out and we've got an ideal bar space, or a place to keep the logs for the new woodburner. And the huge open fireplace with the Rayburn in the 'farmhouse kitchen' - really quite redundant as we've gone all-electric - is just *too* awkward: it would be much neater blocked off. And the slate floor in the dining room is every bit as inconvenient, and nobody knows how to clean it properly, and there's no way it's suitable for fitted carpets. And so it goes on.

This mistaken - and often convenient - view of the limited application of the protection provided by listing is not confined to householders. Estate agents are prone to smoothly reassuring phrases: "Yes, the house is listed, but of course you can do what you like inside". Writers in the estate columns of reputable local newspapers glibly instruct their readers likewise. With such expert - and welcome - advice, house owners old and new go ahead and 'do as they like inside' in a state of happy innocence.

The need to awaken owners of listed houses to the real nature and extent of statutory protection is urgent. First reactions are often predictable: "It's our house...we have to live in it...this is the twentieth century...it's only the outside that shows". In many ways, such protests are understandable; certainly, they are arguments that need to be met not just by insisting on the letter of the law, but also by giving the reasons why interiors must be protected as well. These reasons fall into two areas: the first is concerned with the nature of a building's architectural and historical identity; the second, which has particular force in Devon and Cornwall, relates to the often deceptive relationship between exteriors and interiors.

First, the matter of architectural identity. An old house, it needs to be stressed, is not just a façade or set of façades - like flats from a stage set. All its historic features, inside as well as out, are part of the architectural story and have essential interest. Their effect is cumulative, creating the particular atmosphere, the elusive character that makes historic buildings unique. The loss of an interior feature means a loss of character and identity; major losses necessarily render the architectural story incomplete, and can render it incomprehensible. Radical interior changes can utterly destroy the connection between the inside and outside of a building. This can be seen in those 'conversions' of older buildings, particularly in cities, in which interiors are gutted and new shops or offices filled in behind historic frontages to which they have no functional or spatial relationship. What results is a kind of fraud, a species of architectural lie in which the street elevation promises a Georgian terrace or a Victorian hotel while the interior delivers the bulk standard layout of Boots or Marks and Spencers.

The deceptions of modern *façadism* take us to the whole question of the relationship between exterior and interior: ironically, the confusion created by façade architecture finds a mirror image in many hundreds of historic houses in Devon and Cornwall. Very frequently, as a result of historical change or simply

because of the modesty of a building's exterior, it is impossible even to guess at the quality of an interior from external features. Uninteresting or unattractive modern façades can hide seventeenth-century staircases, Tudor plasterwork, or medieval roof trusses. Even exteriors of which the fabric is early - and this is particularly true of cob - can be so tidied up by cement render and magnet joinery windows that the antiquity of the building is almost totally disguised. This can best be illustrated by some examples: Little Hackworthy (Figs. 14, 15 and 16) and Welltown, where unremarkable exteriors belie the rich and rewarding character of the interiors; and Rudge, where an interior of one date lies hidden behind the handsome cladding of another.

