DEVON BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 1

APRIL 1986

SECRETARY'S REPORT

When the Devon Buildings Group was set up it was felt that case work would form the centre of our activities. This has indeed been the Committee's experience over the first few months of the Group's existence, so it is with a review of case work, and of the wider issues that some of the cases have given rise to, that I will begin this first newsletter.

Two cases with which we have been involved call for special mention: that of the seventeenth-century warehouse buildings and dock discovered on the Quay site in Exeter, and that of the Exe Vale Mental Hospital at Exminster, built 1842-5 to the designs of Charles Fowler, the architect of Covent Garden Market and the Higher and Lower Markets in Exeter. Detailed accounts of these buildings will be found later in the newsletter, but it is appropriate to say something about the case work involved here.

The warehouse and dock were discovered behind later building at 45-47 The Quay. Initial proposals for its renovation and re-use by the Quay Trust would have resulted in extensive alteration and the loss of many features of importance. Together with the Devon Archaeological Society and the Conservation Office of Exeter City Council, the DBG objected. Archaeological investigation further revealed the unique character of the building and of the site. After discussions and site meetings, and in the light of the new archaeological evidence that had emerged, the Quay Trust recognized the inappropriateness of their original scheme - a flexibility that is to be applauded. A different approach to the building has now been adopted and the question of its future use entirely reviewed. Consideration is now being given to turning it into an interpretation centre for the whole of the Quay area, a use which will be sympathetic to the building and which will reflect its major importance in understanding the development of the site as a whole. The case provides a useful example of the way in which a concerted approach from different conservation interests can bring results.

The case of the Exe Vale Mental Hospital at Exminster has involved the DBG in matters of genuinely national concern. It is no exaggeration to say that the Hospital currently presents the single largest problem in the conservation of historic buildings in Devon, and that this reflects a situation that is beginning

to emerge throughout the country. Over the last few years it has been the well-publicized policy of the NHS to take patients out of large institutions for the mentally ill and return them to the community, often moving them into small residential units. Broadly speaking, these measures are to be financed by the sale of the usually extensive sites occupied by existing mental hospitals, which the implementation of the policy will, of course, render redundant. It seems clear that this national policy was formulated without adequate consideration being given to the architectural significance of many of the buildings involved; indeed, the NHS has only recently begun to realise, and take stock of, the large number of historically important buildings that it owns. The great hospitals built throughout the country in the nineteenth century were a specialised building type; like town halls, museums, markets, and cemeteries, they were built in response to the needs of the rapidly expanding population of an increasingly industrialized and urban Britain, and were expressions of the new sense of civic pride and corporate social responsibility that emerged in the Victorian period. In view of the proposed closure of Exminster Hospital and the sale of the site for re-development, the DBG, in conjunction with the Victorian Society, asked English Heritage to inspect the buildings with a view to listing. As a result, in November last year, Fowler's original hospital - comprising the central administrative block with its semi-circular access corridor and radiating wings - was listed Grade II*, while Fowler's gates and lodges, and the chapel of 1875-6 by Joseph Neale were listed Grade II. The Committee realized all along that such statutory protection, though essential, would only be a starting point and felt that the DBG should try to stimulate interest in the sympathetic re-use of the buildings in order to secure their long-term survival. Accordingly, we wrote to the *Architects' Journal* in February; the publication of our letter met with a very encouraging response and we have since had meetings with architects and others actively involved in considering the future of hospital buildings elsewhere in the country. The full scale of the problem is only now becoming apparent and, as such, beginning to engage NHS planners at the national level. Locally, we have had a preliminary meeting with the Exeter Health Authority at which we were able to correct a number of misconceptions about the kinds of constraint imposed by listing and to suggest ways of exploring the possible long-term re-use of the buildings at Exminster, preferably as part of an integrated re-development scheme. Such a scheme could well help the Authority towards its entirely legitimate goal of maximising the financial return on the site. But it would also necessitate the widest possible consultation - with planners, local authorities, English Heritage, conservation bodies - and it is the DBG's current policy to try to facilitate that process. The date for the closure of the hospital has been put back from 1987 to 1990 so time is available in which to investigate the available options. Meanwhile, it is clear that Exminster Hospital will continue to occupy a central position in our case work.

The re-use of historic buildings brings problems of its own, and proposals for the conversion of farm groups have been considered by the Committee on a number of occasions. The increasing mechanisation of modern agriculture, the amalgamation of farm units - particularly on large estates - and the continuing reduction in farming operations that are labour intensive, all tend to convince farmers that traditional farm buildings no longer have a viable agricultural use. In addition, and despite the recession nationally, money from out of the county continues to be attracted into Devon. One characteristic of this process, whatever other benefits it may bring to the local economy, is an increased pressure on the existing building stock as the demand for retirement homes, second homes, and holiday accomodation intensifies. The existence of such a

demand provides a ready inducement to the conversion of agricultural buildings, and often whole farmsteads, for residential use. Unfortunately, such conversions are rarely sympathetic to the distinctive architectural character of the buildings themselves: almost inevitably, the insertion of doors and windows brings a total change in external appearance, while interiors and fittings are destroyed entirely. In September the DBG objected unsuccessfully to a multiple residential conversion of Neopardy Farm at Yeoford, near Crediton. This mid nineteenth-century farmstead was listed Grade II and occupies a critical position in the landscape; although there were some amendments to the original plans, the scheme to which Listed Building Consent was given still involved alterations which, in our view, were much too extensive. Far more hopeful is the case of Newlands Farm near Broadclyst. Newlands was one of the farms on the Aclands' Killerton estate and is now owned by the National Trust; the property was farmed by the same family from 1853 until last year and the whole planned farmstead, which dates in its entirety from 1841-2, survives with remarkable completeness. Like Neopardy, it is listed Grade II. We have had a useful meeting with the estate Land Agent and made written representations to the Trust stressing the architectural and historical importance of Newlands and expressing a strong preference for its continued agricultural use. Although the Trust will need to consider all options - including conversion to residential purposes - they are well aware of the conservation issues involved: a decision on the future of the farm will be made later this month. Threatened re-development of two major farm sites in North Devon are also of current concern. Town Farm in Braunton is of great historical importance in being the only farmstead left in the town that has a direct relationship to the Great Field. The farmhouse, a Grade II* listed building now in use as an agricultural store, is late medieval and retains a great deal of early detail. The present owner has intentions to convert the house and its associated buildings for multiple residential use. Wistlandpound Farm in Kentisbury is an example - unique in North Devon - of the large model farms built in response to the high agriculture of the mid nineteenth century. It is threatened by a residential conversion that, in its initial form, proposes no less than nineteen dwelling units. The re-development proposals for Town Farm Town and Wistlandpound are still in their early stages and have not yet been formally submitted: the Group will need to monitor both cases closely over the coming months.

