

# DEVON BUILDINGS GROUP

## NEWSLETTER NUMBER 6

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### SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Group's third Annual Conference, held in May, discussed the crisis confronting Devon's agricultural buildings. The high attendance was clear evidence of the concern that this issue raises among DBG members. For many years now, increasing mechanization and the amalgamation of small agricultural holdings into single large farms has meant that many traditional farm buildings have become surplus to requirements - either no longer needed, or unsuitable for modern farming methods. This long term process has recently become more critical as a result of the need to reduce EEC food surpluses: subsidies have been cut or are no longer available; land must be taken out of production. In order to make up the consequent reduction in income, the government has encouraged farmers to diversify - to seek other sources of income from their property. Converting under-used or unwanted farm buildings to holiday accommodation, or to permanent houses has become a standard method of achieving such diversification. What has brought this process to crisis point is the extraordinary rise in the demand for housing in Devon: with money flooding into the county from outside, particularly from the south and south-east, the price of building land has soared. Once accompanied by outline planning permission, redundant farm buildings are transformed into major assets readily convertible to hard cash. So much so, indeed, that there are now indications that the promise of instant profitability has led many farmers to abandon agriculture altogether and realize the value of their farm buildings while the housing boom lasts. In this context, it is not surprising that farm building conversions have figured largely in the Group's casework. Two such cases involve buildings of outstanding historical and architectural significance, both in the area of Mid-Devon District Council: Canonsleigh Gatehouse in Burlescombe, and Uplowman Court near Tiverton.

Canonsleigh was a monastic house of Augustinian Canonesses: the fifteenth-century gatehouse, with a fine entrance arch and paired cusped lancet windows, survives as part of a farm complex, and is listed Grade I. Some years ago the roof was removed without Listed Building Consent, and the condition of the building has deteriorated subsequently: there seems no chance of a Compulsory Repairs Notice being issued, and the long-term survival of the gatehouse is only likely if it is converted for some kind of residential use. Proposals for conversion have recently been submitted to Mid-Devon: though doubtless well-intentioned, these seek to cram in too much accommodation, with resulting damage to the historic fabric, and substantial detrimental alterations to the building's external appearance. The Group has commented in some detail on the

plans, urging that Listed Building Consent be refused and the owner advised to submit a more modest scheme that would incorporate the careful repairs that the present state of the gatehouse requires and that would minimize impact on the existing building. We await the outcome.

The case involving Uplowman Court is a clear example of the way in which the economic forces of the current property market are operating. The present farmhouse of Uplowman Court, immediately adjacent to the parish church, has a substantial crosswing at its eastern end: although in sporadic use as a store, this crosswing has been neglected for more than a century. Earlier this year the owner, with an eye to the climbing prices in the Devon property market, obtained outline consent for converting the crosswing to residential use, and sold it off from the main farmhouse. The purchaser bought it as a straight speculation, intending to carry out the conversion and sell the building again. Meanwhile, the English Heritage re-survey of historic buildings had identified the crosswing as being of medieval date and potentially of considerable interest: as a result, it had been listed Grade II\*. Worried by the situation, and concerned by the work that had already started on the building, Devon County Council very sensibly commissioned a historical and archaeological report from the historic buildings consultants, Keystone. The report amply bore out the crosswing's importance: it is, in fact, the solar wing and chapel of a large, high quality manor house built around 1320 for the de Willingtons, an important gentry family in fourteenth-century Devon. The survival of such a substantial part of a high status house of this date is an authentic rarity: the importance of the solar wing and chapel must be recognised in any work that is carried out. Already, however, a number of important architectural features have been removed, and the detailed proposals for conversion that have followed the initial outline consent do not include provision for returning these features, nor do they include the kind of specialized conservation repairs that the building needs if it is to retain its architectural quality. Advice on such repairs has been made available by The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, whose scholars have also reported on the fabric. The DBG feels that the recent discoveries about Uplowman Court change the whole situation with regard to Listed Building Consent. The outstanding importance of the crosswing was not understood when outline consent was first granted: it is now, and a simple elaboration of the original consent is no longer appropriate. We have written to Mid-Devon District Council urging the Planning Committee to require a new application that will include the return of features that have been removed, and that will incorporate the measures necessary to preserve the historic fabric. Though battered, the solar wing and chapel of Uplowman Court have survived for nearly seven centuries: it will be a cruel irony if they are allowed to disappear in an unsympathetic conversion at the very moment when their significance has been recognised.

Canonsleigh and Uplowman are high status buildings that, in the post-medieval period, have been functionally relegated to agricultural service. This is not, of course, the case with most of the county's farm buildings. Humbler structures, built for the purpose, they form the bulk of the Devon countryside's traditional buildings and the threat to them is far more pervasive, and far more difficult to counter. A case in point, as important in its way as those already described, is that of Thorne Farm, Bow. Thorne farmhouse is medieval in origin, and has a smoke-blackened medieval roof: it was listed Grade II\* in English Heritage's recent re-survey. At the same time, the outbuildings, which form a modest but picturesque ensemble, were listed Grade II for what is known as group value: that is, they were deemed worthy of statutory protection

not in their own right, but because of the vital contribution they make to the setting of the farmhouse, and to the farmstead grouping as a whole. Following a now familiar pattern, the buildings of the farmstead have been alienated from the farm and divided up for sale. The farmhouse, with a small parcel of land, has been sold separately from its outbuildings. The outbuildings are now to be sold in their turn, and outline permission is being sought to convert them for residential use. In order for any such conversion to take place, they will need to be largely rebuilt. The requirements of housing will mean they are altered out of recognition; moreover, because of their siting and size, they will dominate the farmhouse itself. In other words, their conversion would mean the destruction of the farmstead as a group - which was precisely what the listing sought to avoid. The Group has written to the District Council urging that permission be refused for the reasons given here. Thorne could prove a test case: if the pressure to convert can be successfully resisted, then a precedent is set for the protection of other farm groups in the county.

