

# DEVON BUILDINGS GROUP

---

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 9

October 1990

---

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

This Newsletter comes out a week or so after the Group's fifth AGM, which was held on 20 October at Dartmouth, and I will take the opportunity of this report to put into print some of the material that was contained in the annual report I gave at Dartmouth.

Firstly, the casework the Group has undertaken since the last Newsletter appeared back in the Spring. The continuing depression in the state of the national economy has resulted in a general slowing-down of building activity. Moreover, persistent high interest rates have largely dispersed the rosy glow of easy money that, for a long period, seemed to emanate from every unconverted farm building in Devon. In consequence, fewer cases involving barn conversion have come to the Committee. Even so, over the last six months we have objected to conversions and similar projects at Sampford Courtenay, Lustleigh, Drewsteignton and South Tawton, among others where we have expressed concern about aspects of the proposals. In most cases schemes were amended or permission for Listed Building Consent was refused, and many of the proposals were subsequently dropped, the owners perhaps deterred by the pervasive chill in the economic climate. The same influence also seems to have affected the outcome of two cases that I described in the last Newsletter. In the first, the owners of Ayshford Farm withdrew their appeal against the refusal of permission to convert before the case could come to Public Inquiry. In the second, the disused longhouse at Chaddlehanger came up for auction having been very fully recorded, and with the carefully sale hedged round by planning conditions: in the event, it failed to reach the reserve, though we believe that it has now been sold privately. An account of the building will be found in the present Newsletter. The results of these cases, and the general falling-off in applications for the residential conversion of traditional farm buildings, may be a consequence of more than the current economic situation. In June, in an article in *Country Life*, a spokesman for the Exeter auctioneers, Stags, indicated that converted barns were becoming something of a drag: "There is not the same euphoria", he lamented, "as there was in the heady summer of 1988". He even went on to suggest that prospective buyers, no longer scrambling to buy at almost any price, were showing signs of preferring houses that were actually built as houses. There is nothing that will stop barn conversions quicker than a lot of builders and speculators finding that there is no longer a market for them. If that is becoming the case, and without being unduly optimistic, it may be that the long siege of Devon's traditional farm buildings is in the process of lifting.

Other, much larger enterprises which have figured in the Group's casework have also shown the signs of the economic times. Proposals that were emerging to replace the Market Hall in Tavistock Pannier Market with a block of flats and convert surrounding buildings to the kind of chic little shops one has grown to know and loathe appear to have got no further than fantasy. The extraordinary scheme, outlined in my last AGM report, for turning the whole of the Plymouth and Devonport sea and river front into a continuous consumer and leisure complex seems similarly to have become just so many castles in the air - or perhaps, marinas in the air. In July discussions took place about the future of the Royal William Victualling Yard, but again, no further proposals seem to be forthcoming. One definite set of schemes that now looks in severe jeopardy is that for the centre of Tiverton: members will remember Mark Lewis's article about the proposals in Newsletter Number 8. Although Mid-Devon Council is remaining publicly cheerful, their optimism is appearing increasingly strained. The most necessary part of the scheme, the Southern Relief Road, should go ahead as it is part of Devon County's road-building programme. But much of the rest of it - a multi-storey carpark, pedestrianization, heritage enclaves - depended on a new shopping mall in the pannier market. After getting planning permission, the developers, Rosehaugh, became increasingly reluctant to start and the council were soon issuing almost weekly denials that anything had gone wrong. At the end of September it was reported that Rosehaugh had been taken over by another firm: no word from them so far on whether the Tiverton of the future will include the amenities and delights of a shopping centre in the heritage kitsch manner.

In the Group's casework, whether concerned with individual buildings or whole groups, the best foundation for arguing against demolition or disfigurement is the fact that buildings are statutorily protected, either by virtue of being listed or - less securely - by virtue of being in a designated conservation area. Where buildings are not listed, we stand far less chance of arguing for their retention on historical or architectural grounds. In fact, the last few months have seen a number of examples of this. In Plymouth, the 1890s coroner's office is threatened; although it is of historical interest and retains some original features, it has been too extensively altered to merit listing and it is just outside the Barbican conservation area: in arguing for its retention, the DBG can only rely on exhortation. In Colyford, a planned housing development will mean the demolition of a late nineteenth-century house called Kingsholme. Although not uninteresting, the house is in a somewhat coarse Vernacular Revival manner and not listable. Although the Committee was sympathetic to retaining the building, we did not feel able to appear at a Public Inquiry to defend it on architectural or historical ground, particularly as local protesters had been unable to discover either its architect or its precise date. Further east, at Axminster, British Rail proposes to demolish the Tudor Gothic station house dating from the 1850s in order to make way for a new station complex. The Group has made representations to English Heritage, but they have declined to list the building. Personally I would concur in English Heritage's judgement with regard to both the Plymouth and the Colyford buildings, though I believe them wrong in the case of Axminster station, where we know the building to have been designed by William Tite, architect of the Royal Exchange, and specifically intended for the stretch of line on which it stands. I single out these cases because they demonstrate very clearly how crucial the perceived listability or unlistability of a building is in any attempt to preserve it. In the last few months, the question of listing criteria has caused major controversy in Devon. As that controversy is of central importance to anybody concerned with the protection of the county's historic buildings, it is worth considering in detail.

Devon, of course, gained a great number of new listed buildings in rural areas during the accelerated re-survey of the mid 1980s. Recently the Department of the Environment agreed to fund a programme of reviews of listed buildings in urban areas. Although the reviews are not wholly satisfactory, in that they are not full-scale resurveys, they nevertheless provide a real opportunity for extending the statutory protection of buildings in our towns and cities. In Devon, central Barnstaple, Tiverton and Crediton have already been reviewed, with others on the way, including Torbay. But the operation has run into major difficulties. At Ilfracombe, the review process threw into stark relief the problems and the limitations of listing as the principal means of preserving the urban built environment.

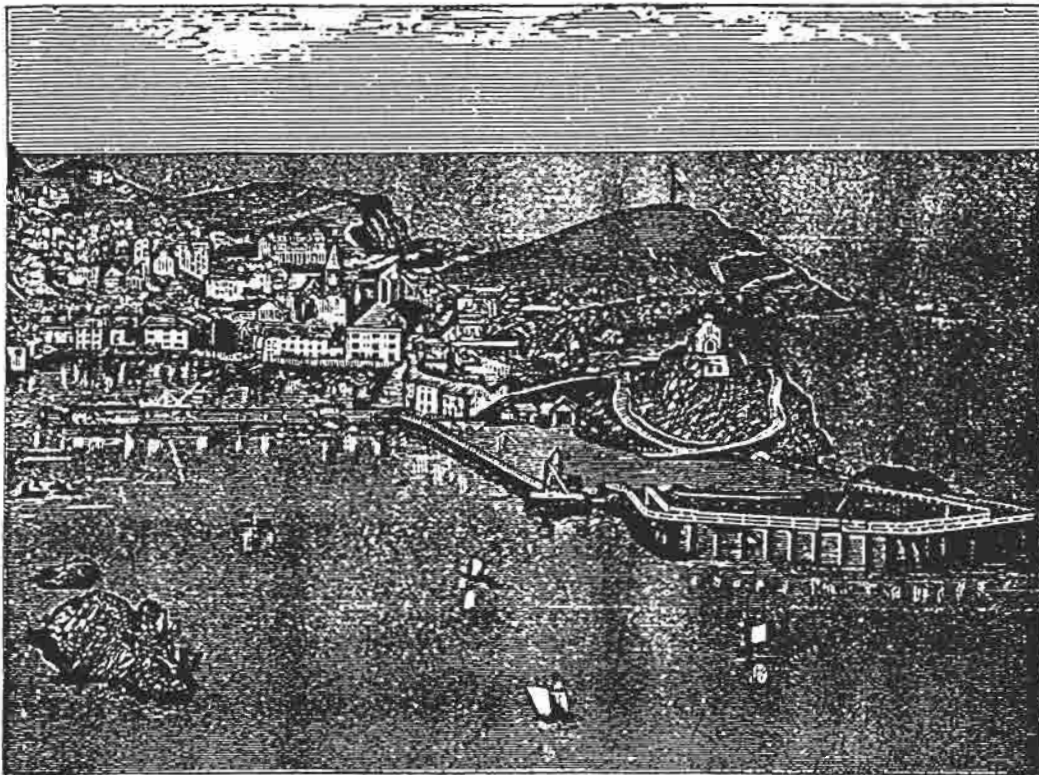


Figure 1. Ilfracombe pier and harbour.  
From Twiss's *Guide to Ilfracombe and North Devon* (c.1895).

In its thoroughness, the review of central Ilfracombe partook of the nature of a full re-survey. It was jointly funded by Devon County Council and North Devon District Council, and the final suggested list was accepted by both an Inspector and a Senior Inspector from English Heritage. When the list was presented to the Department of the Environment, however, they sent it back, claiming that it contained many buildings that did not meet the criteria of listability. As English Heritage is established, among other things, to provide the Department of the Environment with expert advice on what is or is not listable, this was an explicit rejection of the opinions of the Department's own experts. Rather than arguing the case, English Heritage effectively withdrew the Ilfracombe list. After a long period of silence, the alarming news came from



London that English Heritage now considered only a few dozen buildings in Ilfracombe to be worthy of statutory protection. The County and District Councils both complained, and were joined by the Victorian Society, for it was nineteenth-century buildings that were in question. As I represented the Victorian Society in the dispute, the DBG was implicitly involved. After several exchanges of varying degrees of heat, a compromise was worked out during the summer. A review of the whole of Ilfracombe began in September, with the rejected list as the principal guide to what might be included in the central area. Not all the structures on the original list will get on the final list, though there should and, I think, will be many more than the mere handful that English Heritage seemed at one time to be suggesting.

The whole affair caused considerable distress and alarm, not only locally but nationally. Once the Department of the Environment had refused to accept the original list, there is no doubt that English Heritage were in a difficult position. Even so, the problem should have been handled much better: English Heritage's steady failure to keep the County and District Councils informed of the difficulties betrayed a lack of openness that came close to arrogance, particularly as the County and District were footing the bill for the review. Managerial weaknesses aside, however, the core of the problem was both real and far-reaching: quite simply, the dispute over the listing revealed the sheer difficulty, given present legislation, of providing adequate statutory protection for a town like Ilfracombe.