Most of the farmsteads mentioned above are now listed. Although this does not necessarily provide the level of protection one might wish - Neopardy being a case in point - the establishment of statutory protection is often an important first step in securing the long-term survival of a building or buildings of interest, and the DBG has been active in making representations to English Heritage about listing. We have met with varying success. Most disappointingly, English Heritage eventually refused to list Tavistock pannier market, despite a very carefully presented argument that attracted wide support: the details of this case and its implications are discussed at length later in the newsletter. A further disappointment was Barcombe Hall. An intriguingly eclectic design of 1839-40, Barcombe stands in its own ground and was the first major villa built in nineteenth-century Paignton. Change of ownership put its future at risk and, after an approach by Torbay Borough Council, the DBG gave full support to their application for it to be included on the list of protected buildings. Despite Barcombe's evident architectural interest and historical importance, the application was turned down. Fortunately, other cases have had a more satisfactory outcome. We prepared the listing submission for Tiverton Town Hall, designed in 1862 by Lloyd of Bristol, and this is now a Grade II building. In

conjunction with the Victorian Society, the DBG made successful representations for the up-grading of St Augustine's Priory, Abbotskerswell, from II to II*. The chapel of 1863 and the main conventual block of 1871 are major works by Joseph Hansom, the chapel containing a uniquely extraordinary tabernacle by Hansom's pupil, Benjamin Bucknall. The additional measure of protection provided by the II* listing has been made necessary by an ambitious re-development scheme that envisages the conversion of the whole Priory into retirement flats and houses, and that initially included a plan to turn the chapel into a swimming pool and spa bath.

Something of the range of the rest of the case work dealt with over the past months may be briefly indicated. We have maintained a close interest in the future of 3 North Street, Crediton, a listed building that was part of Crediton Market and is now owned by Mid-Devon District Council; again in Crediton, the DBG made representations about the implications for historic buildings of the various routes proposed for the by-pass; back in August, we joined other conservation bodies in protesting against the dispersal of statues from Mamhead House; earlier this year, the Group submitted views on the alterations being made to The George Hotel in South Molton; within the last fortnight we have objected to proposed demolition within the conservation area of Cheriton Fitzpaine. The scope and variety of the cases in which the DBG has already been involved is ample proof that the Group is needed. There is, however, one aspect of the Group's work that gives cause for concern. The great majority of cases in which we have so far been involved have originated from members of the Committee, rather than from the wider membership of the Group. Contact between members should have been made far easier with the publication of the Register, and the Committee is anxious that case work should be generated from a far broader base than at present. All members of the Group are, after all, actively engaged with the historic buildings of the county: if we are to realise our potential as a concerted conservation body, that individual activity needs to be more fully reflected in the work of the DBG as a whole.

Besides case work, much of the Committee's time, inevitably, has been taken up with matters of organisation. Early meetings discussed questions of eligibility for membership and levels of subscription, the results of which were circulated to members in September. In the autumn, a Sub-committee was established to draw up a constitution for the Group. The provisional draft of this is now nearly complete; when this is agreed by the full Committee, copies will be sent to all members in good time for the AGM when any amendments can be brought forward and, it is to be hoped, a final constitution adopted. Over the coming months, in preparation for the AGM, the Committee will also be making provision for the proper nomination and election of officers and a new Committee. The compiling and printing of the Register took rather longer than had at first been hoped, as a result of which, preparation of the present newsletter was also delayed. The whole of the Register is now, however, stored on a word processor, so future editions should be easy to produce. Some additional entries are included in this newsletter. Organisation of the Conference also met with an early setback: the Committee originally intended that it should be on the subject of Thatch but, after some of the initial preparations had been made, it was discovered that this would clash with a conference already set up by the Devon and Cornwall Master Thatchers' Association. As a result, the subject of our conference was changed to Devon Plasterwork and the date put back to June 7: all members should have received the details of this by now. The Thatchers'

conference, earlier this month, was attended by representatives of the Group, and contacts made then will, we hope, form the basis for a useful relationship between the Association and the DBG: a report on the conference will be found in the present newsletter. We have also been in touch with a number of other organisations, with encouraging results. As will be seen from the Register, membership of the Group has been taken out by Devon Library Services, the Devon Record Office, Exeter City Council, and the National Trust. In November, the DBG was represented at the inaugural conference of the South West Centre for Historical Studies at Exeter University. Preliminary contacts have also been made with the Devonshire Association and the Devon Historic Buildings Trust.