It is not only agricultural buildings that are targets for conversion: industrial or semi-industrial buildings and their sites are subject to the pressures of the same housing market: the Group has been concerned with several such cases over the last few months. Perhaps the most important has been that of Brannams Pottery in Litchdon Street, Barnstaple. The Brannams firm was probably the best known of the North Devon potteries in the nineteenth century, and its art pottery achieved a national reputation in the years around 1900. The firm is still active, and still occupies its Victorian premises, which comprise two long ranges of processing buildings behind street frontage offices and show-rooms, attractively decorated with pictorial tilework and designed by the Barnstaple architect W.H.Oliver in 1886-7 and 1904: the workshop ranges include two substantial kilns. All the buildings are listed Grade II. The management of Brannams is anxious to move operations from the present site, which is narrow and constricted, to new premises outside the town. In order to finance the move it was proposed to demolish almost all the buildings on the site and to build sheltered home accommodation, dull in design and tightly-packed. All that was to be retained of the historic pottery was the street frontage and one of the kilns - which it was proposed to dismantle and re-erect as a visual 'feature', complete with an absurd pergola. Despite the listings and the obvious historical and architectural interest of the Brannams site, the scheme was concocted by the firm in consultation with North Devon District Council, without the slightest reference either to English Heritage or to any relevant amenity bodies. When the proposals were announced the DBG joined the North Devon Conservation Society, the Victorian Society, and the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology in protesting. As a direct result of this pressure the Council agreed to commission a report on the historical importance of the site from the Ironbridge Institute. This report, which was very quickly prepared, pointed out that Brannams was the last remaining traditional industrial pottery manufactory in the United Kingdom and recommended the retention of more of the listed buildings, while still allowing a large part of the site to be used for new-build housing. Although these proposals were an advance, the amenity societies involved felt that they still allowed too much demolition: English Heritage, in their response to the initial proposals and the report, also argued for a less destructive scheme. Nevertheless, the firm drew up alternative proposals based on the Ironbridge report. Objections have been lodged to the extent of the demolition envisaged and to the density of the proposed housing, and the amenity societies are urging English Heritage to call in the scheme as the preliminary step to a full public inquiry: a decision is awaited.

Among other industrial buildings, Fremington Mill in North Devon and the Paper Mill in Lee Mill village, near Ivybridge, have both been threatened with demolition to make way for housing developments. Fremington Mill retains much of its nineteenth-century milling gear, and is listed Grade II. Along with North Devon Conservation Society, we objected strongly to a scheme that proposed the destruction of a listed building with no attempt having been made to re-use it, or to offer it for sale on the open market - a requirement of the legislation. These objections, supported by a report from the Mills and Waterwheels Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, were put forward at a site meeting where the Planning Committee of the District Council took a similar line. The owner was given permission for a smaller housing development in another part of the site and accepted that the Mill should be preserved: there is now some hope for its eventual restoration. The Lee Mill Paper Mill was worked by the Holman family from about 1840, and there is evidence of paper milling on the site from an earlier date; the mill ceased production around the time of the First World War, becoming a fodder store and, more recently, a bacon factory. It is now empty. The Mill is an impressive building with a dominant chimney stack; this, with the frontage, dates from 1891, but the core of the main works building seems to belong to the first part of the nineteenth century. It forms the focus of the visually unexciting village of Lee Mill, and was indeed its economic *raison d'être*. The present scheme to demolish has aroused local opposition, particularly from within Sparkwell Parish Council, and there is no doubt that the destruction of the Mill would be a substantial loss to Devon's industrial archaeology, as well as a disaster, visually, for the village itself. Unfortunately, English Heritage has already decided that the Mill does not merit statutory protection. Even so, we have written asking for the building to be re-assessed and providing additional historical information. If it can be saved, there seems no reason why it should not be converted for residential use - a far more positive solution than merely flattening it.

If the demand for housing can lead directly to the threatened demolition of historic buildings, its impact can also be more subtly destructive. Such is the case with Crowdy Mill, outside the South Hams village of Harbertonford. A water-powered flour mill has occupied the site since medieval times: the present mill building, which has the rare feature of two counter-rotating wheels, has a seventeenth-century core, enlarged around 1900, and retaining milling machinery of mid and late nineteenth-century date. Associated with the mill is a nineteenth-century miller's house and outbuildings - all modest enough but forming a delightful and unspoiled group. The whole set of buildings has been recommended for listing at Grade II. Over the past few years, Crowdy Mill has been rented by Martin Watts of the SPAB Mills and Waterwheels Section, who has not only carried out a remarkable restoration, but has also re-opened it as a working mill producing several tons of flour a week. The owners have now decided to sell: although the mill itself is probably safe from alteration, the market attraction of the group is undoubtedly the potential for residential conversion represented by the outbuildings. If this were to take place, the mill would lose storage and service buildings and become very difficult to run as a viable concern. Almost inevitably, from being a working traditional water mill - the last such in the whole of the South Hams - it would become just another 'heritage' exhibit. The DBG has written to English Heritage and South Hams District Council expressing our concern over Crowdy Mill and urging that everything possible be done to secure its future as an operational mill. Much will depend on the attitude of the purchasers but, with an asking price of some £250,000, a new owner anxious to continue traditional milling seems unlikely.

I have discussed the preceding cases in detail because they illustrate the variety of ways in which the pressure of the housing market is affecting Devon's historic buildings stock. The housing boom brings with it, of course, a whole sequence of other demands that, in their turn, exert pressures of their own: the demand for bigger, better and more convenient shops, the constant need to improve existing roads and the pressure to build new ones, the apparently insatiable appetite for 'leisure facilities', from re-vamped public houses to heritage centres. The impact of these demands has been very evident in the new casework undertaken by the Group over the past six months.

We have commented on the proposed road improvements between Exmouth and Clyst St George - necessitated by the volume of commuter traffic into Exeter; we have protested against attempts to re-animate the scheme to route a by-pass for Braunton through the Braunton Great Field. We wrote to Devenish Breweries expressing our concern over extensive alterations to the Victoria Inn in Union Road, Exeter, particularly urging that its distinctive green faience and tile exterior should remain untouched, and it now appears that this will be the case. East Devon District Council consulted the Group over proposals to convert the Angel Hotel in Honiton High Street to retailing and housing. While accepting the scheme in principle, we urged a number of changes in detail that would ensure the preservation of the building's historic plan and its street elevation: we await the final planning decision. In Barnstaple we protested against an insensitive set of retailing and commercial alterations proposed for Bull Court Warehouse - the last remaining fellmonger's warehouse in the town. Meanwhile, there have been other cases in which the Group has made representations, at Plymouth, North Molton, Bideford, Chagford and Widecombe.