The architectural importance of Ilfracombe rests in the relatively complete way in which it demonstrates the transformation of a small seaport-cum-fishing-village into a successful and popular Victorian and Edwardian seaside resort. That is, its architectural character is inseparable from its socio-historical significance, particularly as it never achieved the social cachet of resorts like Regency Sidmouth or Victorian Torquay. Its heyday was in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, when it attracted upper artisan and lower middle class holiday makers from Bristol, South Wales and the Midlands. Its particular architectural identity perfectly reflects this: although it has its terraces, they are not on the grand aristocratic scale of Brighton; although it has some fine detached houses, it does not have the acres of *haut bourgeois* villas that one finds in Torquay or Paignton. Its effect is essentially cumulative, its fabric made up of an eclectic mix of nineteenth-century developments - some piecemeal, some planned - and of buildings that are variously showy, plain, eccentric, inventive, solidly respectable. It is full of detail, from ironwork to polychromatic brickwork, from ridge tiles to floor tiles. It is very much the creation of local builders and architects, men working from Ilfracombe on the tide of the town's late Victorian prosperity. And it is also, importantly, dependent upon its whole landscape setting: the great North Devon cliffs around the harbour; the steeply sloping streets that climb up from the old town; the picturesque little hills against which the smart Gothic houses of the Tors development are set; the pyramidal bulk of Capstone Hill, which was the principal landscape asset of Ilfracombe's Victorian seafront.

Such considerations take us directly into areas where architectural history and architectural studies are now, as it seems to me, making most advances: in the relationships between buildings and socio-economic history, buildings and environment, buildings and the composition of local design and craftsmanship. And it is precisely when we start thinking of buildings in these terms that the inadequacy of listing as a mechanism for protecting them becomes clear. Despite

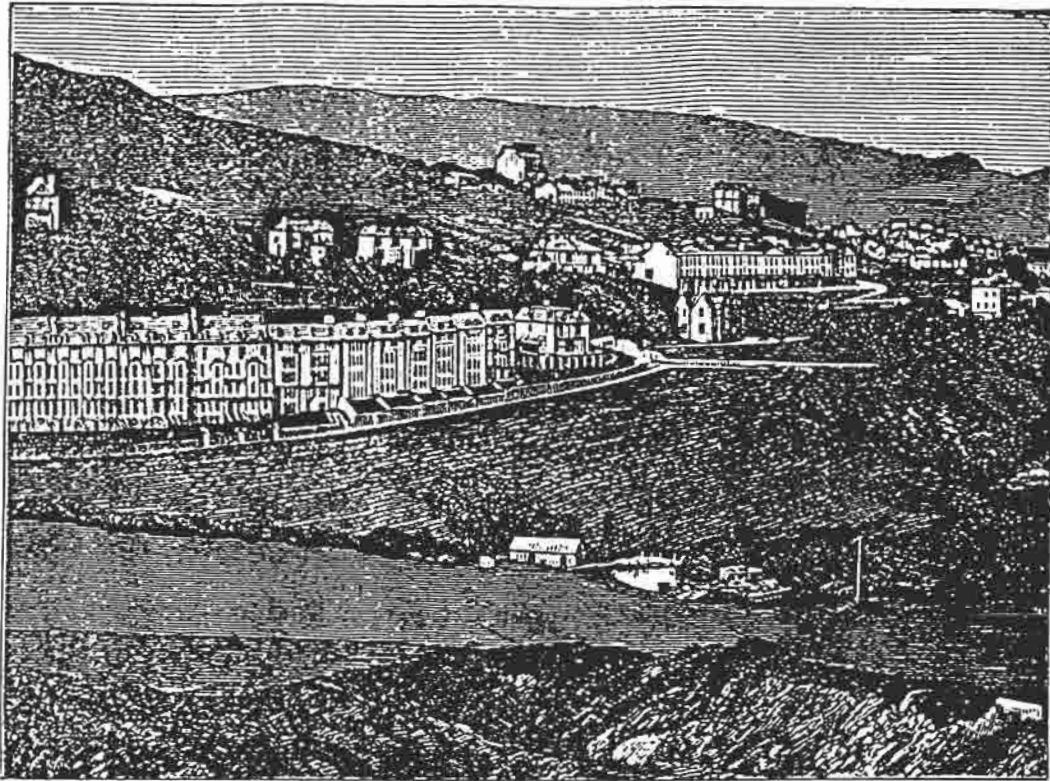


Figure 2. Larkstone and Hillsborough Terraces, Ilfracombe.  
From Twiss's *Guide to Ilfracombe and North Devon* (c.1895)

the provision for group value as an element of listability, listing is essentially directed at the preservation of the individual building. That is, the building considered in isolation, primarily as an aesthetic object; or the building which is amenable to assessment largely independent of context, either because it has self-evident rarity by virtue of pre-dating the middle of the eighteenth century, or because it was conceived to stand alone, like a parish church or a country house. Of course, this is to generalize. There have been important changes in recent years, most strikingly, perhaps, in the listing of industrial buildings, in which the context established by an understanding of process and function has partly replaced aesthetics as the core of assessment. More widely, the new guidelines relating to the listing of nineteenth-century buildings, announced in Martin Cherry's article 'Rethinking the Nineteenth Century', published in English Heritage's *Conservation Bulletin* this month, will result in appraisal that is better informed and more sensitive. But such changes, welcome as they are and useful as they will be, are not addressed to the conceptual basis of listing, which will remain the reflection and product of an attitude to architectural history that now seems essentially old-fashioned. For to shift fundamentally the criteria of listability from the assessment of an individual building to the integrated assessment of a built environment would be to alter the very nature of listing. And such a move is expressly ruled out by Martin Cherry himself: "Overall, the listed building criteria, as broadly set down in the legislation and the Department of the Environment's Circulars, are not in need of radical revision". Of course, this does not mean that English Heritage is unaware of the need for a holistic approach to the historic built environment: it means that listing is not the mechanism that will secure it.

What will? More specifically, what could give adequate protection to the particular quality and character of a town like Ilfracombe? Part of the answer would seem to lie with Conservation Area legislation. Or at least, with some future form of Conservation Area legislation, for at present it is miserably inadequate. Unless there are specific Article 4 directions - and I do not know of one Conservation Area in Devon where they are in force - there is no legislative constraint on work short of demolition or new building: doors and windows can be replaced, wall finishes changed, roof coverings altered. The feebleness of Conservation Area controls and the fixity of listing criteria, between them mean that the legal protection afforded to a town like Ilfracombe will be weak and limited. Although, as I argued earlier, there is growing awareness of the importance of townscape and environment as a cultural totality, not merely as a background to those buildings that have been flagged as aesthetically special, conservation law, as it exists, cannot safeguard that totality.

A toughening-up of Conservation Area legislation would certainly help and is something that English Heritage is beginning to urge on the Department of the Environment. Tighter legal control would, of course, be welcomed by architectural amenity groups both locally and nationally, and rightly so. But it would not, indeed could not provide the answer to the problem. There are some 250 Conservation Areas in Devon alone. Even if the law were made really tough, where would local authorities find the manpower to make it stick? And even if the manpower were available, would the resulting levels of supervision, intervention, and enforcement be socially desirable? In the end, although additional powers would be valuable, Conservation Areas will need to regulate themselves: that is, voluntary regulation by the people who live and work in Conservation Areas must go hand in hand with statutory regulation. That will only happen if people know why towns like Ilfracombe are so worth preserving. And that is a matter of public education. There is an obvious relationship between saving buildings and raising public awareness of them. A principal means of raising that awareness is through publication - through books, articles, journals, pamphlets, newspapers, even newsletters. The last year or so has seen a number of important publications relating to historic buildings in the county. We can feel pleased that almost all the people involved in writing them are members of the DBG, and the Group can certainly claim to have helped foster the whole climate of interest and support in which such work has been produced. But we need to think seriously about doing more. A major task for the DBG Committee in the coming months will be to consider ways in which the Group's publications could be improved and, perhaps, expanded. If by so doing we could help raise public awareness of the historic built environment, then we will have made a real contribution to saving towns like Ilfracombe.

Chris Brooks



## A LONGHOUSE AT LOWER CHADDLEHANGER

There was a remarkable auction in Tavistock on Friday, 6 July, 1990 when a disused longhouse at Chaddlehanger, in the West Devon parish of Lamerton, went up for sale. Not only did the sale particulars mention that the longhouse was listed Grade II\*, but also included an unprecedented list of conditions for its conversion. The building was not to be enlarged; the shippon end was not to be converted to domestic use; the historic features that would have to be preserved in order to meet the requirements of Listed Building Consent were itemised. Although it failed to meet its reserve price, there is an unconfirmed report that it has since been sold privately. The stringent conditions on sale imposed by Devon County Council and English Heritage, and supported beforehand by the Devon Buildings Group, resulted from the Grade II\* listing of the building in the recent DoE Resurvey of Listed Buildings in Devon. Constraints were necessary in order to control as firmly as possible the likely conversion of the longhouse to residential use. At the time of sale, it had been abandoned for over two hundred years and used as a shippon. Many people who visited the place would have preferred it to remain in agricultural use, although it must be admitted that it was inconvenient and labour-intensive by modern farming standards. Also, as the conservation laws work, any building formerly used as a domestic habitation can be brought back to domestic use. However its starred grading gave English Heritage and Devon County Council considerable powers of control from an early stage in the sale process. As a first step they jointly funded an historic and archaeological record, which was undertaken by Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants. This article is a summary of their findings.

### BACKGROUND

Chaddlehanger is now a small scattered hamlet built around the head of a valley, and containing four old farmsteads and the disused longhouse. The name probably means "the place near the cold spring" and there is indeed a spring some twenty to thirty metres higher up the valley from the old longhouse. The longhouse itself appears to be the oldest house in the hamlet: it is certainly medieval and could well date originally to the fourteenth century.