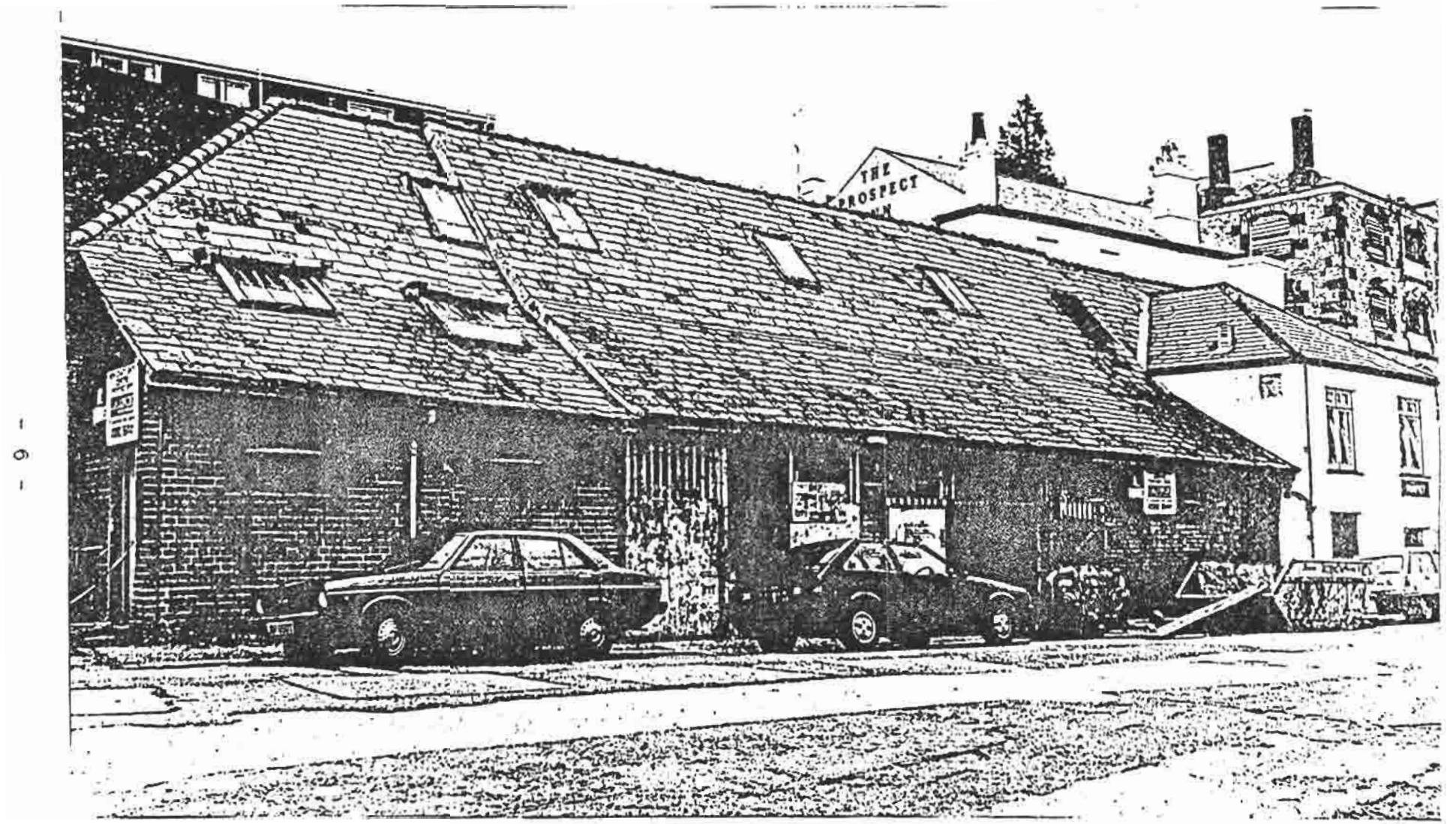
A final few words on personnel: since it was set up at the inaugural meeting of the DBG, the Committee has lost two members. Martin Cherry has taken up a post with the RCHM in Kent and Gwyneth Guy has moved to Hereford. Both were members of the original Steering Committee, and we owe them thanks for all the work they put into the establishment of the Group. In seeking replacements, the Committee decided to increase its number somewhat. The new Committee members are: Peter Child, who currently works in the Planning Department of East Devon District Council and who was also involved in setting up the Group's Steering Committee; Peter Dare, who is the Master Mason of Exeter Cathedral; and Isobel Richardson, who has taken over from Gwyneth Guy in the National Trust Vernacular Buildings Survey.

Chris Brooks

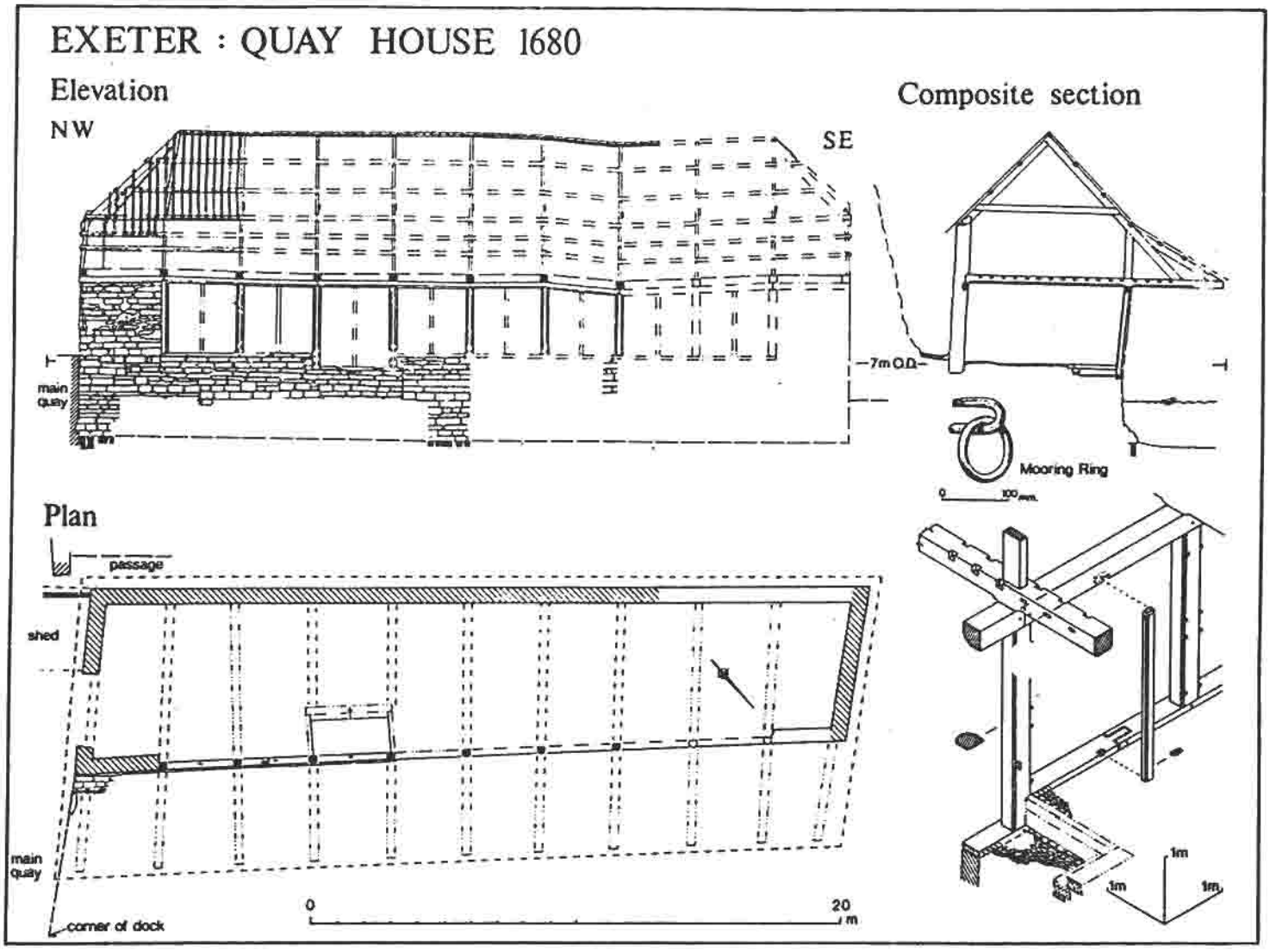
AN EARLY WAREHOUSE ON EXETER QUAY

An early warehouse discovered recently at Exeter Quay is thought to be the only surviving building of its type in Britain. Survey and excavation by the Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit have shown that Nos. 45-47 The Quay, and the core of the adjacent 'Prospect Inn' were built in the late seventeenth century as a transit shed standing next to a lighter dock.