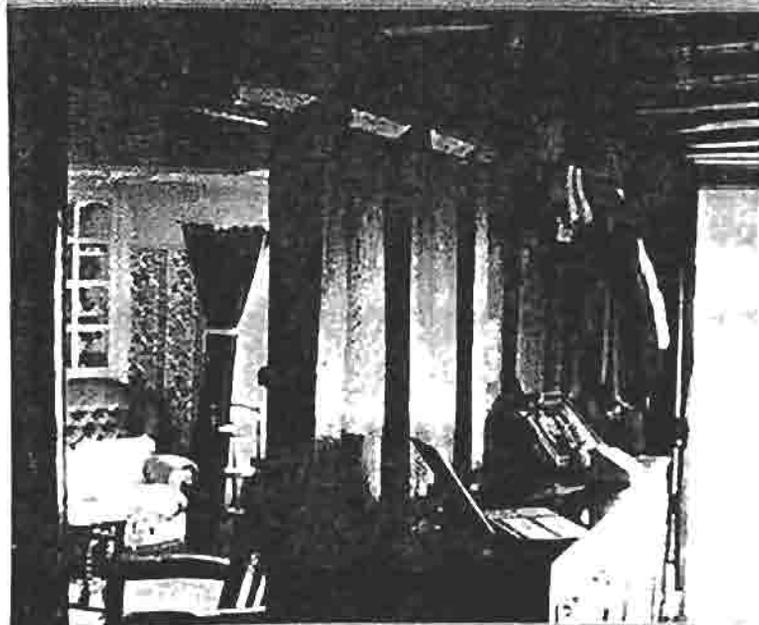
Welltown Farmhouse, in the Devon parish of Walkhampton, lies just below the western slopes of Dartmoor. It is a stone-walled, slate-roofed house with an unprepossessing façade which includes badly pointed masonry, unremarkable Victorian sash windows, and a drab roughcast finish to a gabled projection at one end. The only features which are historically suggestive are a shaped stone chimney, some picturesque if puzzling rooflines, and two mullioned windows, one of them blocked. Even so, the overall appearance is of a house, perhaps with early fragments, but otherwise almost wholly rebuilt in the nineteenth century.

The interior tells a wholly different story. Apart from the dairy and a small inner room, there are granite framed fireplaces in every room: three are heavily moulded with a striking if enigmatic plant design in a central panel; one has the initials of Richard and Grace Atwell, who married in the late sixteenth century and lived at Welltown. Further, there is an impressive granite arched doorway with decorated spandrels leading into what is now the kitchen, and three seventeenth-century moulded timber doorframes elsewhere in the house. The dairy retains slate shelves, a channelled slate floor and a wooden shuttered window. All this speaks clearly of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; in the roof, and almost inaccessible, one truss is unmistakably smoke-blackened, so pushing back the date of the original house into the late medieval period. Taken as a whole, the architecture of this modest but interesting house tells a significant story of the way in which it was enlarged and altered in direct relation to the rising wealth and status of a family who occupied it for at least four centuries. None of that story could be recovered if only the exterior of Welltown survived.

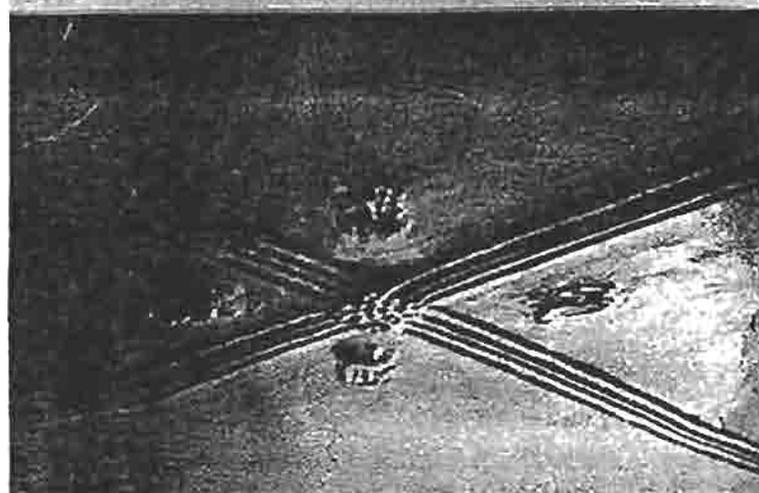
A farmhouse perhaps even more deceptive externally than Welltown is Rudge in Morchard Bishop parish. Instead of a rather non-descript and uninformative exterior, Rudge appears from the south front to be a good quality Victorian house. This is not just because nineteenth-century windows have been inserted into earlier openings: the house was totally refronted and reroofed in the mid nineteenth century, so entirely disguising a fine late medieval building within. So effective is the disguise that not even the three room and through passage plan can be deduced from the outside: the introduction of a second passage involved inserting a new door, so making the front almost symmetrical. The importance - and surprise - of Rudge lies in the fact that, underneath the nineteenth-century cladding, its late medieval smoke-blackened cruck roof survives almost intact. Doubtless its survival is due to its primary structural function: quite simply, its removal would have involved virtual demolition. Similar reasons probably explain why so many cruck trusses still remain in mid to north Devon, where they seem to have been the prevalent type of early roof construction. The roof of Rudge is of high quality, structurally sophisticated and with moulded timbers: as with many such roofs, it was superseded by another when its thatch covering was replaced by slates.