There is no medieval documentation and the later documents are maddeningly imprecise, failing to distinguish between the different farm settlements in the hamlet, and describing all of them merely as farmsteads at Chaddlehanger. The documents are described at some length in the Keystone report, although the conclusions are necessarily tentative. The earliest document, of 1515, refers to an established farmstead, the longhouse, which was granted to a Christopher Tolle. The other farmsteads were established in the vicinity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, it seems, the old longhouse declined as most of its lands were taken over by the newer farms. Finally, probably in 1787-88, the old place was abandoned and converted to full agricultural use. About the same time, the fourth farmhouse in the hamlet was built.

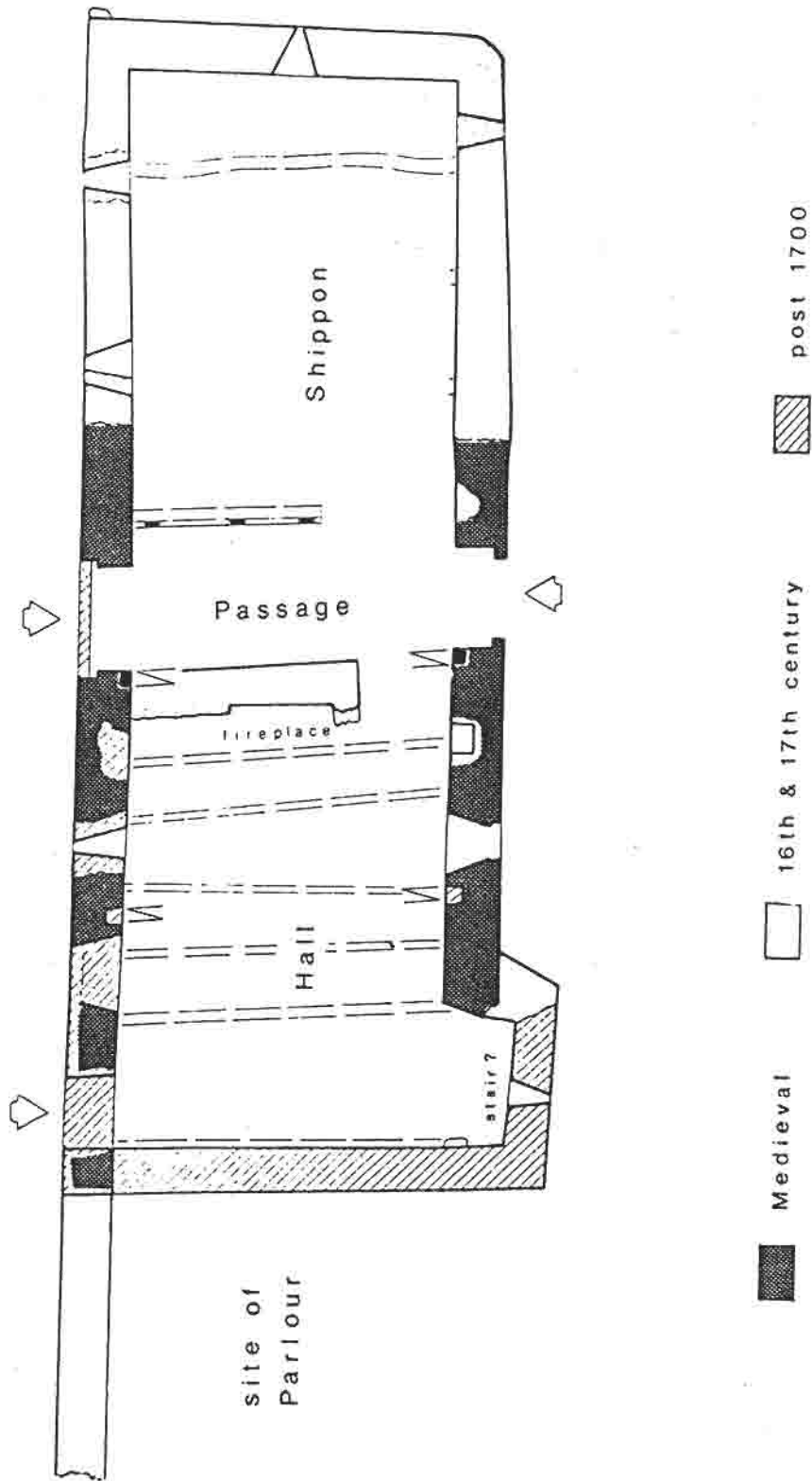


Figure 3. Lower Chaddlehanger, Longhouse. Phased plan with site north at the bottom.



## *THE LONGHOUSE*

The former longhouse was built down a relatively steep hillside on a rough east-west axis, its eastern (upper) end terraced into the slope. The building includes the extensive remains of a medieval hall-house with a two or three room and cross passage Dartmoor longhouse plan. The oldest fabric could be as early as fourteenth century. There is evidence for various alterations between then and the seventeenth century, and there are indications that the house formerly extended further east than it does today. The domestic section was abandoned in the late eighteenth century and the whole building was put over to housing cattle.

The present plan has two shippons separated by the cross passage. There is a timber boarded partition between the passage and the original shippon to the west. A full height, stone crosswall along the eastern side of the passage separates the passage from the eastern shippon, which was originally the hall. It once incorporated the hall fireplace, but the stack has been removed to increase shippon space. The present layout probably dates from the late eighteenth century with minor late nineteenth and twentieth century alterations.

### *PHASE 1: THE FOURTEENTH- OR FIFTEENTH-CENTURY LONGHOUSE*

The original masonry was high quality work. It survives each side of the former hall, continuing westward a short distance beyond the passage. The walls are about 750 mm thick and sit on a foundation course of large blocks of white quartz. Above, blocks of the hard local sandstone are laid to rough courses with copious amounts of thin stone chippings giving a laced appearance. By contrast, the original openings on the north side are built of large diagonally-tooled blocks of green Hurdwick stone ashlar.

The north doorway to the passage is a stone two-centred arch, while the south doorway has a rebate for a timber doorframe. It seems that the north side (to the lane) was the prestige front. There is evidence for two narrow windows to the north of the hall, presumably stone lancets, and a wider timber-framed window to the south. The roof was carried on true crucks of massive scantling. Part of one truss survives over the passage and there are wall slots for another over the hall.

Only the hall, passage and shippon contain definite fabric evidence of being medieval. Before the domestic section was abandoned there was certainly an inner room east of the hall, but insufficient masonry was uncovered to establish whether its origins were medieval. The rest of the house was open to the roof, divided by low partitions, with its hall heated by an open hearth fire.

The present shippon floor is late eighteenth century, but an older central drain appears where the cobbling has worn away from the lower end. It is possible that the drain is medieval and was reused when the shippon was rebuilt in the seventeenth century. It is certainly unusual: floored and lined with Hurdwick stone, it is about 200 mm deep; much deeper than any others known in Devon, and deep enough to appear quite hazardous for cattle. Perhaps it was a covered drain although, to date, no parallels are known for such an arrangement in a longhouse shippon.

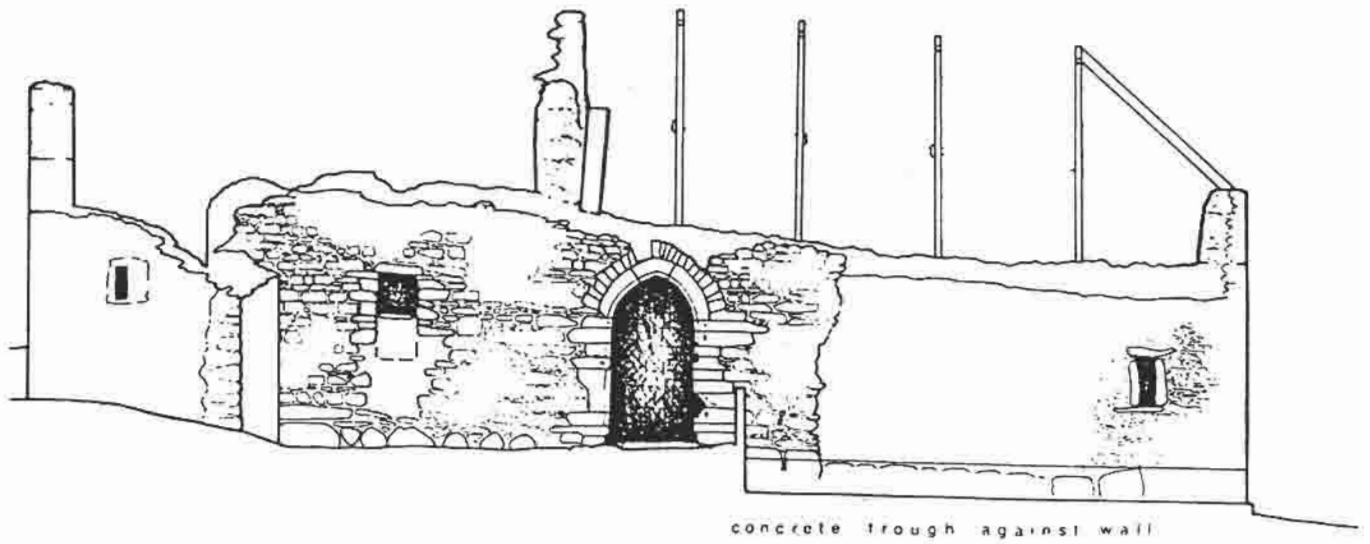


Figure 4. Lower Chaddlehanger, Longhouse; front north elevation.