In September, outline plans were announced for the comprehensive redevelopment of the Royal King William Victualling Yard in Devonport, and of the adjacent dockfront. No longer needed by the now much-reduced Royal Navy, the whole of this early nineteenth-century dockyard complex is of outstanding historical and architectural importance. The proposed redevelopment is colossally ambitious, with an estimated expenditure of £300 million. The outline plans envisage the retention of the major historic buildings on the site, and the creation of museums and cultural centres alongside lots of shopping and the ubiquitous 'leisure facilities'. Other parts of the old dockyard site will accommodate industry and housing. Generally, the initiative must be welcomed. Extraordinarily, however there has been no prior consultation with the people of Plymouth and Devonport, and none with amenity and conservation groups, either locally or nationally. That consultation is now promised, and the Devon Buildings Group will certainly seek to be fully involved. The Devonport proposals are almost certainly the most expensive single development scheme ever to have been put forward in the county. More importantly, however, they bring together the full range of planning, design and conservation issues that are determining, and will continue to determine the future of historic buildings, not only in Plymouth, but throughout Devon.

Chris Brooks

## COURT HOUSE, NORTH MOLTON

We first saw Court House on a blustery September day in 1975 and recognised it as a building of exceptional quality within the context of the vernacular architecture of North Devon. The dullness of the late afternoon did not detract from the mellowed tone of the dressed sandstone of its walls and the reflected light from the square-paned leaded light windows. The house, built on the fringe of Exmoor was F-shaped in plan with two narrow two-storeyed projecting wings on the front elevation, one of which formed the entrance porch, with a Tudor arched opening surmounted by an arched hood moulding. Set on the ridge of the slate roof was a square-sectioned, lead-capped bellcote.

This setting of the house, with All Saints' church dominating the view to the east and north, is described by Patrick Brown, in his *Buildings of Britain 1550-1570*, as an 'unexpected delight in its windswept context and harmoniously correct in its treatment'.

Internally the building was only one room in depth, dissected by a 16'6" long cross-passage. To the left was the Servants' Hall. There were two inter-connecting rooms to the right entered by double doors, both with late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century bolection moulded pine panelling lining the walls, one room covered with a bright canary yellow paint, the other with a more sombre 'Georgian' green. The inner room was graced by a late seventeenth-century wooden fireplace surround and overmantel of exquisite craftsmanship. The central feature was a shield of arms with heraldic beast supporters in full relief, said to have come from Poltimore House.



Figure 1. Court House, North Molton

The first floor was approached from a hall-way forming an extension to the rear elevation, enclosing a seventeenth-century dog-leg staircase with barley-twist balusters. There was a total of six bedrooms, with an additional attic range. A panel over the fireplace in one bedroom retained its original oil painting, which depicted a hunting scene.

The manor of North Molton was held by the family of le Zouch in the thirteenth century, devolving to a St Maur heiress and thence to the Bampfylde family in the early seventeenth century. Their main Devonshire seat was at Poltimore, near Exeter, and Sir George Bampfylde took the name of Baron Poltimore in 1831. Court House had descended through this family to Sir Dennis and Lady Stucley of Hartland Abbey and Affeton Castle, who used it infrequently on hunting and shooting trips. By the 1970s the house, which had remained largely unchanged for several generations, was no longer needed by the Stucleys. It was listed in the 1952 survey of historic buildings, and was re-graded as II\* in 1964, when it was described as 'a good example of a medium sized Elizabethan house with some later alterations'.

Court House was purchased by a local builder, who made some approved alterations and extensions to the periphery of the house. However, in May 1987, his application for 'alteration and extension to dwelling' involved a huge, incongruous addition which appeared to double the size of the original building. Much of the new roof was to be flat in profile, and covered in felt. The intention was to provide separate accomodation for his adult children.

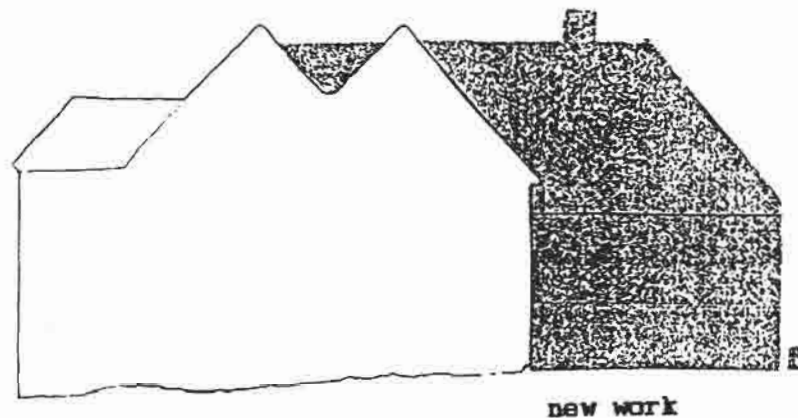


Figure 2. Extension profile from the east

The North Devon Conservation Society sent a letter of objection to North Devon District Council, stressing that they were 'strongly opposed to the alterations, which were practically a rebuild'. The Society argued that, if approved, the proposal would negate the reason for listing by adding a very large area to the original form, would destroy parts of the historic plan, and that materials used, including concrete beams and asphalt felt, were totally alien to an old building. They suggested that, if extra accomodation were required, then adjacent farm buildings might be utilised rather than making such radical and irrevocable changes to the house itself. These views were supported by the North Devon District Council planning officers, who recommended refusal of the

application. The Planning Committee, however, decided to approve the plans as they stood. The North Devon Conservation Society immediately contacted English Heritage, who agreed to call in the application.

At the subsequent Public Inquiry, letters outlining the Devon Building Group's opposition and the objections of English Heritage to the plans were presented to the Inspector. I was able to illustrate the rarity of Court House as one of only two II\* houses in the South Molton area. It was revealed that the site lay within a Conservation Area, and that officers from North Devon District Council, Devon County Council, and English Heritage had all been involved in discussions with the owner to try to negotiate changes in his proposals. As servants of their Councillors, the Council Chief Planning Officer and Solicitor supported the owner's application, as did a local Councillor: he felt that the extension was acceptable as 'it would not be seen from the front of the house'.



recent work

Figure 3. Rear elevation, showing proposed new work.

Peter Child, on behalf of Devon County Council, put the case for conserving the historic features and plan of the house, and accompanied the Inspector on his site visit. In the course of the Inquiry, the Inspector expressed surprise that, as a result of the recent re-survey, the listing description of the house now covered over one and a half pages, compared with the original entry of just seven and a half lines. He was assured that this more thorough recording was regular practice in the re-survey of Devon.

The Inspector's decision, supported by the Secretary of State, upheld the representations of the conservation bodies, and dismissed the application. In his summary, he was critical of recent inappropriate 'alterations and improvements' to the house, which had resulted in ribbon-pointing to the stonework and the application of lead strips to single sheets of window glass set within stained timber window frames. The Inspector's decision was a most satisfactory conclusion, but probably not a final one. There may be a further submission, with an amended plan, possibly on a smaller scale.