Figures 14 15 and 16. Little Hackworthy, Tedburn St Mary.



In common with many Devon farmhouses, the exterior of Little Hackworthy, listed II*, gives scarcely any indication of what is to be found inside. Rendered, with an asbestos roof replacing the original thatch, it has a set of simple timber windows to the front and a generally workaday appearance. As the interior reveals, however, it is a splendidly complete example of a traditional late medieval house, modernised in the early seventeenth century. The smoke-blackened roof timbers from the medieval open hall survive and the features from the later re-fashioning, the oak screens, exposed carpentry and decorated plasterwork in the parlour are all intact.



The listing, of course, applies to all the interior features and there would be little point in statutory protection if it did not. It also applies to the exterior features, even the asbestos roof. The owners would need to apply for Listed Building Consent to change the roofing material whether they were proposing thatch or concrete tiles. This is vital because if the roofing material were altered, the Local Authority would need to be sure that the irreplaceable medieval roof was not going to be damaged.

At Rudge, the disguise of the medieval structure is the historical result of continuing prosperity and of money continuing to be spent on the building. This raises a further issue, for the undoubted importance of what remains of the medieval house should not blind us to the aesthetic and historical value of the subsequent recasting. The nineteenth-century work at Rudge has its own importance and is part of the history of the house. The significance of such later work in old houses can easily be overlooked by owners who, with the best intentions, want to restore the building to its 'original' state: in so doing they can often destroy good quality features of a later date. Most often this applies to interiors where features have been covered up rather than destroyed. Here, much care and forethought is necessary. To take a simple case, the enthusiastic owner needs to be certain that an early fireplace exists before pulling out a good Victorian grate: otherwise, the result could be nothing more informative than an ugly hole in the wall. And what if the later fireplace is itself of considerable quality? An intact grate and surround with a full set of William de Morgan tiles would be a much rarer survival than a seventeenth-century fireplace lintel - which, after all, are fairly common in the county. Similarly, nineteenth-century joinery is often of high quality and in good condition, whereas earlier carpentry may often be comparatively crude and poorly preserved.

Listing is not about preserving good-looking exteriors: it is an attempt to safeguard the future of a whole building and its setting. Owners need to be far better informed about what statutory protection involves, and the vital importance of interiors needs to be explained. Better communication with owners and more easily available advice should be worked for by amenity groups, local authorities, and English Heritage itself. After all, owners of historic buildings cannot be expected to look after them if they do not understand what makes them historic in the first place.

Jenny Chesher
Veronica Chesher

BRIDGELAND STREET, BIDEFORD

The highly successful Devon Buildings Group Summer Conference included visits to some of the houses of Bridgeland Street. This planned street of late mercantile housing is remarkably well-preserved and must rank as one of the finest groups of housing from the period outside London.

In the late seventeenth /early eighteenth century Bideford enjoyed a period of great prosperity based largely on North American trade and tobacco in particular. So great was this trade that in 1709 its customs area head was transferred from Barnstaple to Exeter because, as the *Calendar of Treasury Books* for that year records, Bideford's trade at that date was "more considerable than that of Barnstaple".

In 1690, whilst the town was growing, the Feoffees (Trust Committee) of the Bideford Bridge Trust embarked on a project to build a street of fine houses. The project is relatively well-documented although the writer has not yet been able to locate a commemorative charter which apparently recorded much of the detail including the tight building controls. Nevertheless, the *Bridge Trust Account*

Book for the period records the acquisition of gardens, orchards, a carpenter's yard and the like between 1690-2 for building the "Nue Street". Most of the 1692-4 leases for the Bridgeland Street houses contain the following preamble:

...the Feoffees, for the better repairation and maintenance of the said Longbridge and for increasing the rents and revenues thereof that the same may be continued and repaired... have taken into their hands and possession diverse gardens and other grounds, parcels of lands belonging to the Longbridge... with the intent to build and to make a new street there, with roome also and ground allotted for the lessees and takers thereof to have gardens and other conveniences behind theyre respective houses.