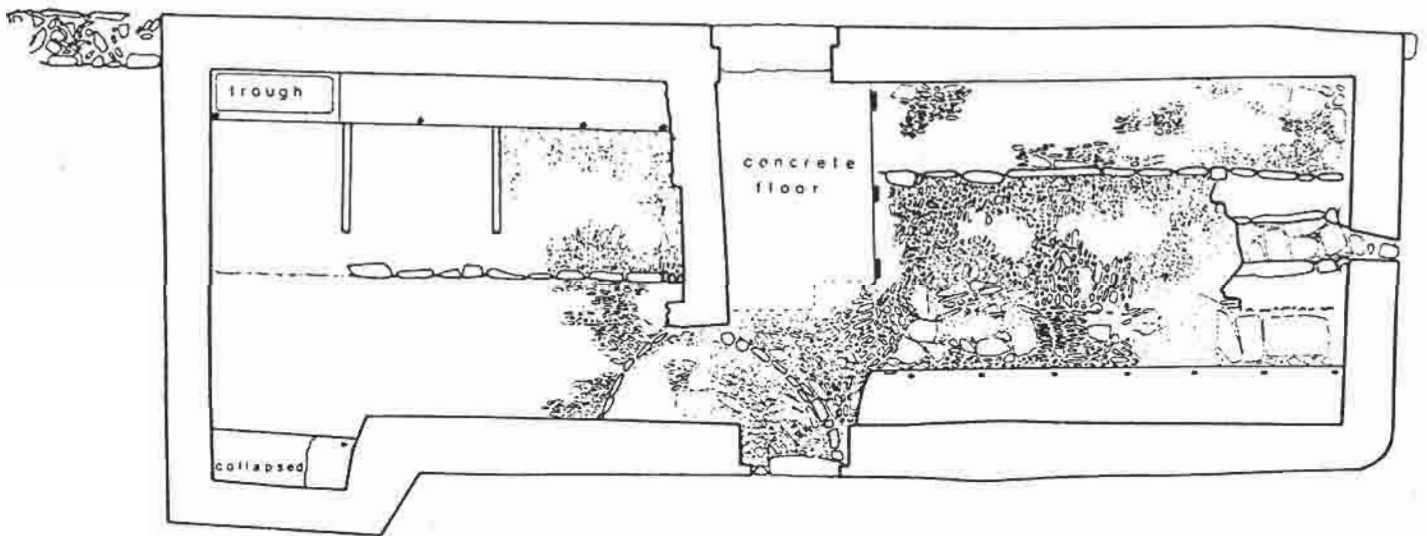


Figure 5. Lower Chaddlehanger, Longhouse; ground floor plan showing late eighteenth-century cobbling and manger ledges and the exposed section of the older central drain.

## PHASE 2: SIXTEENTH- AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ALTERATIONS

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a series of modernisations brought the domestic section up to contemporary yeoman standards of comfort and privacy. The projecting bay on the north side dates from this period, though it was extensively rebuilt in the eighteenth century. The bay was almost certainly a stair turret, indicating that the inner room end was two storeyed by the sixteenth/seventeenth century. A full height crosswall was built along the upper side of the passage. It included an axial stack serving the hall and backing onto the passage. There is no evidence that the hall was floored. A small cupboard alcove was inserted into the front wall of the hall.

The shippon was rebuilt, probably due to structural failure in the original walling. The rubble masonry is of lower quality than the medieval work, though similarly built on on a foundation course of large blocks of white quartz boulders. It includes a narrow slit window and, on the south side, a wider dung hole. The hayloft was carried on a series of irregular waney crossbeams of which only one survives intact. In common with many early shippons there are no signs of joists. Temporary floors could be erected for storage as and when they were required. No evidence survives of the seventeenth-century roof.

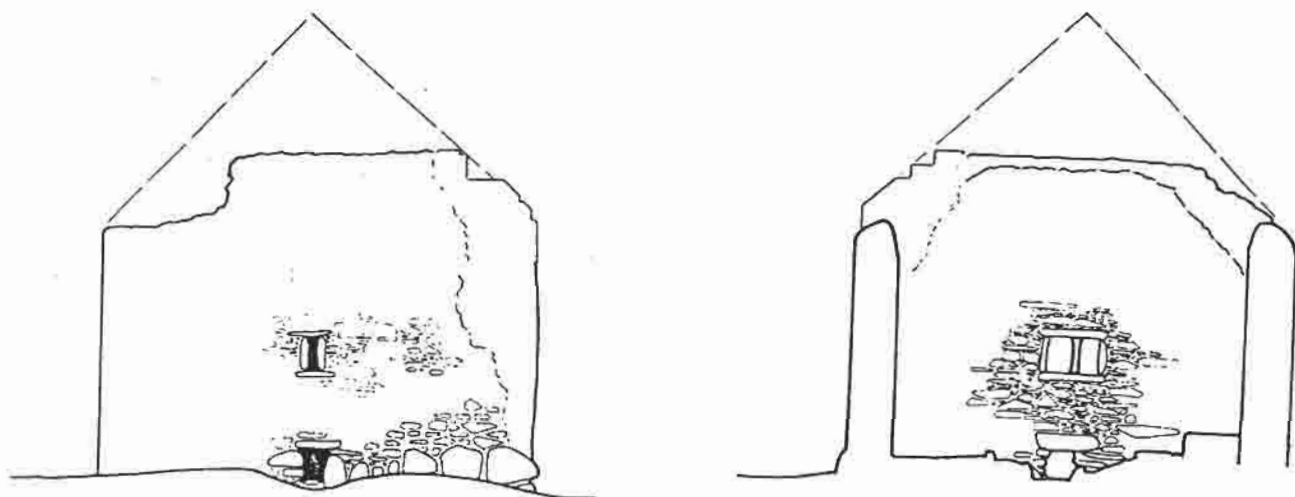


Figure 6. Lower Chaddlehanger, Longhouse;  
external and internal elevations of the west end wall of the shippon.

## PHASE 3: AFTER 1700

Around 1787-88 the house was abandoned, the building was reduced in size by the demolition of the inner room end, and the old hall was converted to a cattle byre. The old and new shippons were recobbled, with drains along the opposite side from new manger ledges laid with slabs of Hurdwick stone. They represent an interesting survival. At the same time, a new doorway was put through the south wall so that cattle came in from and out to the fields rather than the lane.

It is worth noting that, although the shippon space was doubled, the size of the cattle or the amount of space they were thought to require had evidently increased. In the original shippon, the old central drain indicates that two rows of cattle could be tethered, each facing the opposite side walls. In the converted building, however, the newly positioned drain and manger ledges could only accommodate a single row of animals. As a result, the whole building could only have stalled about the same number of cattle as would have been kept in the old shippon alone.

At the time of its conversion wholly to use for stock, the building was reroofed and thatched throughout. In the twentieth century the roof was covered with corrugated iron. A large part of the roof blew off in the winter gales of 1989. In the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, a hayloft was inserted over the old hall shippon with a new loading hatch in the east end wall. At about the same time new timber stalls were erected. These survive in the old hall and were presumably very similar to the ones they replaced, since the main stanchions fitted into original holes in the manger ledges.

The disused longhouse at Lower Chaddlehanger is a remarkable survival with important features remaining from all three of its main building phases. The building is now recorded and understood for the first time, and this information will be available to any new owner. It is to be hoped that he or she will use it to inform any conversion work that is undertaken.

John R.L. Thorp

© 1990 Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants.

---

## THE PRACTICAL USE OF LIMEWASH

### INTRODUCTION

Limewash is currently enjoying a revival among those most involved in the repair of old buildings. This is not surprising, as time has cruelly tested the claims of the synthetic paint makers, and highlighted the advantages of lime based paints. These advantages may be summarised briefly.

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Lime based paints | - do not burn                                   |
|                   | - do not emit noxious fumes while curing        |
|                   | - are unaffected by ultra-violet radiation      |
|                   | - are relatively porous                         |
|                   | - match old finishes                            |
|                   | - give a mottled rather than 'dead flat' finish |

However, the revival in the use of limewash is fraught with problems. The victory of the commercial paintmakers has been so complete over the last thirty years, that builders and decorators have lost the skills needed for successful limewashing. Worse, the faint memory that remains tends to be of poor quality cow-shed whitewashes. The result can be excruciatingly bad limewash, that looks unsightly and fails rapidly.





Distribution of Limestone -  $\text{CaCO}_3$

The purpose of this paper is to give basic information on the materials and techniques of limewash, so that the main pitfalls in using it can be avoided. Limitations of space mean that only a brief outline can be given, but fuller details are available in our booklet *Using Lime*. Even so, a word of warning: limewashing is, above all, a practical skill, and there is no substitute for practical experience.

### MATERIALS

Well-chosen materials are the heart of a good limewash. They can be divided into three categories: lime, binders and pigments.

### LIME

To understand the role of lime in a limewash, some basic chemistry is needed: this is best described as the 'lime cycle'.

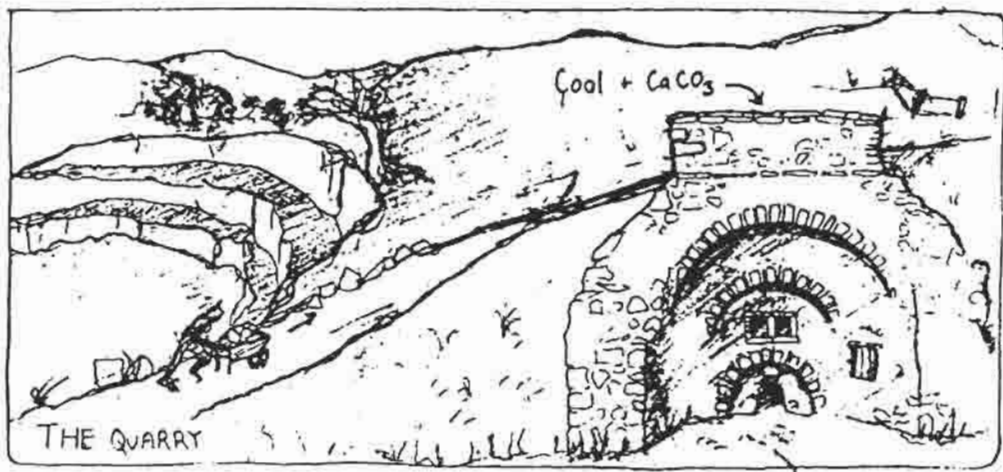
1. Limestone or chalk (Calcium Carbonate) is quarried
- ↓
2. Limestone is kilned to make quicklime (Calcium Oxide)
- ↓
3. Quicklime is slaked by adding water to produce Calcium hydroxide, also known as 'hydrated lime'; this can be produced as a dry powder or, with extra water, as a putty
- ↓
4. The slaked lime reacts with Carbon Dioxide to form Calcium Carbonate (limestone)

For a limewash to have any mechanical strength, it is essential that the carbonation process - Step 4 of the lime cycle - occurs 'on the wall' after the limewash is applied. In other words, the aim is to coat the wall with a very thin layer of Calcium Carbonate. If freshly slaked quicklime, or well-kept lime putty, is used as the base for the limewash, getting carbonation 'on the wall' is not a problem as long as the wash is not allowed to dry before it carbonates.