The lighter dock can be dated on documentary evidence to 1676. In that year the Exeter Canal (built in 1564-6 to bypass the river Exe between the city and the head of the estuary) was extended and made passable for vessels of up to 16 tons; at the same time major additions were made to Exeter Quay, resulting in a run of stone quays recorded as totalling 483ft. in length. The newly discovered dock accounts for about 220ft. of this figure, measuring about 6m. [20ft.] in width at its head and about 30m. [100ft.] in length, with quays on three sides and its south open to the river, facing downstream. The dock walls stand 3.2m. [10ft. 6ins.] high, and contain masonry of five main periods, the earliest of sixteenth-century date. The building originally occupied the north-east side of the dock. Known as the Quay House, it was built in 1680 at the same time as the Custom House, which stands 20m. to the north west on the main quay.



Nos 45-47 The Quay, Exeter



The Quay House comprises ten bays and has a trapezoidal ground plan with maximum external dimensions of 29.3m. × 7m. The walls on the ground floor are built of Heavitree stone except for the middle eight bays of the south-west side where an arcade of moulded oak posts, seated on a plain oak base plate, runs along the edge of the dock. Iron mooring rings 11-13mm. thick and 105mm. in diameter are attached to the base plate by staples. The arcade posts are 0.28m. [11ins.] square in section with external ovolo mouldings (continued on the deal arcade plates) and internal rebates. The arcade openings are 2.6m. [8ft. 6ins.] square except in bay 4 where a 3.1m. [10ft.] high opening frames a sunken loading well 0.45m. [1ft. 6ins.] deep entered by steps on its north-east side.

Each arcade opening originally contained a removable deal intermediate post which fitted into mortises in the base and arcade plates; the single surviving example measures 0.10m. × 0.15m. [4ins. ×6ins.] in section, with a plain external chamfer and an internal rebate on each side. The other arcade openings were provided with four 'stable' doors hung on hooks, two pairs of which are found on each jamb. These doors were probably permanent fixtures: they could be swung open to provide light, and when bulky goods were handled the intermediate posts could be removed.

The upper floor is carried on oak beams (chamfered with scroll stops) up to 0.3m. [1ft.] thick and originally as much as 9.75m. [32ft.] long; these project forward across the arcade line to support a cantilevered 'attic' roof forming a shelter over the lighter dock about 3.7m. [12ft.] in width. The joists of the main floor are tenoned (but not pegged) at one end and seated in open sockets at the other; those in the cantilevered area, however, occupy open sockets at both ends, suggesting either that this part of the floor is an insertion or that it was designed so that sections could be taken up to permit loading direct into lighters below. No stairs or other means of access to the first floor have been located. However, the joists in bays 1-3 are replacements, and it is possible that a stairway or open hatch through which goods could be passed existed in this area. The upper floor presumably served for the storage of goods delayed in transit.

The walls above the upper floor level are built of brick and contain no original openings. The roof is hipped and was probably covered originally with small South Devon slates. In each deal A-frame truss the rear principal is set into the top of the back wall, whilst the front principal projects down to rest on the cantilevered beam about 1.5m. [5ft.] forward of the arcade line, part of the weight of the roof being transferred onto the arcade through a vertical queen strut notched into the principal. A subsidiary principal extends the truss to the end of the beam, giving the front section of the roof a lower pitch than the rest. The collar is lap-jointed to the principals and secured at either end by two pegs and two iron spikes. The notched, mortise-and-tenoned apex is pegged, as are all the common rafters to both ridgepiece and purlins. All other roof members, including the trenched and scarfed purlins, are secured by iron spikes.

The Quay House was entered from the main quay to the west through a doorway about 2.6m. [8ft. 6ins.] wide in the north-west end wall, near the western corner of the building. Wear marks on the cobbles inside the doorway attest to the passage of carts with wheels set about 1.2m. apart.

An open fronted timber-framed shed around 2.6m. [8ft. 6ins.] wide, with a monopitch roof sloping to the rear (i.e. north east), abutted the end wall of the Quay House on the north-east side of the entrance. This building had a cobbled floor continuous with the surface of the main quay and with the cobbled floor of the Quay House. This may be the 'lynney' mentioned in a deed of 1688, and perhaps served to house the carts recorded as belonging to the Quay at this period. At the back of the Quay House was a 1.2m. wide passageway whose cobbled surface incorporated an eavesdrip 0.4m. from the back wall. The passageway and the rear part of the Quay House are terraced into the foot of a sandstone cliff which rises to a height of about 10m. above them.

In the late seventeenth century Exeter ranked among the leading English provincial ports, exporting to the Continent a considerable volume of woollens, much of it serge cloth woven in the hinterland and finished in Exeter or Tiverton. It was primarily to serve this trade that the new lighter dock, Custom House, Quay House and a warehouse were built by the City Chamber (council) in 1676-80. The packs of cloth were transported in the city's own lighters, seven in number by 1691, which plied daily between Exeter Quay and the ships anchored in the tideway at Topsham and Starcross.

In 1698-1701 the Exeter Canal was deepened to allow sea-going ships of 14ft. draught to reach Exeter Quay. At this time the lighter dock was filled in

and the Quay House partitioned internally to create probably seven separate warehouse units: four on the upper floor - two of two bays, two of three - served by stairs at the front of the building in bays 3 and 7, and three on the ground floor - of two, three, and probably five bays.

Excavation of pre-1676 levels has uncovered the foundations of earlier quay walls as well as sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century warehouses.

In 1986 the Exeter Canal and Quay Development Trust intends to convert the building to provide shops, offices and a heritage interpretation area illustrating the history of Exeter Quay.