This development was tightly controlled. An entry in the *Trust Account Book* from 30 March 1690 records a payment of £4.6s to Nathaniel Gascoyne, a carpenter, for "drawing a designe of the Nue Streete". Jonathan Hooper's 1692 lease for 28, Bridgeland Street shows something of the building regulations:

Jonathan Hooper hath undertaken and promised that he ...will, att his owne cost and charges within two yeares next ensueing the date of this present erect and build a good and sufficient new dwelling house on the said premises so allotted and sett out for him as aforesaid according to the course agreed, contayning sixtie two ffoote in ffront, well tymbered with oake and firre tymber and the foundation thereof layne with stone and so upwards in height two ffoote above the ground, the rest of the walls upwards with good brick, two storeys high and sixteen ffoote in breadth between the walls, the ffirst ffloore nyne ffoote in height and the walls thereof two bricks and a halfe in thickness, the second ffloor of the same height and two bricks in thickness, all healed and covered with slatt or helling stones from the quarries of Dennibowl...

The *Trust Account Book* also has an entry dated 21 June 1690 for payment of £45 to William Linex, brickmaker, for building "the drayne or common shore" down the street and in 1693 Nathaniel Gascoyne and William Linex were paid nearly £300 for building a "Nue Kay and slip" at the bottom of the street for the use of the tenants.

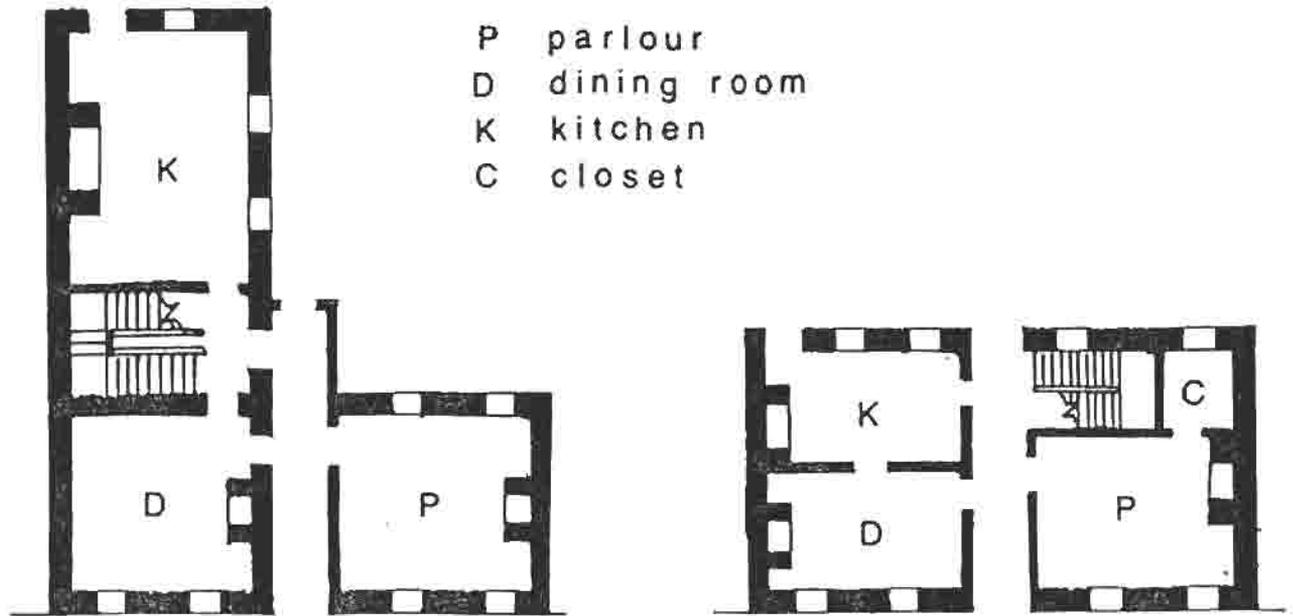
Most of the houses themselves survive as an exceptionally fine group although the first impression is of a street of early nineteenth-century buildings. Only Jonathan Hooper's house, No 28, looks anything like it did originally from the exterior. Nevertheless, most of the alterations have been confined to superficial and, in several cases, mainly external alterations. Most of the Bridgeland Street houses, in fact, date from 1692-4 and some are remarkably well-preserved.