Unfortunately, the most commonly available form of lime is bagged hydrated lime powder. This is available at most builders' merchants and tends to be used routinely when lime/cement compo mortars are specified. It is excellent as a plasticiser in such mortars, but is of no use whatever as a base for limewashes.

In our experience, bags of hydrated lime are normally kept in damp, unheated storage for many months before sale. Dry hydrated lime is a very fine powder, and thus has a very large surface area for any given volume. During storage it is inevitable that this large surface will become carbonated 'in the bag'. A limewash made from a bagfull of carbonated powder will behave like any other inert dust that has been made into a water-based suspension: as the water dries out, it will return to dust.

Good limewashes can be made from all the available British limes - for example, Buxton, Cheddar, or Totternhoe. Unless there is a specific reason for doing so, a magnesian lime should not be used.

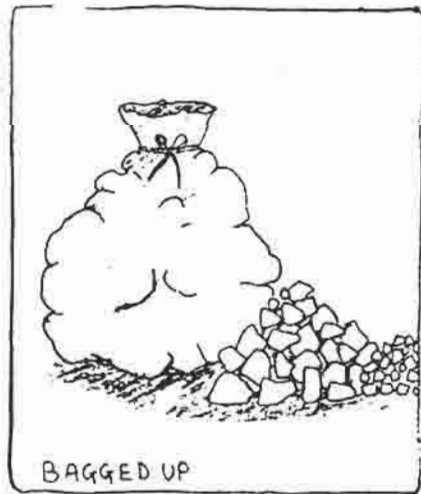


Limestone  
Calcium Carbonate  
 $CaCO_3$

Limestone + heat →  
Calcium Carbonate + heat →  
 $CaCO_3$  + heat →

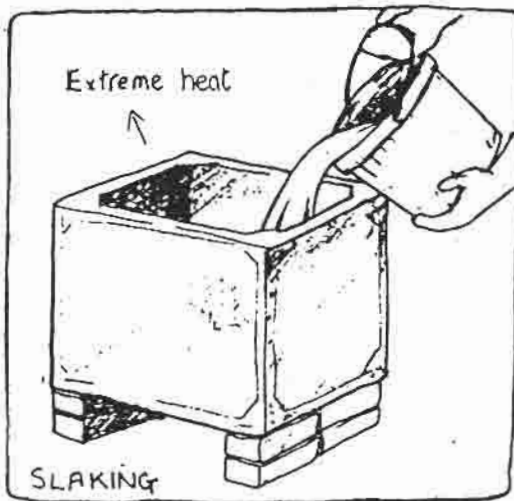


→ Quick lime + Carbon Dioxide  
→ Calcium Oxide + Carbon Dioxide  
→  $CaO + CO_2$



Quick lime or Lump lime  
Calcium Oxide  
 $CaO$

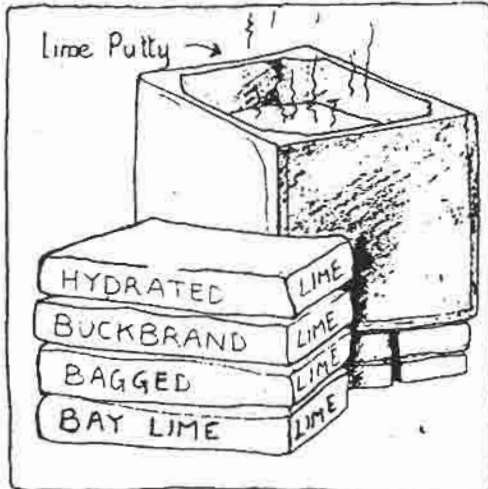
Figure 7. The Production of Lime



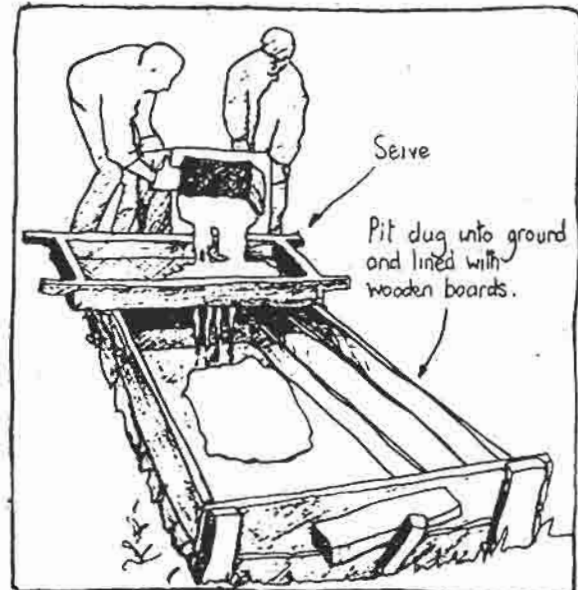
Lump lime + water →  
 Calcium Oxide + water →  
 $\text{CaO} + \text{H}_2\text{O}$  →

### SLAKING

1. Always use a metal bucket.
2. Lime slakes more vigorously with hot water. This can be achieved either by pouring hot water over the lime eg from a kettle, or by heating the container from underneath with a gas burner.
3. Only fill the container  $\frac{1}{3}$  full of Quick lime -  $\text{CaO}$ .
4. Always wear protective clothing - especially over the eyes.
5. Cover the bucket as the slaking commences.



→ Hydrated lime } Calcium Hydroxide  
 → Lime putty }  $\text{Ca(OH)}_2$   
 → Slaked lime }  
 → Bagged lime powder }



Sieving is essential before use, to remove unslaked lumps of lime.

Figure 8. Slaking Lime

### BINDERS

Limewash rarely needs a binder if the materials are well chosen and the wash is applied properly. However, exceptionally harsh environmental conditions - such as an external wash on a tall church tower - may demand an exceptionally adhesive limewash. There are three binders that are widely used, and they each have different properties.

**Tallow** This is probably the most commonly used; it also seems to have been employed from a very early date. The tallow must be shredded into hot limewash

in order to emulsify properly; hot limewash must be allowed to cool before application or it will crack severely. Tallowed limewashes are strongly water resistant: if more than one coat is to be applied, only the top coat should contain the tallow, or it will be difficult to make subsequent applications adhere. Limewash containing too much tallow will smell like a dirty abattoir on a hot day.

**Milk** Casein is a major constituent of milk. When milk is added to a limewash, the casein reacts with the lime to form Calcium Caseinate. This is a primitive plastic, somewhat similar to Bakelite. Limewashes bound in milk adhere well in the short term, but tend to curl and flake if the underlying surface is not clean and well keyed. The milk reduces the surface tension of the liquid limewash, causing bubbles to develop as it is applied: these do not disappear as the limewash dries.

**Size** Vegetable glue added to limewash produces distemper. For many years, until the invention of emulsion paints, distemper was the easiest way of avoiding the care needed to apply limewash successfully. Size is not a particularly stable binder, and distemper curls and flakes relatively rapidly.

All binders make limewashing easier at the time of application. Less care is needed in preparing the surface to be limewashed, weather and temperature conditions are less crucial, and inferior materials are not immediately obvious. The problems appear later. Moreover, all binders reduce the porosity of limewash, and as ability to 'breathe' is one of its chief advantages, this is a serious defect. Damp walls should not be painted with bound limewashes. In addition, tallow, milk and size all promote mould growth in limewashes. We do not believe this either can or should be countered by the use of proprietary fungicides. Firstly, such fungicides are only temporary in their effect, and we have yet to see evidence that they prevent mould for more than three years. Secondly, there are environmental objections to spreading poison when its run-off cannot be controlled. If it is essential for cosmetic reasons that no mould develops, then, quite simply, binders should not be used.

Unibond (pva emulsion) is a special case as a binder. Unbound limewash will not adhere to a surface that has been emulsion painted, and where a large wall area has been so painted, there is no practical way of removing the emulsion paint without damage to the surface below. Where any chance of damage must be avoided - if, for example, there is a possibility of wall-paintings - the visual appearance of limewash can be produced by adding 5% Unibond to an otherwise unbound wash. No other form of binder will hold limewash effectively onto an emulsioned surface. Of course, the effect will only be cosmetic: all the inherent problems of the underlying emulsion paint will remain.

#### PIGMENTS

In many situations, unpigmented limewashes look wonderful. Totternhoe lime has a delicious light cream finish. When colour is needed, however, good quality lime-fast pigments should be used. Very bright, dense colours can even be achieved, though these require large volumes of pigment. Effectively, such large volumes are a 'load' of inert material that the lime and binder must carry. The greater the proportion of pigment, the less durable the limewash. This is not too much of a drawback for internal limewashes, but can be problematic when limewash is being used externally.



Neither sands nor stone dusts should be used to colour limewashes. Sand and stone dust have little colouring power for their weight and volume, and they impose a very heavy load on the limewash. It is also very difficult to keep the dust in suspension while the limewash is applied, and there is a great danger of the mix getting very thick.

When acquiring pigments, it is important to tell the supplier of the intended use, as not all pigments are lime-fast. Virtually all pigments fade in sunlight, some of them very rapidly. Artists' pigments are available, and these are often of very high quality, though they are correspondingly expensive. Humbler - and less expensive - pigments can usually be found that will give almost the same finished colour.

Large volumes of pigmented limewash need very careful mixing to keep the colour consistent: the whole of each coat must be mixed in a single batch or the colour will inevitably vary. It is very difficult to achieve exact colours, or to match colours from one batch to another.