Chris Henderson

THE TAVISTOCK PANNIER MARKET

The Tavistock Pannier Market stands on a triangular site in the centre of the town bounded by Bedford Square, Duke Street and Market Road. In 1862 the Tavistock Gazette greeted the opening of the market with enthusiasm: "the buildings are admirably adapted for the purposes intended....the whole reflects great credit on the architect who has so admirably planned and carried out the work". It is difficult to disagree with these comments - the market is a model of thoughtful planning rather than lavish detail, although the use throughout of the local greenstone with handsome granite and yellow brick dressings and slate roofs makes the complex of buildings sit quite comfortably with the fifteenth-century Abbey gateway in Bedford Square and the parish church which is visible from the east end of the market site.

The pannier market complex consists of a very complete central market hall, aisled on all four sides. There is an irregular range of buildings on the Market Road side including a good Auctioneer's Hall and two cart entrances. The Bedford Square end of the site is partly made up of the impressive town hall of 1848 which is arcaded towards the market. The architectural detail is reserved for the Duke Street side of the site where a fine row of three-storey shops facing Duke Street has a blind arcade with iron columns and three archways leading into the market place. These shops are unusual in that they are back-to-back with further shops under an iron colonnade facing into the market. The market thus has two public elevations - the Town Hall which actually forms part of the market at the rear, and the Duke Street shops.

The building history of the market must be one of the best documented in the country. The Bedford Estate papers in the Devon Record Office reveal that credit for the buildings is due as much to the relationship between the people of Tavistock and the seventh Duke of Bedford as to Bedford's Devon Estate surveyor, E.Rundle, the architect of the pannier market. In the late 1850s the Duke was memorialised by the people of Tavistock requesting that he should provide a pannier market. The problems of finding the appropriate site exercised both the Duke and the townspeople; it became clear that wherever the market was sited it would involve Bedford in a programme of purchasing property for demolition. There

were accusations that interested parties filled public meetings with old men and schoolboys paid to vote one way or another and the political opponents of the Bedford faction threatened never to sell to the Duke. When the site was finally agreed upon it involved not only purchase and demolition on a large scale but also the obliteration of the old street plan in the area and an alteration in the course of the River Tavy. All the relevant costs and correspondence survive, including the market bye laws.

The market is still in use but is currently causing some local concern. It is in a prime position in the centre of Tavistock and its future is likely to be under constant review on the basis that more money could be made out of other activities on the site. A local resident contacted the DBG expressing anxiety about the possible re-use of the market hall as a squash court and we were startled to discover that when Tavistock was relisted in 1983 the market hall and Market Road ranges had not been included, although the Duke Street shops were graded II. While listing in no way precludes changes of use or alterations it does allow opposition to be aired and objections to be heard. The current Resurvey of historic buildings in rural areas does not, of course, include Tavistock and if buildings have been missed in the urban areas the only recourse is spot-listing - as it will be in the rural areas when the Resurvey is completed. It has been suspected for some time that, after the Resurvey, it will be increasingly difficult to get buildings spot-listed as the Department of the Environment will take the line that the lists are definitive. We were keen, therefore, to request the listing of the pannier market not only on its own obvious merits but to establish a precedent for adding buildings to the list in an area that had - in theory - already been covered. Our experience was not a happy one.

It turned out that the buildings had not been inadvertently missed when Tavistock was resurveyed but judged to have been of insufficient interest. This is an extraordinary response to the market complex, bearing in mind that part of it - the Duke Street shops - were listed as having special historic or architectural interest and that the Town Hall is also a listed building. The whole market site was conceived, designed and built as a complex of inter-related buildings and only makes historical sense when understood as such. The DBG made this point to The Department of the Environment whilst pointing out the quality and extent of the surviving documentation - something which might easily have been missed when the building was assessed. We also argued the significance of the market to the visual integrity of Tavistock town centre and the special place it occupies as part of a townscape largely created by the Dukes of Bedford. In addition we asked the Victorian Society to support our case which was given additional weight from Peter Beacham and a number of architectural historians including Bridget Cherry and two specialists in nineteenth-century building history.

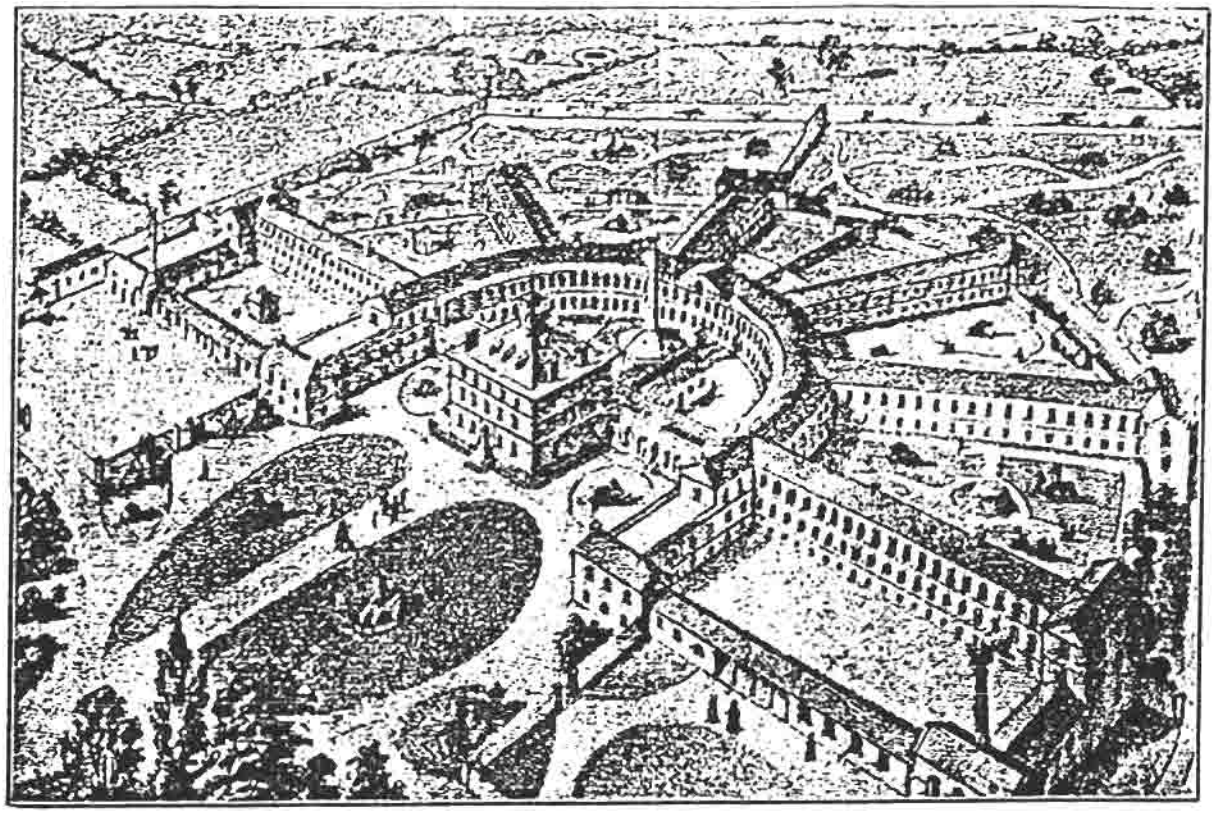
We were eventually informed that the buildings had been re-assessed as unlistable. Our representations both to English Heritage and the Department of the Environment had been detailed and we felt it was not unreasonable to ask for a fuller explanation of why they had not accepted our points. We received a reply that told us that the pannier market (except for the Duke Street range) had not been afforded statutory protection because it is not "a sufficiently important example of the genre to merit listing": that is, it had not been listed because it had not been listed.