Although the houses vary in size they would have presented a unified frontage on each side of the street. All were built parallel to the street at the front, end to end, two storeys high with attics and symmetrical brick facades with large central doorways. A wide, central through passage from the street to a rear courtyard was connected to a fine dog-leg stair in all but one (The Great House, No 12), the stair set at right angles to the passage. The main ground

floor rooms are invariably the kitchen, dining room and parlour and each house has a particularly fine first floor room which is considered to be a principal parlour rather than a master bed chamber since it is the finest room in the house. The variations of plan form fall into two types.

Plan-type A

Plan-type B



Bridgeland Street

Figure 17. Plan types of houses in Bridgeland Street, Bideford.
Approx. 1 : 250

Plan Type A, the L-Plan house. The type example is No 4, which was built for Christopher Pollard, a merchant. The main block on to the street is a two-room plan with a through passage between. These rooms were originally the parlour, to the right and dining room, to the left. A rear block projecting behind the dining room at right angles contains first the staircase, then the kitchen (in fact the kitchen part is much altered in No 4). The doorway to the stair lobby lies behind the passage through a lobby in the angle between the two wings.

Plan Type B, the double-depth house. The type example is No 31, which was built for Thomas Power, a merchant, and was described as "well-nigh finished" in the earliest lease of 1692. Here all the rooms are housed in the double depth main block built along the street with one front and back room either side of the central through passage. To the left there is the kitchen behind the dining room, to the right a front parlour with the staircase behind it, rising at right angles from the back of the passage. Since the stair does not take up the full space there is room for a small closet behind the parlour on each floor.

Although the Bridgeland Street houses conform to two basic plan types no two houses are exactly the same. No 28, now the largest house on the street, has a full courtyard layout but the main rooms conform essentially to the Type A layout. The smallest of the original houses, No 13, the All Seasons Public House, is a very compact version of the Type A plan. Of the Type B houses Nos 25-26, The Red House, provides an interesting variant. Here the kitchen is in a rear block behind the staircase and is connected to the front dining room by an unobtrusive narrow service corridor under the stairs. No 12, the Masonic Lodge, is also different. This is only a part of what was originally the largest house on the street, built for John Smith, a merchant, and known as the Great House. Here the staircase is alongside the passage and set parallel to it and, most unusual for any house of the period, the stairs rise from back to front.

The original leases also show that one plot on the street was set aside for a Non-Conformist church, the Great Meeting House. This was demolished in 1856 and replaced by the present Gothic Lavington Chapel but early nineteenth-century prints show a frontage very much like those of the other houses. A meeting house on the best street in town, whose trustees included many of the leading merchants of the day (several of whom actually lived on Bridgeland Street), is historically significant. It demonstrates that, in late seventeenth century Bideford at least, the social and political disadvantages associated with non-conformity earlier in the century had ceased to apply. The power and confidence of the Bideford merchants in the years immediately following the arrival of William of Orange had made non-conformity not only respectable in Bideford, but also part of the architectural identity of the finest part of the town. This comes through in Daniel Defoe's report on Bideford in his early eighteenth-century *Tour Through England and Wales, Vol I (1928 edn.), p 260. He was impressed by Bridgeland Street which he described as:*

a new spacious street,...as broad as the High Street of Excester, well-built, and, which is more than all, well inhabited, with considerable and wealthy merchants, who trade to most parts of the trading world.