#### APPLICATION

Painting with limewash is not difficult provided basic rules are followed.

Mixing Mix all the limewash for each coat at a single batch. Mix powdered pigments with water in a jar before adding to the limewash, and stir it in with maximum thoroughness to ensure that the pigment is evenly distributed.

Sieving All limewash should be put through a flour sieve before use: good quality limewash has no lumps whatever.

Dampening The surface to be painted should be thoroughly wet, sufficiently so that further water should not soak in, but not so that the surface is running with water. In wetting the wall, do not use a hosepipe connected to the mains: too much water will be applied and damage to the building is possible. The best method is to use a good quality, hand-pumped pressure spray. Garden sprayers will do, but they tend to be insufficiently robust for extended use.

Painting Limewash should be applied in a consistency no thicker than milk. Work should be limited to one coat a day: any shorter interval will cause the previous coat to pull away in flakes and will interfere with carbonation. Redampen between coats. Do not panic when the colour disappears as previous coats are redampened - it returns when the finished work dries out. Use large brushes when possible and paint quickly: if the surface is correctly dampened, there will be no noticeable drag as the brush passes over it.

Stirring The limewash should be stirred constantly: by far the best tool for this is a balloon whisk, which can be bought from a kitchen shop. Remember that the last brushfull of limewash from the bucket should be as thin as the first.

Drying The limewash should not be allowed to dry quickly. If the weather is warm or dry, protect each coat with damp sacking and/or polythene sheeting. Do not limewash in direct summer sunshine, or if there is a strong drying wind.

If these guidelines are followed, the result will be an even coloured and well carbonated limewash, always provided that the underlying surface is consistent. Damp or salt-laden areas of wall will prevent an even colour being achieved, and very porous areas of walling can defy even the most heroic attempts to control the speed of drying. Differences in drying speed can dramatically alter the colour of the limewash, particularly in the short term. As the whole wall dries completely, many of these variations will disappear - though probably not all of them.

#### MAGIC ?

Limewash, for all the claims that enthusiasts make for it, is not a magic compound conjured from the alchemist's lair. It is a very ordinary material. It has simple, cheap components. It needs no expensive technology. It is long lasting when applied properly. It protects delicate limestone from attack by acid rain. Its application can be learned without long training. But it also has all the disadvantages of being 'hand made'. It can be very unpredictable. Colour matching is always a problem. Although it helps buildings to breathe, it is not a cure for dampness. Although it does not exacerbate salt damage, it does not last long on salty walls. In brief, it is not a magic cure for underlying problems.

The magic of limewash lies in its aesthetic appeal, the subtlety of its textures and colours, its power to create beautiful surroundings. Aside from their technical problems, synthetic paints are too even, flat and perfect for churches and old buildings. In such settings, only limewash will do.

Bruce and Liz Induni

© Bruce and Liz Induni 1990

---

#### YARDE FARM, MARLBOROUGH

Yarde Farm is a relatively unknown historic house, situated in the South Hams parish of Marlborough. It is a Grade I building, and open to the public. DBG members are strongly recommended to visit it as a spectacularly unspoiled example of a small-scale evolved manor house, still used as a working farmhouse. It retains a multitude of features that have long since been ironed out of most publicly accessible historic houses, from the remains of the ingenious seventeenth-century water system in the service yard, to the still-used nineteenth-century pantry and larder in the kitchen, and the painted linen wall-hangings of the seventeenth century. The house is in need of an expensive, phased programme of repair and is open in order to raise money for this purpose.

Repair schemes need to be underpinned by a good understanding of the building: this sorts out priorities - for instance the historic significance of plan form, often ignorantly destroyed in 'renovation' schemes - indicates what may be concealed and establishes what, if anything, may be amended or disposed of in the course of the repair.

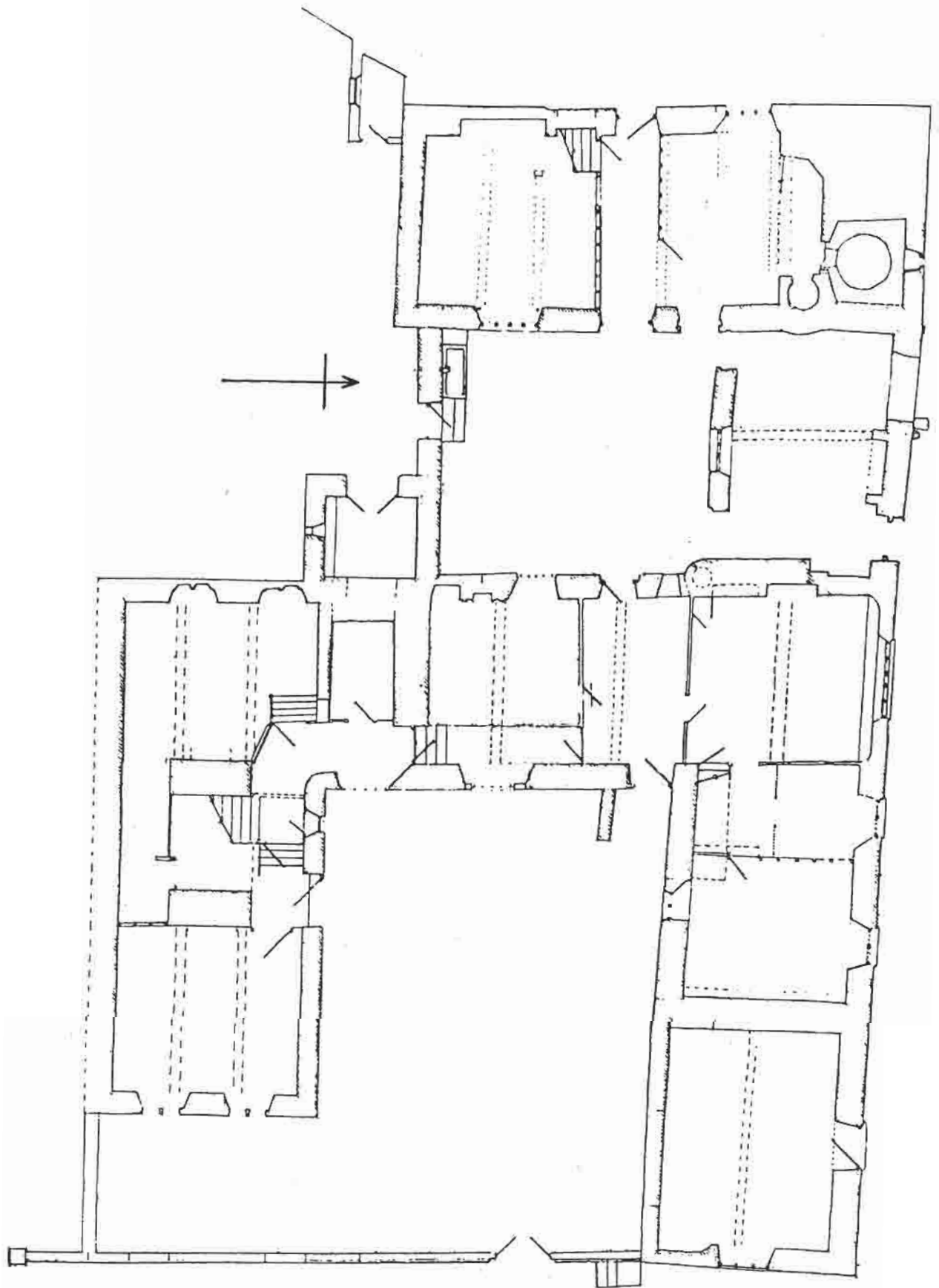
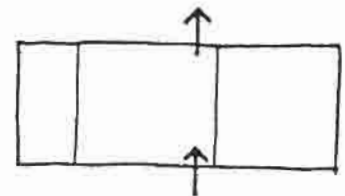


Figure 9. Yarde Farm, ground plan.

In 1989 a report on the house was commissioned by English Heritage and Devon County Council. Part of this report involved linking an analysis of the very complicated existing fabric and plan (Figure 9) to what proved to be rich documentary evidence. A coherent explanation was needed for numerous straight joints and blocked openings in the masonry, quantities of patently re-used material (found only in some parts of the building), and more than one major entrance pre-dating the eighteenth century. Whilst most of the evidence for the phasing outlined in this article derived from a close look at the archaeology of the standing structure, allied to a knowledge of traditional buildings of the region, the documentation helped to provide a convincing narrative about the evolution of the building, and connected it to its inhabitants over the centuries. It also raised some interesting points about multi-occupancy, which may have occurred at Yarde as early as the late seventeenth century and was almost certainly the way the building functioned from 1718 to at least 1864.

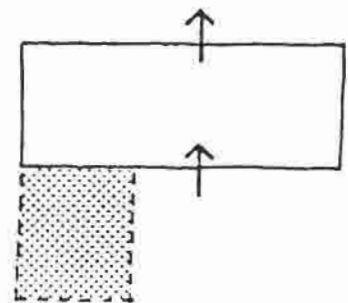
#### **PHASE 1. MEDIEVAL YARDE**

This is the core of the medieval house at Yarde and is largely inferred from the evidence of comparable historic buildings. A house on the site was leased to Richard Dyer I in 1564 from Thomas Yarde of Bradleight (Bradleigh) (DRO 164M/T9). The three lives of the lease were his own, that of his wife, Katherine, and his son, Thomas. It is reasonable to assume that this building was amended, rather than flattened, in the course of successive alterations. The present through-passage arrangement of the farmhouse seems to be on the site of the original medieval entrance arrangement, which would have had the higher end, including the largely communal hall, to the south (left).