Pauline Brain



### 'BARN CONVERSIONS': SOME STATISTICS

Figures for the number of traditional farm buildings in Devon currently being converted from agricultural use to permanent houses or holiday accommodation are difficult to obtain. The extent and speed of the process, however, have been evident to anybody who has taken an interest in the county's buildings over the last five years. Scrutiny of planning applications in just one of Devon's rural District Councils produces hard statistical evidence that strikingly confirms one's general impression of what has been happening to farm buildings, and that has alarming implications for the county as a whole.

The figures that follow are for the Borough of West Devon, a predominantly rural area that extends from the Cornish border in the west to include most of Dartmoor, and from Hatherleigh in the north to the edge of the Plymouth conurbation in the south. Information about applications as a whole, including



Figure 4. Borough of West Devon

those that were eventually refused, is not detailed enough to allow for useful analysis. Therefore, the table below is based upon the approvals for change of use granted in West Devon over the five years 1983-1987. The figure given in the first column is the total of planning approvals for all change of use applications in the year shown; the figure in the second column is the total number of approvals given for the change of use of farm buildings from agriculture to other purposes; the third column expresses the number of approvals for farm building conversions as a percentage of the total figure for change of use approvals.

	TOTAL CHANGE OF USE APPROVALS	APPROVALS FOR CHANGE OF USE OF FARM BUILDINGS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL APPROVALS
1983	819	34	4.2
1984	738	42	5.7
1985	755	51	6.8
1986	812	70	8.6
1987	895	89	9.9
Five year total	4019	286	7.1

Although one cannot be certain how many of these approvals have been actually taken up, it is likely that the proportion is a high one: similarly, because the great majority of the approvals relating to farm buildings were for conversion to use as houses or holiday lets, the physical alteration in the buildings implied by the figures is bound to be very extensive. One remarkable feature of the statistics is that total approvals for change of use over the five year period remained relatively stable, with an approximate fluctuation of between -10% and +10% of the 1983 figure, while approvals for the change of use of farm buildings increased consistently - from 34 in 1983 to 89 in 1987, an increase of 161%. At the same time, and as a result, the proportion of farm building approvals rose from just over 4% of all approvals in 1983 to nearly 10% in 1987. This can be put another way: in 1983, 1 in 25 of all approvals for changing the use of a building in West Devon was for turning a farm building over to some use other than agriculture: five years later, in 1987, that ratio had become 1 in 10.

There are seven largely rural Districts in Devon, all of much the same size: as well as West Devon, there are East Devon, Teignbridge, South Hams, Mid Devon, North Devon and Torridge. There is no reason to suppose that West Devon is being exceptionally hard hit by farm building conversions: indeed there is some evidence that other Districts are under greater pressure. For a start, West Devon is far from showing the most intensive agricultural use: farm buildings elsewhere in the county are considerably thicker on the ground. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the area of West Devon is not that most obviously in demand. It is clear that the highest demand for traditional farm buildings with consent to convert is on the eastern and north-eastern side of the county. Here

there is more immediate access to the motorway system, to ever faster railway journey times from Exeter and Tiverton Parkway to London, and to the rapidly expanding Exeter Airport. As a result, pressure for conversion in the Districts of East Devon, Mid Devon, and North Devon is almost certainly more intense than in West Devon. Thus, if we use the figures for West Devon and apply them to the county as a whole, we are unlikely to be over-estimating: if anything, the total estimate will be conservative. As such, it is alarming indeed. If all the rural Districts of Devon granted the same total of approvals for the change of use of agricultural buildings as did West Devon in the period 1983-7, then permission was given for the conversion of some 2000 farm buildings over the five years. If only 75% of approvals were acted on - and that seems a very low estimate - then we have 1500 farm buildings undergoing conversion, predominantly to residential use, in the last five years. And the process is accelerating: if the high figure for approvals in West Devon in 1987 is accurate for the rest of the county, then conversions last year neared 500 - and that is still only allowing for three-quarters of the permissions having been taken up. If all the approvals were acted on, then we reach the astonishing figure of 623 farm buildings in Devon in 1987 alone.

Comparisons with other counties are not easy, but some suggestive figures are available for Kent. Direct comparison between the two counties is necessarily crude and must be subject to many qualifications: but both Devon and Kent possess a large number of agricultural buildings, and many of them are of historical and architectural importance. Kent County Council estimate, for instance, that over 1000 barns, oasts and granaries will be statutorily protected when the current English Heritage resurvey of listed buildings is complete. It is also worth noting that Kent and Devon have the highest numbers of surviving medieval houses in any English counties. All in all, there seem to be sufficient similarities to make a comparison worthwhile, though it can only indicate general tendencies.

The figures that are available are for Kent as a whole: from 1980 to 1986 approval was given to a total of 1300 applications to convert farm buildings to other uses. Of these, 924 were conversions to residential use, 71% of the whole, and these 924 conversions produced a total of 1364 new dwellings. In the present year the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential use accounts for 4% of all new dwellings provided in Kent. Many parts of Kent are, of course, under direct and severe pressure from the demands of the London housing market, with the price of both building land and house prices significantly higher than in Devon. Yet the figures show a significantly lower annual average for approvals in Kent than that indicated by the totals derivable from the West Devon statistics: an average of 186 annually in Kent for the seven years 1980-1986, compared to the 400 annually that we have estimated for Devon in the five years 1983-1987. Even if we omit the 1987 figure, the peak year in West Devon to date and one not included in the Kent figures, we still get an estimated annual average for Devon of 345 for the four years 1983-6. Briefly put, there were 85% more farm buildings converted in Devon in those years than in Kent.

A further comparison with Kent is possible. As well as the 1300 applications for converting farm buildings approved in 1980-1987, 624 were refused: that is, about one third of the total. Precise figures for West Devon over the period discussed have not been worked out, but an approximation indicates that the proportion of refusals is far smaller, more like one tenth. In other words, a major factor in the lower number of conversions in Kent is that

local authorities there - up to 1986 at any rate - are far more prepared to refuse applications for conversion than are authorities here. Judging from what can be gathered from the West Devon figures, District Councils in Devon refuse only one in ten of such applications, whereas Kent Councils refuse one in three.

Despite the necessary tentativeness of some of our conclusions and despite the unavoidable inexactness of some of our comparisons, all the statistics we have reviewed here point unavoidably the same way. They show that the growing alarm about the future of the county's farm buildings is wholly justified. Effectively, one of Devon's most important and most characteristic classes of historic building is vanishing before our eyes.