When commenting on the meeting house Defoe was impressed by the clerk there, Mr Bartlet:

A most acceptable gentlemanly person, and one who, contrary to our receiv'd opinion of these people, had not only good learning, and good sense, but abundance of good manners, and good humour; nothing soure, cynical, or morose in him...I wish I could say the like of all the rest of his brethren.

The Bridgeland Street houses are a very important survival since they offer the opportunity to study a group of well-documented contemporary houses built in a controlled development by a small group of craftsmen. They were built at the high point of Devon's mercantile trade and show something of the expectations and aspirations of the merchant class at the close of the seventeenth century. At the time their fashionable appearance must have contrasted sharply with the carved oak-framed frontages popular in the mid seventeenth century. Their plans were experimental and represent a late phase in the evolution of the layout towards the "modern" house, as represented by the classic Georgian type. Inside, the rooms were rationally arranged, comfortable, light and well-proportioned, the best rooms lined with large field panelling and decorated with moulded

plasterwork cornices. These were elegant modern houses for a confident, prosperous merchant class. Few towns in England can boast a comparable development.

The research for the writer's work on late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century urban housing in Devon is sponsored by an RIBA grant. The results will be summarised in a forthcoming article in a new edition of *Devon's Traditional Buildings* to be published by Devon Books in 1988.

John Thorp

THE CONVERSION OF FARM BUILDINGS

The number of farmbuildings in Devon currently being converted to houses will not have escaped the notice of DBG members. Such conversions are probably the most obvious visible sign of the growth of a new kind of rural population arriving in the county and making an impact on the architectural environment which may prove to be as dramatic as the 'great rebuilding' of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

As early as 1904, Ebenezer Howard, one of the founding fathers of the Garden City movement, predicted that the twentieth century would be a period of de-urbanisation:

I venture to suggest that while the age in which we live is the age of the great closely-compacted, overcrowded city, there are already signs, for those who can read them, of a coming change so great and so momentous that the twentieth century will be known as the period of the great exodus, the return to the land...

The "great exodus", mostly from London and other urban areas of the South-East, is upon us. Judged in terms of travelling time, Devon is moving closer to the South East with every new phase of every new link road and by-pass across the south of England, making commuting to London perfectly possible for someone who lives in the county. Inflated house prices in the South East allow owners to exchange a modest property in Fulham or Maidstone for a substantial farmhouse or character barn conversion in Devon, often with one or two acres of land. De-urbanisation has coincided with a period of agricultural uncertainty and farmers are off-setting the decline in the value of agricultural land against capital made from selling their traditional farmbuildings to developers, who make far more profit than the farmers when they finally sell the converted building.

There is nothing new about the conversion of agricultural buildings to domestic use. In most of the genuine Devon longhouses the shippon end has been re-used as an extra parlour or a new kitchen and there are a number of examples of farmbuildings converted to cottages in the nineteenth century. Following The Housing (Rural Workers) Act in 1926, designed to improve the living conditions of the agricultural labourer, a number of barns were turned into cottages. While applauding the reasoning behind the Act, the effect on the farmbuildings was drastic (Figs.18 and 19). In contrast to the generally sympathetic treatment of



Figures 18 and 19. Stone and slated barn before and after conversion into four cottages for agricultural workers under the Housing (Rural Workers) Act of 1926.
From R. T. Shears, *The Conversion of Devonshire Cottages* (1926).

old cottages, reconditioned under the same Act, the barns seem to have been regarded largely as building sites. In some cases this is equally true of the new wave of conversions taking place today - developers are buying, not a building for conversion, but a building plot for a new house in a rural area in order to circumvent the planning policies which restrict new building in the countryside.