The whole episode raises a number of worrying issues. We will leave aside the wearisome months of waiting for any kind of reply from either English Heritage or the Department of the Environment. What is important is the failure to judge the pannier market as a complete entity. The persistence in picking out part of the market complex as being of interest because it happens to be one of the show elevations is precisely the kind of architectural history that, until recently, was responsible for misjudging so many vernacular buildings, continues to affect the assessment of industrial buildings and is especially insensitive to the complex workings and arrangements of Victorian public architecture. Furthermore, it does seem as though there may be real difficulties in picking up buildings that, inevitably, will be missed on the current Resurvey.

Jo Cox

CHARLES FOWLER AND THE DEVON COUNTY ASYLUM, EXMINSTER

The provision of specialised institutions for the care of the mentally ill essentially dates from the nineteenth century, a result of the unprecedented pressures on social administration and organisation generated by massive population growth and the urbanisation that came with the Industrial Revolution. The lunatics - to use the historical term - for whom provision was needed were, in the great majority of cases, members of the working class whose afflictions ruled out any chance of employment and whose families, where they existed, did not have the resources to look after them. In middle and upper class families money could be found to care for lunatics within the home - as is the case with Mrs. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* - or in private establishments - like that in which the Gentleman in the Small-clothes is confined in *Nicholas Nickleby*. The erection of public lunatic asylums out of public funds was made possible by enabling Acts of 1808 and 1828, though relatively few were built in the first three decades of the century. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, however, created an entirely new administrative structure for dealing with poverty and the impoverished, who included, of course, the lunatic poor. The distinction between 'able-bodied poor' and 'impotent poor', fundamental to the thinking behind the legislation, meant that each of the union workhouses established by the Act needed separate facilities to look after the aged and infirm who had been taken into care. In the early years of the Act's operation these facilities were often inadequate and sometimes harsh - though local variation was considerable. Particular problems arose over the treatment of those paupers who were insane or just feeble-minded, for the Act had made no distinction between them and those inmates who were simply sick or old. Despite later legislative moves and periodic public scandals, the abuse pathetically represented by 'the moping idiot in the workhouse' persisted throughout the century. However, many early Victorian authorities responsible for administering the Poor Law did see the need to make special provision for the mentally-afflicted poor, both those in workhouses and those receiving outdoor relief. Understandably, they thought in terms of a centralised and purpose-built institution. Such a need was recognised by the Devon magistrates; accordingly, after the spring Quarter Sessions of 1841, they announced their intention of building a County Asylum.



Devon County Pauper Lunatic Asylum, Exminster
Aerial perspective by Charles Fowler, 1845

A Committee of Justices, meeting under the chairmanship of the Earl of Devon, was appointed to superintend the erection and management of the new Devon County Pauper Lunatic Asylum - to give it its original title. A site was chosen at Exminster: airy and open, on well-drained soil, and commanding impressive views over the Exe estuary. Plans for the asylum were obtained by competition and, having sought the advice of an independent assessor, the Committee selected the design prepared by Charles Fowler. Construction began in 1842, the contractor being the Torquay building firm of J. T. Harvey - responsible for so much of the early development of Torbay. The asylum was opened on 22 July 1845, by which time expenditure on the building and extras amounted to some £55,000.

The choice of Charles Fowler (1792-1867) as architect was a crucial one. He was a Devon man, born in Cullompton, and he retained professional contacts with the West Country throughout his career. Having been apprenticed in Exeter to John Powning, and worked in the London office of David Laing, he set up his own practice in London in 1818. Fowler achieved celebrity as the architect of Covent Garden Market (1828-30) and went on to design Hungerford Market (1831-3; demolished 1862) and Exeter Lower Market (1836-7; destroyed 1942) as well as completing the Higher Market in Exeter (1835-8). Fowler's mastery of the particular functional difficulties presented by such specialised buildings stems from a rationalist approach to architectural design which is characterised by lucid planning and, often enough, by innovative construction. As Sir John Summerson has said, 'his original sense of structure places him alongside engineers like Rennie and Telford'.

Like the big urban market, the lunatic asylum was a new building type that had its own peculiar functional requirements, and, experienced as he was in confronting the complex problems of large-scale design, Fowler evidently gave much thought to Exminster. In a paper delivered to the Institute of Architects in 1846 and partly reprinted in *The Builder* (25 July 1846), Fowler detailed the factors that determined the Devon County Asylum design and offered a critique of previous asylum plans in the light both of his own experience at Exminster and of the classic first principles of construction, convenience and propriety. Fowler argued that the distribution and arrangement of an asylum should result from meeting special requirements: the supervision of patients had to be balanced against the need for privacy; open wards and communal areas had to be provided, as had the means for exercise; there had to be easy access to the different parts of the building; good ventilation and plenty of light were needed; arrangements had to be made for different categories of inmate as well as for the separation of the sexes. Fowler divides the plans previously employed for asylums into three basic types. The first is a radiating plan, as at Bodmin Asylum (John Foulston, 1818), in which wings run out from a central administrative and supervisory block like the spokes of a wheel. The second type is the rectilinear plan in which the constituent buildings take the E form, a version of which is found at Hanwell in Middlesex (William Alderson, 1828-31). The third is the parallel type, as at Wakefield Asylum (Pritchett and Watson, 1816-18), which is arranged on the H plan. His criticisms of all three plan types are succinct. The radiating plan makes for easy supervision, but the convergence of the wings at the centre results in constriction, lack of light and poor ventilation. Although the other two plans allow for plenty of light and air, and have generous exercise areas, communication between different parts of the building is inconvenient and inefficient so that, at Hanwell, 'the kitchen...is more than 1000 feet distant from the day-rooms in the west wing, and it is consequently found desirable to send the dinners packed in a cart drawn by a horse'. Fowler's design for Exminster is a redefinition of the radiating type which deftly synthesises the best elements of all three earlier models, resulting in a plan of brilliant lucidity. He maintained the central administrative block but encompassed it with a three-storey semi-circular range which contained day rooms, and which gave access to six two- and three-storey radial wings, each of eighteen bays, designed to accomodate 'the separate classes of inmates'. A hexagonal kitchen in the courtyard behind the administrative block gave into the centre of the semi-circular range, allowing food to be distributed 'with the utmost promptitude and facility'. The areas between the radial wings provided ample space for exercise.