Brian Blakeway  
Chris Brooks  
Jo Cox

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#### THE SGRAFFITO DECORATION OF COLATON RALEIGH CHURCH AND ITS CONSERVATION

The parish of Colaton Raleigh lies in the Otter valley some three miles west of Sidmouth. Its medieval church, dedicated to St John the Baptist, was restored and largely rebuilt in 1873-5. Before restoration the church consisted of a nave and north aisle, a chancel with a north-west vestry room, a south porch and west tower: all of this was essentially fifteenth-century, but incorporated a three-bay Transitional arcade to the north aisle - the remnant of the early thirteenth-century church that seems to have been the first to occupy the site. The 1873-5 restoration retained the tower, the north arcade, and the foundations of the north aisle: the north side of the church was rebuilt, the chancel enlarged, and an organ chamber and south aisle added, resulting in a completely new south elevation. The architect of the restoration was Robert Medley Fulford, who, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was to become one of the most interesting church architects practising in the south west: Colaton Raleigh was his first major commission.

Robert Medley Fulford (1845-1910) was the son of the Revd. John Loveband Fulford, the vicar of Woodbury for over fifty years until his death in 1898, and one of the leaders of the High Church party in the diocese. From his father Robert inherited both High Anglicanism and a commitment to its expression through the church building of the Gothic Revival. The focus for this synthesis of theology and design in Victorian Devon was the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society, founded in 1841 by the vicar of St Thomas, the Revd. John Medley, to whom J.L.Fulford had been curate and from whom Robert received his own middle name. Around 1860, Robert was articled to John Hayward of Exeter, the leading Gothicist of mid-century Devon, and architect to the Diocesan Architectural Society, of which by this time J.L.Fulford was Secretary. Finishing his time with Hayward, Fulford worked for a year in the London office of William White, one of the most impressive church architects of the High Victorian period, and a man with a national reputation. Fulford was in practice on his own account in Exeter by the late 1860s. In 1867-8 he designed the small chapel/schoolrooms at Dartmeet and Postbridge; in 1869 he carried out alterations to Princetown church;

in 1870 he was the architect for the re-seating of Merton church. All this was modest enough, and one is inclined to regard it, essentially, as apprentice work. At Colaton Raleigh, however, Fulford's distinctive architectural manner appears for the first time. External features are handled and combined with originality, and with a freedom from historical precedent, particularly evident at Colaton Raleigh in the composition of the south side. Much play is made of materials, textures and colours - characteristics that link Fulford with the architects of the Arts and Crafts movement and the buildings of the English Vernacular Revival. Internally, his spatial arrangement can seek dramatic effects - at Colaton Raleigh the almost theatrical stepping-up of choir and sanctuary from the level of the nave floor, is specially notable. All these elements, with many variants, occur in the churches Fulford designed and restored over the following twenty years. But perhaps the most immediately striking feature of the church is its internal decoration: all the walls are covered by coloured designs incised in plaster, a technique known as Sgraffito.

Sgraffito decoration was known to the Romans. It was revived in Renaissance Italy and then again, having fallen out of fashion, by Gottfried Semper in Dresden in 1840. It attracted the interest of Henry Cole, Secretary of the Department of Practical Art at South Kensington and *doyen* of the mid-Victorian Art Manufactures movement, and it was at South Kensington, in 1871-3, that the technique was first tried in England on a substantial scale: the back wall of what was then the Government School of Mines was decorated with an ambitious scheme in Renaissance style. Fulford's adoption of sgraffito throughout Colaton Raleigh is thus remarkably early in the history of the revival of this particular form of decoration. Moreover, its stylistic character is quite different from that adopted at Kensington: unsurprisingly perhaps, for Fulford was a committed Goth, schooled in the tradition of Pugin and Ruskin, to both of whom the Renaissance was abhorrent. In fact, the influence of the London experiments seems to have been tangential, for the genesis of Fulford's sgraffito was local.

Robert Fulford's involvement with the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society has already been mentioned - indeed, considering his father's connections, Robert might almost be said to have been born into it. He first appears in the List of Members in 1867, after his return from London, and his first paper to the Society was delivered in the same year. In the early 1870s the lists of the Society's Committee and Officers show that J.L. Fulford was still Secretary (now one of two), John Hayward was still Architect, and Hayward's son, Pearson Barry Hayward - a personal friend of Robert's from their days together as pupils in the elder Hayward's office - was Curator. In 1872, the year before the Colaton Raleigh restoration began, the Revd. W.T.A. Radford read a paper to the Society entitled 'On the treatment of the inner face of a church wall'. Radford was a Committee member and squarson of Down St Mary, where he had personally conducted restoration work over a number of years. Radford's paper argues against the practice of leaving the interior walling masonry of churches exposed after restoration: instead he wants to see some kind of permanent colour and decoration. In an appendix to his main text he advocates the use of what he terms 'Sgraffiato plastering' and mentions this as having already been introduced in decorating the inner walls of Winkleigh church, the restoration of which in 1871-3 had been carried out by the Barnstaple architect John Ford Gould - the same architect Radford had employed under his supervision at Down St Mary. Remarkably then, sgraffito decoration appears in Devon at precisely the same time as it is being introduced in London. And it appears in churches rather than public buildings. An appendix to Radford's 1872 paper describes the technique.

The process is briefly as follows: - First, mix with mortar some colouring substance of the tint desired for the pattern of your design; then apply a thin coat of the tinted mortar to the surface of the wall; next, when this coat is nearly dry, apply on it another coat similarly prepared, but of the colour intended for the grounding, and then, having prepared a mould in zinc of the exact outline of the pattern, apply this mould to the wall, mark round its outer edge, and finally, with a sharp tool, cut away so much of the upper coat of plaster as comes within the pattern, down to the face of the lower coat. By carefully arranging your pattern, you may, by this method, employ a considerable variety of colouring, or you may even apply three successive coats of different colours, cutting through sometimes one coat, sometimes two, as you wish to exhibit the colour of the intermediate or of the lowest coat respectively.

As Radford goes on to say, with evident satisfaction, 'the result is really bold and imaginative.'