The scale on which such conversions are taking place today is, however, quite new. It is already having a discernible effect on settlement patterns in some rural areas: the old topography of small villages surrounded by scattered farmsteads is being transformed into a landscape of hamlets, centred on old farmsteads but now supporting four or five families. The wage-earners commute to work either in local towns or sometimes outside the county. Unlike a working farm, these places are oddly deserted during the daytime as are the farmsteads where the buildings have been converted for holiday accommodation. The changes to the farmbuildings themselves can be anything from sympathetic to almost total destruction. There is no doubt that some buildings can be converted with less damage to their original fabric than others. It would take a very fine architect indeed to make a decent job of retaining the integrity of an eighteenth-century cob threshing barn, characterised by simple outlines and probably with only two original openings, both of them massive and rising to the eaves. On the other hand, a nineteenth-century stone or brick shippon, with eight or nine original windows, and loft doors looks far more like a house to begin with.

The difficulty for a group like ours is that it is all too easy to become preoccupied with the details of individual cases at the expense of making ourselves properly informed about the larger issues that determine those cases. To some extent this has already happened and over the past year we have been fighting a rearguard action, arguing simply for less greedy development - fewer residential units, fewer new windows, more original features retained - without exploring or seeking to change the often contradictory policies that lie behind the whole business of conversion.

To begin with, there can be a conflict of interest between the Ministry of Agriculture and the farmer. The Ministry, operating EEC policies, may offer a grant for new farmbuildings to a farmer, on condition that the old ones are demolished or evidently no longer in use as farmbuildings. The farmer himself may be quite happy to retain the old buildings for storage or light use but is prevented from doing so if he wants his grant. Secondly, the process of listing can, ironically, hasten the destruction of historic farmbuildings. Approved alterations to listed buildings are exempt from VAT - this increases a developer's profit on a conversion and it is not uncommon for developers, having approached a farmer with a likely-looking range of buildings, to request that they should be listed. If the buildings do satisfy the criteria for listing, a planning application for conversion is submitted. Several District Authorities have a policy of looking favourably on applications to convert listed farmbuildings. This is not unreasonable since, if they are listed they must be worthy of retention and if the farmer claims they are redundant, or the Ministry has condemned them as unfit for agricultural use, re-use is a sensible planning solution. Conversion to housing also brings in extra rates. The actual conversion may, however, prove to be so damaging, despite good intentions on the part of the architect or the conservation officer, that the buildings have to be de-listed afterwards.

The ideal use for historic farmbuildings is an agricultural use. Some farmers seem ready and willing to continue with their old farmbuildings, perhaps supplementing them with one or two new buildings. We should be in a position to understand why this is possible on some farms, but apparently not on others. We should be quite clear which applications for conversion should be opposed altogether and when our role is to encourage sensitive conversion, or conversion to light industrial rather than residential use - this at least has a directly positive effect on rural employment and involves less damage to the fabric of the old buildings. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings provides excellent advice both on sources of grant-aid for the retention of farmbuildings and on sensitive conversion. This advice is patently not getting through to developers and possibly not even to Planning Authorities and we should be making efforts to ensure that it does.

The great exodus to Devon is unstoppable. In some cases it is providing much-needed money for the repair of neglected houses, and, at the more expensive end of the market, so-called 'leisure farming' is ensuring that some traditional farmbuildings remain intact to house horses or enough livestock to give a 'country' atmosphere to an old farmhouse. Unfortunately, in most cases it is beginning to transform rural areas into a sort of extended suburbia focussed on enclaves of converted farmbuildings. In Kent, where almost every oast house has long since been converted to a dwelling, developers are already building new 'converted oast houses'. The proposed conference on farmbuildings next year is urgently needed if we are to exercise any influence on the conservation of historic farmbuildings in the county.

Jo Cox

CONTRIBUTIONS TO FUTURE NEWSLETTERS FROM MEMBERS OF THE GROUP WILL BE VERY WELCOME: THESE COULD TAKE THE FORM OF SHORT ARTICLES, ACCOUNTS OF INDIVIDUAL BUILDINGS, REQUESTS FOR ADVICE AND INFORMATION, OR ITEMS OF GENERAL INTEREST. THE NEXT NEWSLETTER WILL BE SENT OUT IN THE SPRING..

CONTRIBUTIONS PLEASE TO CHRIS BROOKS.