Fowler's original County Asylum remains today very largely intact, though partly obscured by subsequent accretions and with some additions to the radial wings. The grounds in which it stands still have their original entrance lodges on the main road into Exminster village. Also designed by Fowler, each lodge consists of two adjoining blocks in brecchia ashlar with rusticated granite quoins, sash windows, and granite and freestone dressings. In between the lodges the granite gate piers survive, complete with their impressive cast iron gates. From these an avenue, the trees now fully mature, runs long and straight up to Centre House, the administrative block of Fowler's Asylum. Centre House is an imposing three-storey building of red brick with sash windows in granite architraves; its symmetrical five-bay front has granite quoins and string courses, with granite steps and pilasters to the main door. The interior is very complete, including fireplaces, plaster cornices and ceiling roses, an impressive first-floor committee room, and elegantly cantilevered staircases with iron

balusters. Like Centre House, the semi-circular range and radial wings are all built of red brick. Stylistically, their constituent forms owe little to historical quotation: round-headed small pane windows recessed under brick arches, the floor divisions marked by granite string-courses, and, across the ends of the radial wings, short crosswings with pedimented gables. The keynotes to the whole dignified ensemble are rationality and order, a testimony to the nineteenth-century reform of the earlier chaotic, irregular and inconsistent treatment of lunatics, and to the humanitarian tradition to which Fowler's architecture belongs.

Since 1845, Charles Fowler's buildings have proved remarkably adaptable to changes, many of them radical, in the care and treatment of the mentally-ill. With foresight and imagination they should prove equally adaptable to future re-use when the hospital closes in 1990.

Chris Brooks
Jo Cox

A NOTE ON HERITAGE WORK BY AN MSC AGENCY

The extent to which Manpower Services Commission funded projects provide employment is not realised by everyone: the Bridge Agency alone, at the time of writing, has a workforce of about a thousand engaged on various projects in Devon. Only a small proportion of these are occupied in anything that can be classified as heritage work (to use here for the last time the current vogue phrase), and the tasks they are performing do not make headlines (for good or ill), but are vital for the maintenance and improvement of historical buildings and sites. Given the constraints imposed from above, which - quite rightly - ensure that the recruiting of labour is mainly from the younger long-term unemployed, who are in the nature of things often untrained in any technical or manual skills, it is not to be expected that really elaborate restoration works will be undertaken, for although in-job training forms an important part of a Bridge project, the twelve months employment period is both too short for the mastering of the traditional building skills and ensures the dispersal of the bulk of the workforce on any project running over a period of years. Nor, of course, is it permissible to take work away from existing building repair organisations, whether privately or council operated.

That having been said, there remains a great deal that can be - and has been - accomplished with a professionalm that cannot be gainsaid. The conversion of a redundant church to a community centre, as at North Huish, is an example of this, as well as of a type of transformation of a historic building that seems certain to increase. The repair and restoration of Harberton lychgate and churchyard wall is another wholly satisfying piece of work. But the majority of the tasks are lower-keyed than this, yet no less important for the appearance and stability of the built environment. These are some typical examples: work on paths and new planting in the grounds of Dartmouth Castle; repair of the cemetery wall at South Milton; removal of vegetation, repair and restoration of the North

Gate at Totnes; also at Totnes, the restoration of South Street town wall (a noteworthy improvement) and the clearing of the Leech-wells; tidying Woodleigh churchyard; firming headstones in Harford churchyard; the renovation of a seventeenth-century well at South Brent; the restoration of a waterwheel at Ivybridge. Little things, and things that needed doing.

Scrub clearance is a job of growing importance. Especially in Cornwall, changes in agricultural practice since the turn of the century have led to gorse running wild over field monuments, many of which have been made virtually inaccessible. This particular pest is not such a problem in Devon, but there is no shortage of sites in need of attention. At the moment Bridge teams are clearing Bampton Castle of small trees, scrub and brambles; the site is to be re-seeded. Scrub is being cleared from the south side of Kenwith Castle, Abbotsham, to improve public access, and approximately three acres at Clovelly Dykes are being cleared and re-seeded.

There is, of course, no reason for work to be restricted to such relatively small-scale projects as these. Provided that the type of work is carefully selected, and the key supervisory personnel employed, first-class work can be done on buildings of major importance. For example, anybody who has visited The Nothe fort at Weymouth (undoubtedly a major building of the town, though unrecognised by Pevsner and traditional architectural history) and compared the restoration work done there by MSC teams with that done by English Heritage at Fort Brockhurst, Gosport, knows that the work at Weymouth can stand any comparison - and in terms of presentation far outshines the other.

Suggestions for projects are, of course, always welcome, and members of the Devon Buildings Group are peculiarly qualified to make them. Some misconceptions and hasty assumptions have been made about MSC work in the past, and the surest guarantee of appropriate and well executed work in Devon will be the expert advice which members are capable of providing over a very wide range of matters.

David Evans

THE CONFERENCE OF THE DEVON AND CORNWALL MASTER THATCHERS ASSOCIATION

The Devon and Cornwall Master Thatchers Association does not claim that all good thatchers in the two counties appear on its list of twenty-one members but that members of the Association work to a recognised high standard. The development of the Association reflects changes within the industry which were discussed at the April Conference attended by representatives of all of the Local District Councils except North Devon, the National Trust and the Devon Buildings Group among others.

The Association was established in the 1940s as a friendly society which went some way to countering the traditional craft secrecy of individual thatchers and the spirit of less than friendly competition which sometimes existed between thatchers working in neighbouring areas. Economic and social changes in the two counties and changes in agriculture have brought the traditional ways of the

craft under pressure and the Association has responded to this by changing direction and now seeks to protect the interests of its members and the future of the industry by promoting high standards of work and materials and involving itself in a more public and educative role, "thatchers have come out of the closet" as one representative remarked.