#### **PHASE 2. FAMILY PRIVACY**

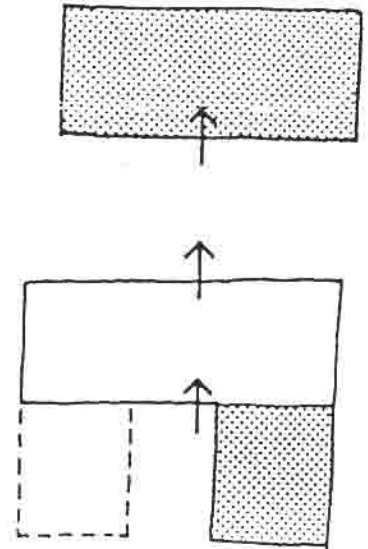
Richard Dyer's land transactions in the late sixteenth century suggest that he was consolidating a Devon estate at this period. It is reasonable to assume that he improved Yarde. Re-used material in the existing south-east block suggests that it was preceded by a c. sixteenth-century structure on the same site, including moulded beams and granite windows. At this date a parlour wing might be expected, providing the master with the family privacy that was increasingly demanded in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.





### PHASE 3. EXTENSION AND SPECIALISATION

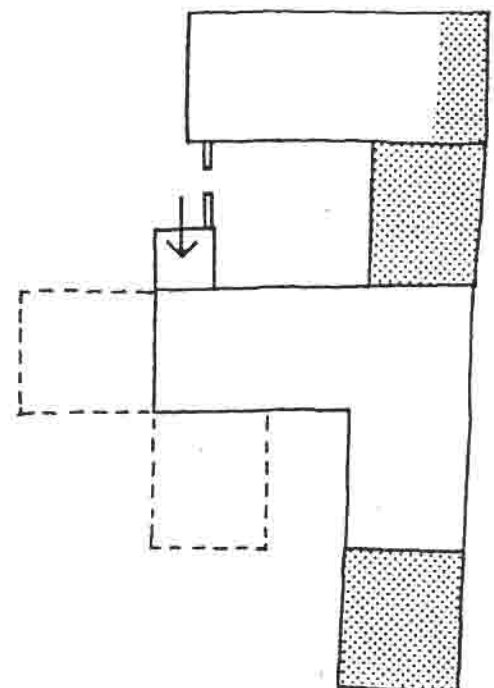
Richard Dyer's son, William Dyer I, was head of the household by 1620. He was the first member of the family who had grown up at Yarde. William's building campaign continued the process, begun with the Phase 1 parlour, of providing rooms with specialised functions. The late medieval sense of social and working space seems to have been derived from and expressed through ritual and decoration. This, rather than solid walls, established social distinction and usage: examples are the hierarchy of seating positions at table, the order in which people were served food and the location of areas set aside for cooking, eating and sleeping, which might take place in the same room. The seventeenth-century distinctions were more tangible and defined by assigning different purposes to different rooms, and this is characteristic of the early seventeenth-century expansion of Yarde into a U-plan house with a separate kitchen.



The main structure of the originally detached kitchen block at Yarde, parallel to the main range, has chamfered timber mullioned windows of the early seventeenth century. A similar date can be assigned to parts of the north east wing. Thus William appears to have made a physical distinction between the service accommodation and other rooms, and extended the main body of the house with a range parallel to his father's parlour wing. It is likely, on historical grounds and the chronology of blocked windows and additions, that he also subdivided the old hall by flooring it, improving its comfort by adding a stack.

### PHASE 4. MULTI-OCCUPANCY ?

To judge from stylistic evidence, several parts of the existing building are late seventeenth century, including the massive fireplace in the kitchen block. The somewhat puzzling west porch (now blocked off) is, stylistically, a little archaic for the late seventeenth century, but could be squeezed into this period. The documentary evidence for this period, although indirect, was particularly interesting, suggesting that the house was divided between William Dyer II (paying Hearth Tax on 5 hearths) and his father, Richard Dyer III (paying Hearth Tax on 9 hearths). This would explain the provision of two major entrances at this period, as well as indicating those changes in family structure around this date that made it



difficult for two generations to live communally. The documentation is not, it should be stressed, absolutely conclusive, but it does make good sense of the existing fabric. A tentative reconstruction of the pattern of occupancy for this phase would be: Richard Dyer continuing to use the original through passage entrance, with his hall to the left (south), his parlour to the right, and an extended and up-dated north east wing; William, with a new entrance into a cross passage - without rear door - on the west side, made use of the sixteenth-century parlour block and probably had his own hall block, added at the south end of the main range. The old kitchen was partly remodelled and provided with a massive fireplace including a brewing chamber, and a link block, with a stack, was built between the kitchen and Richard Dyer's half of the house. The enlargement of the kitchen suggests that it may have serviced both households, although the access to William's half of the house was something of a dog-leg.

**PHASE 5. ACADEMICS, WIDOWS, BACHELORS,  
AND SPINSTERS**

William Dyer III died in 1714 and the estate passed to his brother Richard Dyer IV, who was an Oxford academic and a botanist of some note. As a fellow of Oriel College, he officially lived a bachelor life at Oxford, although there is evidence (in 45 grumpy volumes of diaries, written by Dyer's Oxford colleague, Thomas Hearne) that he periodically visited his elder brother at Yarde and may have had a common law wife in Oxford, Alice Wells, "a comely maiden body" (Hearne), considerably his junior. A legal marriage would have compromised his position (and income) at Oxford.

Four years after he inherited the estate, when he was 66, the new south block was built, its date given on a datestone. This new work involved both the demolition of the sixteenth-century parlour, releasing granite mullions for re-use, and also the demolition of William's hall block. This is confirmed by Hearne's diary which mentions that Dyer found a collection of coins "as they were pulling down the old Porch wall [presumably the west wall of William's hall] of a House belonging to the said Mr Dyer... known by the Name of Yarde". Richard Dyer eventually moved back to Yarde full-time, with Alice Wells, then aged about 50: "She is since married to Mr Dyer and they own their Marriage", Hearne records. This took place in 1724 when Dyer was 72. The bride may have been considered to be of child-bearing age at the date of the marriage - Hearne does note that no children ensued and it is tempting to interpret this late marriage as an attempt to secure a male heir for the family as well as, perhaps, making an honest woman of Alice Wells.

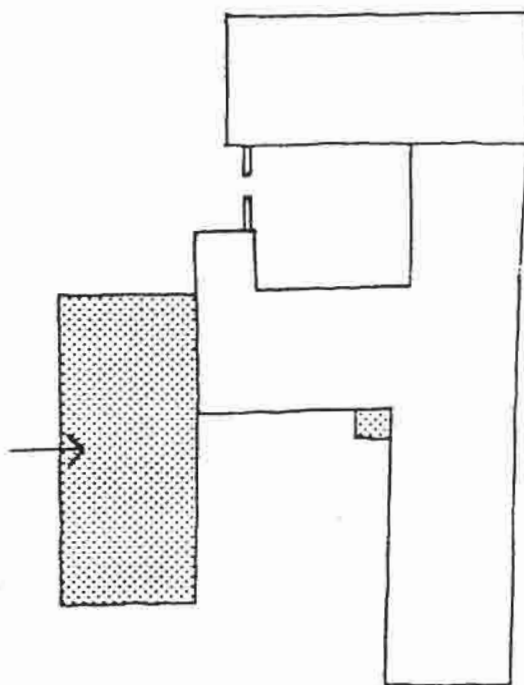




Figure 10. Yarde Farm, west elevation; 1718 block to the right.

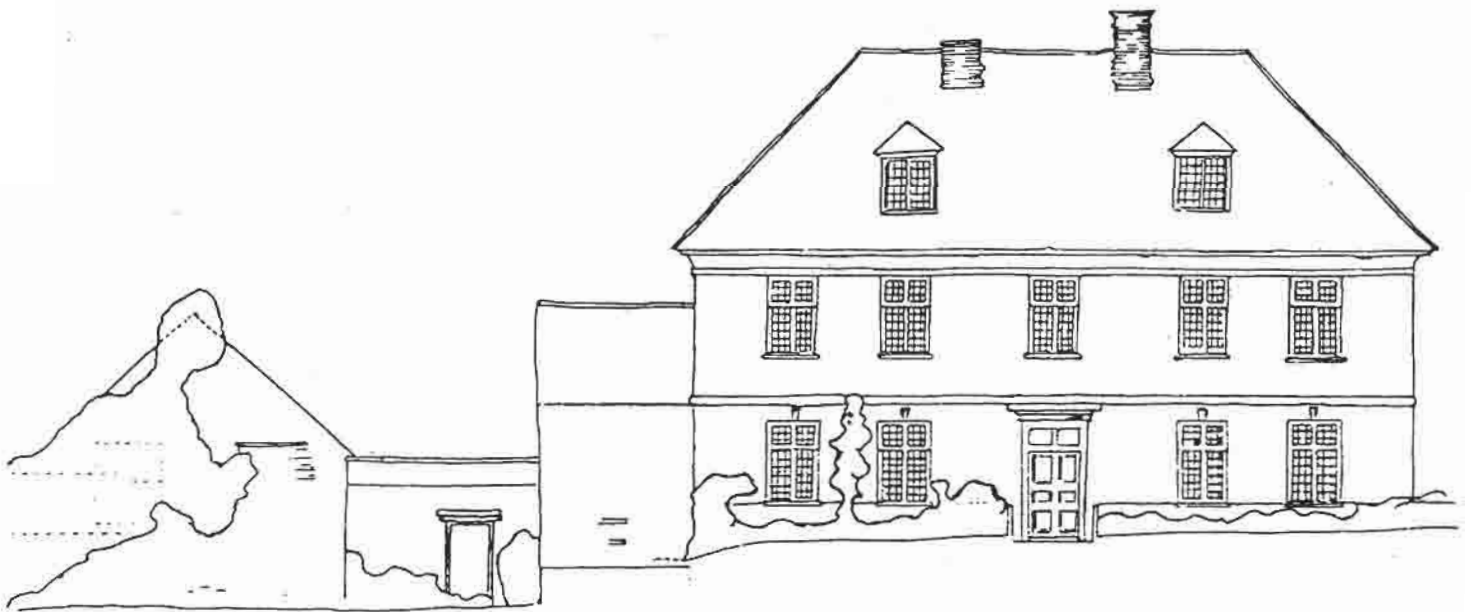


Figure 11. Yarde Farm, south elevation, showing main front of 1718 block.