Figure 5. Winkleigh Church Interior

Fulford's close involvement with the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society makes it certain that he would have known Radford's paper: it is indeed highly probable that he was in the audience when it was first delivered. He would also have known about the Winkleigh restoration, which was one of the most important taking place in Devon at that time. The Society were also to have a direct hand in the restoration of Colaton Raleigh. The Committee's 'Quarterly Report' for November 1873 records that plans and sections of Fulford's proposed work were submitted for comment and advice. With some suggestions for the enlargement of the chancel, these proposals were approved and a grant of £5 given to the incumbent, the Revd. Frederick Bullock. Radford, of course, was a Committee member. If it is in Radford that we find Fulford's source for the idea of using sgraffito at Colaton Raleigh, it is in the Winkleigh restoration that we find the source of the craft skills necessary to put the idea into practice. Radford is again the medium of transference. In the appendix to his 1872 paper he tells us that 'Mr Gould, after having seen the effect of Sgraffiato plastering, when tried on a small scale by Mr Vickery the Clerk of the works, at once adopted it...' The Winkleigh Clerk of Works was George Vickery of Barnstaple, who was to finish his career as resident architect of the Earl of Portsmouth's Eggesford estate. Vickery died in 1904, and his obituary in *The North Devon Journal*, written by the ubiquitous Harry Hems, describes him as 'one of the cleverest craftsmen Barnstaple ever produced'. It was this same George Vickery who was the general contractor for Fulford's restoration of Colaton Raleigh. Not only the contractor, in fact, but also the executant craftsman for the decorative scheme: in its account of the re-opening of the church on 24 May 1875, *The Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* states that Vickery was responsible for carrying out the sgraffito work to Fulford's designs.

The surface plaster of the Colaton Raleigh scheme is a warm buff ochre. Through this the patterns and designs are cut, exposing the lower layers of plaster variously coloured red, royal blue, leaf green and white. Many of the patterns are formal and abstract, particularly in the body of the church. In the choir and sanctuary the texture and density of the decoration thickens and pictorial elements, symbols of the evangelists and symbols of the passion, are introduced. The scheme is at its richest in the tight patterning of the reredos panel below the sill of the east window. Remarkably, the whole sgraffito programme is substantially intact, though its original brightness has faded somewhat, and been dimmed by more than a century of grime. In some places, however, and particularly in the sanctuary, there has been physical damage to the plaster. It was on the sanctuary that the recent work of repair and conservation concentrated.

Lack of maintenance to downpipes, gutters and drains had caused the lower parts of the interior of the church and especially the chancel to become very damp. The flow of water had resulted in the formation of salt crystallisation within the thickness of the plaster. This in turn had caused the plaster to flake and spall. The reredos panel had a different set of problems. In the 1920s it had been hidden behind hardboard and was only re-discovered recently when the hardboard was removed by the present incumbent, the Revd. W.G. Turnbull. The hardboard had caused severe mould growth on the plaster: more seriously, attaching it to the wall had involved driving some 150 iron 'panel pins' into the surface. Every one of this extraordinary number of pins had started to corrode, and thus to expand, spalling off the surrounding plaster. Any attempt to pull the pins out led to the loss of a two-inch diameter circle of plaster, which had become bonded to the rust.

Repairs to the guttering and flashing of the chancel had been put in hand in 1987 as a result of the report of the church's quinquennial architects, Lucas Roberts and Brown. Making the church weather-proof, and curing the source of the persistent damp problems, were, of course, essential measures before anything could be done to repair and conserve the plasterwork. With these works underway, an attempt was made to prevent damp penetration in the sanctuary by hard plastering along the foot of the inner surface of the east wall. This proved unsuccessful: indeed, it was clear that the hard plaster patch was trapping moisture in the wall and forcing it upwards into the sgraffito work above, which included the newly-uncovered reredos. At the invitation of the Revd. W.G. Turnbull the church was visited by Chris Brooks on behalf of the Diocesan Advisory Committee and John Schofield from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. Recommendations on how best the plaster could be saved were sought from Bruce and Lizzie Induni of Stonecraft Conservation. Following discussions between the Diocesan Advisory Committee and Lucas Roberts and Brown an approach was made to the Church Commissioners, who are responsible for the maintenance of the chancel at Colaton Raleigh, to fund conservation of the sgraffito on the east wall of the sanctuary: necessarily, this would include removing all the hard plaster along the base of the wall - work that the Commissioners had already paid for. Laudably, they agreed. The repair programme was carried out in July and August 1988 by Stonecraft Conservation.

Following removal of the hard plaster, the recess immediately behind the altar - always undecorated - was lime plastered. This left the lower parts of the walls to either side of the altar, where the sgraffito had been lost, to be repaired. The pattern consisted of a rectilinear red grid which contained alternate blue IHS monograms and red crowns, and a vertical border of blue fleur-de-lis. Repair and reinstatement followed as exactly as possible the original technique, with hair-reinforced lime plaster being used throughout. An unpigmented base coat was applied to the exposed rubble walling. Onto this a red pigmented coat was placed. Blue pigmented plaster was then placed into incised areas of the red and the whole covered in a yellow pigmented top coat. Successive coats were applied when the previous coat was 'green hard'. Lime fast earth pigments were used for the red and yellow and ultramarine for the blue. Exact colour matching was problematic since the colours of the original plaster had faded: eventually a balance was struck between the true colours still visible in shaded areas of the interior and the more faded tones of those areas adjacent to much of the repairs. The whole process needed considerable confidence in the viability of the technique: at one stage the new work was bright red dramatically spotted with royal blue patches.

When the buff yellow top coat was ready the sgraffito pattern could be reinstated to match the original. Stencils for each of the design elements were cut from stencil paper. As we know from Radford's 1872 article, Vickery used zinc moulds for the original sgraffito, but paper stencils proved quite adequate for the limited area under repair. The stencil was held in position and the outline scored into the plaster with a scalpel: the stencil was then removed and the plaster excavated with a selection of spatulae. Cut edges were smoothed to reduce their sharpness and better match the appearance of the Victorian work.

The other part of the conservation programme was the repair of the damage done to the reredos panel by the scores of iron pins that had been driven into it. Success here depended on finding a way of removing the pins without disrupting the surrounding plaster. The solution adopted was to use a specially