Two changes that have taken place in local thatching were debated at length. Firstly, although local water reed was available in parts of Devon in the past and seems to have been the preferred traditional material in limited areas, the far more common type of thatch in the county was combed wheat reed. Over a period of time many combed wheat reed roofs have been re-thatched with water reed imported into the county. Secondly, although it was generally agreed by the thatchers at the conference that Devon thatching in the past was characterised by plain ridges and a rounded or rather dumpy outline, this tradition is being diluted by a fashion for the ornamental ridges which have long been common on the more steeply-pitched roofs of the south-east. There was little doubt at the conference that the Association is keen to reverse the first change and John Pullen of ADAS (Exeter), the President of the Association, spoke both about the reasons why water reed has superseded combed wheat reed and how this might be countered.

The decline of good quality wheat reed is an aspect of intensive arable farming involving both the farmer and the grain breeder. The farmer grows for grain, not reed, and in order to maximise profits looks for dwarf varieties that stay upright in adverse weather. The use of nitrogen to increase yield promotes various nitrogen-loving lichens and bacteria that rot the reed. Furthermore, the intensive labour involved in harvesting for thatch and thrashing is unattractive to the farmer. Grain breeders are influenced by the "National List" which is the form for registering new strains. It is unusual for any strain to remain on the National list for longer than ten years and it is illegal to sell any unregistered strains for seed, although they can be sold for fodder. Recently, the cost of registering new strains has increased dramatically. From the breeders' point of view the acreage required for thatch is a mere 1% of the total acreage of wheat grown in the country and there is little incentive to produce and register strains that are suitable for combed wheat reed. Historically this is the situation that has lead to the decline of supplies of wheat reed of an acceptable quality and the use of nitrogen-affected wheat reed in the past has compounded the view that it is far less durable than water reed. There are, however, various encouraging signs for the future of wheat reed.

It was John Pullen's view that efforts would be made to stop the over-production of cereals, not by a quota system, but by a reduction in price. This will quickly encourage the farmer to reconsider the costly business of adding nitrogen to the crop at a cost of about £20 a time and sometimes as often as ten times between planting and harvest and could, eventually, produce a wheat reed of higher quality for thatching. There is also a possibility that certain varieties of tall wheat, currently grown for pasta and with a heavy input of nitrogen, could be grown specifically for reed by reducing the amounts of nitrogen used and looking on them primarily as a crop for thatchers with grain as a by-product. These are obviously long-term solutions: in the interim there are other causes for optimism. Devon is fortunate in having a seed merchant, Pickards of Burrington which has three years supply of C1 generation stock of a variety of wheat, Maris Widgeon, that was recognised by the thatchers at the conference as being an acceptable strain for wheat reed. In addition, the Ministry of

Agriculture is funding a three year £40,000 research project at Bath University to evaluate different varieties of grain and methods of production in order to produce the first systematic data on the merits of different strains for the production of reed and precisely what quantities of slow-release organic nitrogen are needed at what times during the growing season. The project has begun by establishing a method of testing the breaking strength of reed and within twelve months some results of their research should be available for discussion between thatchers, growers and seed merchants.

There is less attention being paid to the problem of the style of Devon thatching. Increasing affluence in the county has meant that many thatched properties have changed hands and often have owners who are unfamiliar both with the material and its regional variations. The ornamental ridges which offset the sharper outlines of vernacular buildings in the south-east are being requested by owners in Devon and thatchers, keen to give the customer what he or she wants, are complying with the request. Representatives from the DBG urged thatchers to use their influence to encourage the traditional plain ridges. Ornamental ridges are, however, more expensive and there may be a conflict of interests between the desire to preserve traditional forms of thatch and the financial benefits to the thatcher of fancy detail. There is, perhaps, a need for some research on variations of style within the county; variations in outline and a tradition of decorative "cross-strapping" were noted by Bruce Oliver in 1949 and it would be interesting to know how far back these date.

The Association is obviously keen to ensure that thatched buildings in the county remain thatched. The balance between the work available and the number of thatchers in Devon is a delicate one and is being monitered by COSIRA, who run courses for trainees who are put forward by working thatchers. The massive grant-aid suddenly made available for thatched roofs some years ago and since dried up did the industry little good - the amount of work created attracted inexperienced men who "bought themselves a ladder and called themselves thatchers" resulting in some sub-standard work and a lot of criticism of quality. Whilst the DBG would obviously like to see a dramatic change in the present miserable level of funds available for historic buildings from local authorities, it is important to recognise that, if we are ever fortunate enough to see another increase in grant-aid, the consequences must be more carefully thought out.

There was some discussion of the importance of retaining historic roof timbers and old thatch in all but exceptional circumstances. Thatchers, we were told, are reluctant to meddle with roof timbers and if new rafters are required it is standard practice to retain the old rafters, even when they are structurally redundant. Devon has a remarkable number of roofs with surviving smoke-blackened thatch dating from the medieval open halls of circa 1500-1550. Historians of vernacular architecture have sometimes claimed that thatchers have not treated this medieval thatch with the respect it deserves. Although the DBG representatives were disappointed that the account of the history of thatch at the conference did not mention sooted thatch, it was evident that members of the Association were aware of it and rarely found it necessary to strip an old roof down to the timbers. In other contexts historians clearly have a lot to learn from working thatchers - slides of some of the reconstructions of ancient thatched buildings in building museums were greeted with hilarity, and anecdotes describing how archaeologists and historians of buildings had foolishly delayed asking the advice of working thatchers were recounted with pleasure.

The Association in conjunction with COSIRA has produced minimum specifications for thatching a new timbered roof, a glossary of thatching terms and leaflets on fire precautions, water reed and combed wheat reed. If any members of the DBG would be interested in these please let Chris Brooks know and we will send them on to you for the cost of photocopying and postage. The conference was told that members of the Association are always ready to advise owners and discuss any queries about thatch. The Secretary of the Association is Simon Hallworth, 7, Raglans, Alphington, Exeter, Devon, Tel: Exeter 31449. The SPAB will shortly be producing a pamphlet on thatch written in conjunction with working thatchers.

Jo Cox
James Moir

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 TO OTHER MEMBERS. IT IS HOPED TO BRING OUT DBG NEWSLETTER NO 2 IN AUGUST/SEPTEMBER. PLEASE SEND CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHRIS BROOKS.

DON'T FORGET

DBG FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

DECORATIVE DEVON PLASTERWORK

SATURDAY JUNE 7TH
FORDE HOUSE, NEWTON ABBOT