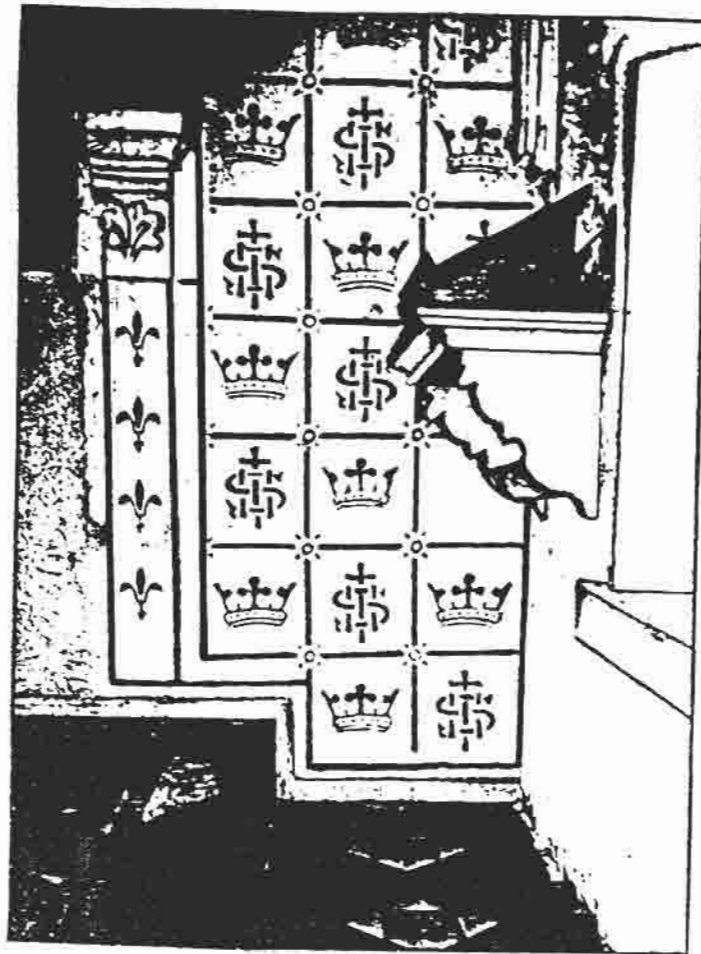


Figure 6. The east wall sgraffito after restoration

designed core drill to drill out each pin. This was made from heat treated high quality steel with an external diameter of a quarter of an inch, and an internal diameter of an eighth of an inch, just sufficient to fit the pin. The method worked very well, though the whole process was a slow one, made more so because the close fit of the pins into the core drill meant that virtually every one of them jammed inside: as a result the drill itself had to be drilled out after each pin had been removed from the reredos. No damage was done to the plaster apart from the quarter inch holes left by the extraction of the pins, and repairing these to match the original work presented no problems.

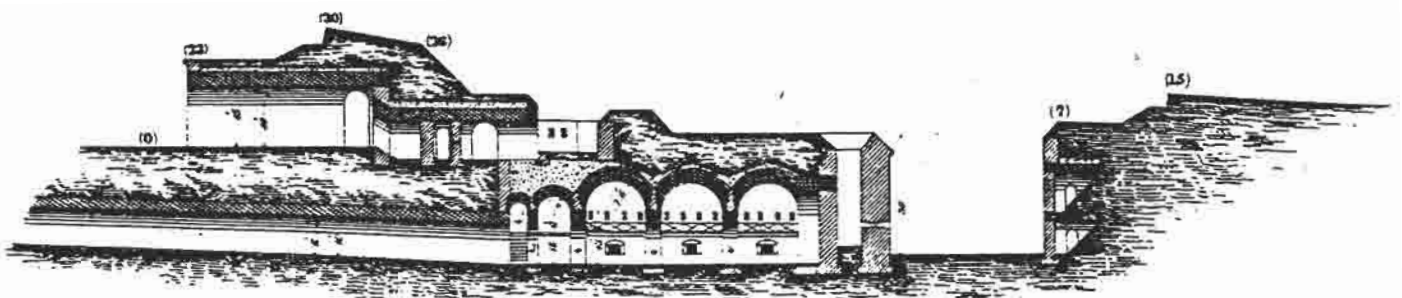
The congregation of Colaton Raleigh was very pleased with the results of the conservation programme, and there is now considerable enthusiasm in the parish for extending the work of repair and cleaning to the rest of the interior. Inevitably this will be expensive, and the parish is small, with many calls on very limited resources. But the sgraffito decoration at Colaton Raleigh is a scheme of the first importance, and something of real beauty. The parishioners should be given every encouragement in their idea of restoring it: more practically, the conservation societies and the Diocesan Advisory Committee should give every help to the parish in finding sources for funding the work.

Chris Brooks  
Bruce Induni

## ON ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE, FORTIFICATIONS, AND OTHER MATTERS

At the Summer Conference of the Devon Buildings Group Joanna Cox showed a slide of a mangold clamp : a piece of organic architecture which complemented the farm buildings. This is a vestigial example of what was once a sizeable class of construction. Though today in England such instances as this have an ephemeral existence, this has not always been so : the dump ramparts of Iron Age hill-forts have long outlasted the 'real' architecture of the Roman towns that supplanted them, and their sculptural force is emphatically not that of second-rate building. Devonshire is fortunate to possess many major examples of this facet of construction dating from modern times - principally in the nineteenth-century fortifications of Plymouth.

For some purposes earth is a more efficient constructional medium than stone, brick or cob, and this was realised from the early days of architectural designs intended to resist attack by cannon. Earth ramparts absorb artillery fire, while masonry crumbles and collapses under its impact. In modern times this was forcibly demonstrated during the American Civil War, when the masonry Fort Pulaski was soon breached and surrendered, while the earthworks of Fort Wagner put up a resistance of fifty-eight days. But the superiority of earthen ramparts was well known in the sixteenth century. The chief function of the masonry revetment was to retain the earth in a permanent geometrical conformation, the masonry being concealed from the direct fire of the attackers by the arrangement of the ditch and glacis (the earth slope built up on the outside of a defensive ditch). The masonry wall was the weak point which, once battered down into a pyramid of rubble, provided the 'practicable breach' through which the building could be stormed. The Dutch fortifications of the sixteenth century which were unrevetted - that is, without masonry retaining walls to the face of the ramparts - were perfectly effective, but required rebuilding and reprofiling after having been abandoned during the intervals of peace. In Devon, Gallants Bower at Dartmouth is an example of such an earthen bastioned work of the Civil War. One of the many artificial and actually misleading practices in architectural history is to oppose such a work as 'field fortification' to a 'permanent fortification' such as Berry Head. This distinction, enshrined in text-books of military architecture has led 'permanent' works to be rated a



Section on Line G. H.  
through Mortar Battery and Centre Caponier.

Figure 7. Earth architecture and masonry architecture. Cross section through a mortar battery and caponier from : W.F.Jervois, 'Observations relating to...the defence of the naval ports, etc.' (1860).

superior dignity, just as conventional architectural history based on style mongering has rated - to use another example referred to during the DBG Conference - the Cavalry Club above the Dartmoor dung-pit. This is, no doubt, harmless enough when confined to polite architectural circles, but in military architecture people's lives are involved. The engineer or engineers - for military architecture, like a very great deal of architecture, is a corporate work - who designed Fort Pulaski probably rated it a more significant achievement on completion than an earthen battery. It was another matter entirely for the men in it.

In short, in fortification the greater the ratio of organic architecture to conventional architecture the more efficient the design. Furthermore, the term 'organic' applies in the broadest sense. Trees and undergrowth were encouraged to grow on the ramparts. The contemporary models of seventeenth and eighteenth-century fortified towns preserved in the Musée des Plans-Reliefs at Paris show the ramparts dense with growth. This had several functions. In the first place, it concealed many likely targets. The thickets and thorns furnished materials for obstacles in the days before barbed wire, and the trees performed an architectural function as well. Their root systems helped to knit the whole of the rampart into a coherent yet elastic mass, so that if the masonry revetment was breached much of the earth would be retained. Most of the land-forts at Plymouth demonstrate this well ; it is to be hoped that the Landmark Trust, when clearing the excess growth at Crown Hill Fort, preserve this feature.

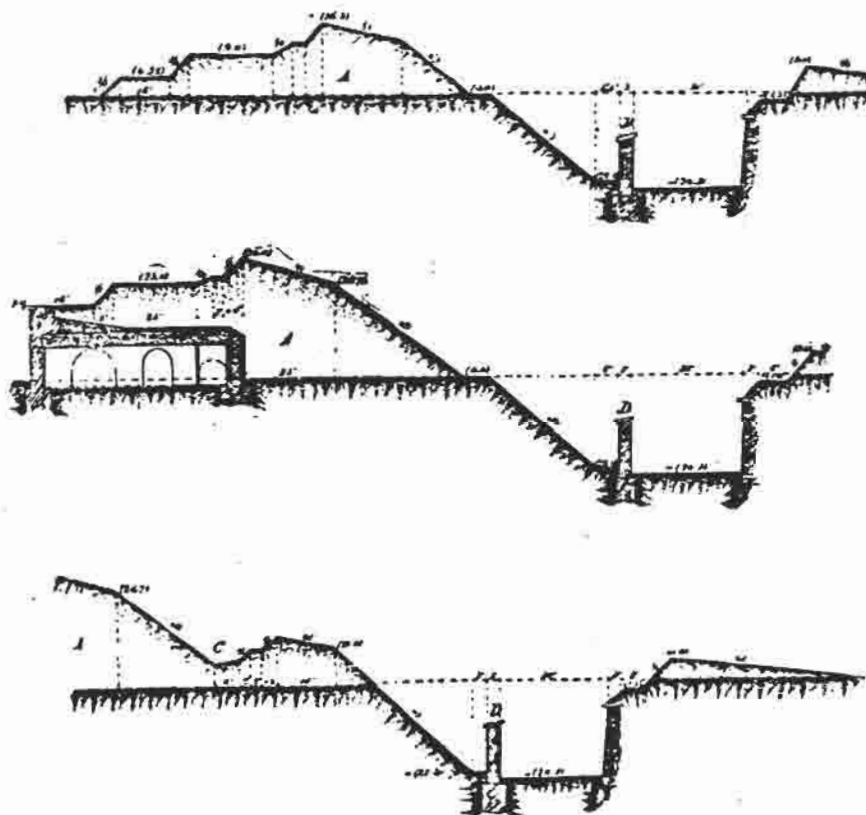


Figure 8. Cross sections through Carnot walls; from Mahan's *Permanent Fortifications* 2nd edn. (1898).

Forts of the Crown Hill type were intended by their designers to strike a just balance between the organic and masonry components. The masonry elements of the building were intended to perform specific functions or provide a few conventional points of architectural reference : for example, the caponiers to provide flanking fire down the ditches, the gateway as a piece of military iconography which defined the relative importance of the buildings - something that can be seen immediately in Plymouth by comparing the portals of Crown Hill and Woodland.

This functional separation of architectural components in nineteenth-century fortification is historically important, though unrecognised by most students of modernism. It was carried to its extreme at the very beginning of the century by Lazare Carnot, who physically detached the revetment from the rampart, placing it as a free-standing, loop-holed wall in the ditch. No Carnot wall as such exists at Plymouth : one was a feature of Yaverland Fort on the Isle of Wight ( now destroyed.) The full implications of this approach were accepted in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century coastal emplacements, best seen just over the Tamar on the Rame peninsula. The minimalist architecture of these gun-positions - one of the most efficient weapons systems ever devised - is an instructive contrast with that of Fort Picklecombe of thirty years before, and raises some fundamental questions about the nature of architecture. Which is the more important historically ? And, if successful function is an inalienable element of good architecture, which is the better architecturally ? 'Cavalry Club and dung-pit' questions have not been prominent hitherto in architectural history, and when they have arisen have tended to be solved in the way English Heritage dealt with that particular issue. However, many types of case-work the Devon Buildings Group is involved with raise these very points, and we are in effect engaged on the theoretical front as well as the practical.

David Evans

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#### HALLELUJAH ! A NEW SOCIETY

Some conservation and amenity societies seem to spring fully armed from the ground, others take a little longer. It was back in 1979 that I became the only Methodist member of the Nonconformist Working Party of the Churches Committee of the Council of British Archaeology. Under the aegis of the Council, this Working Party organised day visits to Nonconformist churches and chapels, and residential conferences about them, and wrote a guide to recording chapels and meeting houses\*. But the Working Party did not act precipitately and the years rolled by. Now, in 1988, with nearly a decade's experience, we have made public a proposal to form an independent society for the study of all aspects of places of worship that are not Anglican parish churches, to put the society's brief in a negative but comprehensive way; Roman Catholic churches will form an important part of our concerns. The Council for British Archaeology is happy to sponsor the society in its early days.

A recent meeting in London chaired by Alan Beith MP, a Methodist lay preacher with a keen interest in chapel buildings, attracted a representative

audience who voted with their cheque books that **The Chapel Society** should become a reality. So now it is the newest national conservation society. The annual subscription is £5, and membership may be obtained by sending this amount to:

Richard Morris, CBA Northern Office, The Kings Manor, York. YO1 2EP.

With the first Annual General Meeting still in the future, a programme has already been arranged, with an afternoon in London in Novemebr and a Spring Conference in York - details will be in the Society's first newsletter.

Why should this be of interest to members of The Devon Buildings Group ? The answer is a simple one. In Devon, chapels form a large and important group of buildings: I know of well over 1100 buildings and sites. They reveal great architectural variety, have considerable historical interest, and repay study. They range from cob - though not thatch - to ashlar, from city street to farmyard, and even from Ashreigney to Zeal Monachorum.

\**Hallelujah ! Recording Chapels and Meeting Houses*, £2.95 from the Council for British Archaeology, 112 Kennington Road, London, SE11 6RE.

Roger Thorne

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