The 1718 addition to the house was a polite, compact block, with a southern aspect overlooking a garden (perhaps reflecting Dyer's botanical interests), and an entrance facing a good stair. It provided two superior reception rooms on the ground floor, two heated bedrooms with closets off and servants' accommodation in the attic, and a cellar. It was perfectly suited to a gentleman who was not a hands-on farmer, and his wife, and, barring the provision of a kitchen, could have stood as comfortably on the outskirts of Oxford as in the centre of an agricultural holding. Presumably the Dyer couple were serviced by indoor domestic servants, while the farm was largely run as a separate household in what had now become, architecturally, the rear end of the complex. The only necessary shared room - and this need scarcely ever have been entered by the Dyers - was the kitchen. The axial passage in the old hall range may be of 1718 and would have allowed food to be brought into the new block.

Richard Dyer's 1718 block seems to have set the pattern for the social organisation of the house through until at least the 1860s. The gentry block was not only well-suited to the series of single, genteel occupants who lived at Yarde after Dyer's death in 1730, but it may have positively attracted a series of occupants who were childless or elderly, while the business end of the farm continued in the old house. Dyer's widow, Alice, lived at Yarde until 1761, when she died, after which the house passed to Samuel Savery, a bachelor, who lived there until his death in 1789. He may have been responsible for some minor alterations to the parlour of the 1718 block. He left the house to his sister, but with the condition that his mother was to live at Yarde during her lifetime, with "the liberty of occupying in the mansion house of Yarde a kitchen, two bed chambers and a parlour". This is almost certainly the 1718 block, with the west parlour, where there is evidence of the insertion of a range, altered to a kitchen. After the death of Savery's sister and mother, Yarde passed to his niece, Dorothy Webster, and was rented out as a farmhouse to Richard Balkwill. There were some alterations of the 1830s, probably for the tenant farmer, but these did not extend to the 1718 block, which may have been reserved for occasional visits from the owner.

In 1841 Yarde was inherited by Mary Burnell, a spinster who had previously lived with Dorothy Webster. Mary Burnell had moved into the 1718 block, then called Yarde House to distinguish it from the farm, by 1851, and was still in residence in 1861, describing herself in the census returns as a "landed proprietor"; Yarde Farm was occupied and farmed by the widowed Elizabeth Balkwill and a number of farm servants.

I hope this brief and somewhat simplified account of Yarde reveals just how useful documentation can be in enriching the interpretation of a building, when it is allied to a good analysis of the standing fabric. I am extremely grateful to Architecton, particularly John Schofield, for permission to reproduce their drawings and block plans, provided for the feasibility study. The interpretation of the fabric is due to the observations of John Thorp and John Schofield on site, including a number of healthy arguments. The documentation was originally provided for the feasibility study. Any errors are my own.

Jo Cox



## BUILDINGS AT RISK

'Buildings at risk' is one of the current catch-phrases in conservation circles, to be found on the lips of almost every interested body. With the co-operation of local authorities, English Heritage is taking a well-publicised lead in setting up Buildings at Risk Registers. It is probably no coincidence that their interest in these buildings was aroused at the same time that the national resurvey of listed buildings was taking place, since many such buildings were coming to light for the first time.

To those unfamiliar with it, the phrase 'buildings at risk' may seem somewhat ambiguous, since old buildings can face a great variety of risks, not least from development and over-restoration. In the present context, however, the 'risk' is that of neglect and dilapidation caused by owners who lack either the resources or the interest properly to maintain the buildings they own. In the case of agricultural or industrial buildings which have been made redundant by changed technologies and practices, this may be understandable. There are, however, a surprising number of houses which it would be perfectly possible to adapt or maintain to modern living standards, but which, for various reasons, are either abandoned or in serious condition.

Broadly, there are two sorts of situation which result in a building being at risk. Firstly, there is an initial cause or catalyst which physically renders a building at risk. Secondly, a further set of circumstances add to its problems, making re-use difficult and thus prolonging the risk.

Redundancy is the reason most often quoted for buildings falling into disuse; it is important, however, to distinguish between genuine redundancy and perceived redundancy, though both may have the effect of leaving a building unused or unoccupied. Genuine redundancy can be caused by various factors which may, in fact, go back several generations and not relate to the present owners at all. In rural areas, changes in agricultural practice have had a profound effect on the buildings of the countryside. From the late eighteenth century until very recently there was a shift in population from rural to urban areas. Increased mechanisation has also reduced rural populations by cutting the number of people employed in farming: currently in Britain fewer than 3% of the working population work in agriculture, the lowest figure in Europe. The recent trend of resettlement in rural areas, facilitated by greatly improved communications, has come too late for buildings which were abandoned or down-graded in use many years ago. Such down-grading happened frequently in the nineteenth century. In mid Victorian England, as agriculture reached its peak, farmers frequently used their increased wealth to build themselves new and grander houses. In this way, many older houses were relegated to use as farm workers' cottages, or even utilitarian farm buildings.

One such example is the old house of Yeo in Sheepstor parish on the edge of Dartmoor. Although on a small scale, when built in 1610 it must have been a very fashionable house, with its symmetrical three-gabled front and storied porch. At some stage, however, the farm became part of the Maristow estate and, around 1900, a new house was built for the farmer. This house, although very plain and of four-square design, was no doubt considered greatly superior to the old farmhouse, situated below it in the farmyard. The old house now survives as a cattle shippon, internally only a shell, but with its external appearance preserved virtually intact - a fact recognised in its listing as Grade II\*. Its

future appears bleak: the tenant farmer is unlikely to provide more than minimal maintenance, and only then for as long as the building remains useful to him. The estate can see no benefit in restoring the house since it is situated in the farmyard and would be of no use to the farmer as a house.

The circumstances which made the old house at Yeo redundant may recur nowadays, and may similarly put buildings at risk. A similar situation is developing at Alston Farm in the South Hams parish of Malborough. Here the farmhouse, a very interesting eighteenth-century structure with an unusually early brick range, is in danger of both dilapidation and redundancy. Some ten years ago, the farmer and his son awoke one morning to find that the end wall of the house had fallen down in the night. The farmer got a local builder to reconstruct the wall in rendered concrete blocks, using bricks at the front where it was most visible, but, even here, failing to match them with the old ones. No restoration or rebuilding took place internally, and this part of the house remains unoccupied - a barn-like shell with the blockwork still unplastered and no first floor. The farmer now occupies only a very small part of the house. Following the collapse, his son moved into a mobile home on the lawn. Having subsequently married and started a family, he applied for permission to build an agricultural dwelling on the farm. This was turned down by South Hams District Council, but was allowed on appeal: the son put up a bungalow on the other side of the farm buildings from the house. When the now elderly farmer dies, it is difficult to see what use his son will have for the large and dilapidated farmhouse, and, as it is located in the middle of the farmstead, it is unlikely that he will want to sell it to outsiders. In these circumstances, it will be up to the local authority to monitor the situation closely, and to take action if needs be.

It should be remembered that while a farmhouse like Alston may seem nothing but a financial encumbrance to its present owner, to many others it would be a house of immense potential, particularly as it is very attractively located in a highly favoured part of Devon. The case of Alston also illustrates the fact that buildings need not be unoccupied to be at risk from neglect and decay. Lack of resources has prevented the present owner from maintaining the house adequately, and it is often the case with farms that the house rates low in the farmer's priorities: expenditure on the house is minimal because all available funds are reinvested in the farm itself.

Tenanted properties, particularly those not owned by major landowners, may also suffer from lack of maintenance, since neither the tenant nor the landlord has the kind of commitment towards the property that might be expected from somebody who was both the owner and the occupier. Wooladon Farmhouse, in Meeth parish, is a prime example of this. In 1987 it was listed Grade II\* as a very unaltered seventeenth-century farmhouse with an unusual plan form incorporating an integral rear outshot with staircase. At this stage it was already in a dilapidated condition, and was occupied by two elderly tenants who were no longer able to farm due to the husband's ill health. The owners of the farm were intending to sell as soon as the tenants moved out, and were therefore unwilling to spend much money on its maintenance. Two years later the farm was put up for auction, having by now developed serious structural problems: the central stack had collapsed through the thatched roof, and the decay of the cob walls further threatened the building's stability. During the period in which the house was available for viewing a number of fine seventeenth-century doors were stolen.

At this stage another factor relevant to buildings at risk came into play in the form of a nearby English China Clay quarry. It emerged that ECC owned the mineral rights to the farm and this, together with the close proximity of the quarry itself, undoubtedly deterred many potential purchasers. This form of external blight on a building can ultimately cause more problems for its reuse than simple deterioration. Wooladon failed to sell at the auction, but was bought immediately afterwards by a local farmer. For over six months nothing was done to the building, though pressure was put on the local planning authority to take action secure its repair. At the time of writing a site meeting, is only just being set up between the authority and the owner. Apparently, work has just started on repairing the house, although the local conservation officer was unaware of this until informed by a concerned member of the public. Again, a higher level of involvement by the local authority at an earlier stage would have safeguarded the building; as it is, its repair has been left almost to chance.

Ironically, it is local authorities themselves that most commonly put buildings at risk, principally by road or housing schemes. A victim of this in Devon is Greenhill Farmhouse, on the edge of Kingsteignton. Bought by Teignbridge District Council in 1982 to facilitate the construction of a relief road and housing scheme, the house still lacks a permanent use and has stood empty for the last three years. In its abandoned state, it has suffered serious vandalism, both random, in the form of fires and wilful damage, and organized, in the form of the theft of architectural features. In an attempt to combat this the council has blocked the doors and windows with concrete, thereby setting up potential ventilation problems. Although Teignbridge does have genuine plans for re-using Greenhill as the community centre for a sheltered housing scheme, funding for this has been frozen for the past three years, and in the current economic climate for local authorities, a thaw seems unlikely. Meanwhile the fine Regency villa stands forlorn and stranded, looking out from its barbed wire enclosure onto a modern housing estate, its once ornate formal gardens now a wasteland.

Greenhill also represents another category of buildings at risk, one that is probably more common in urban than in rural areas: this is when the site on which a building stands is of more economic value than the structure itself. In these circumstances unscrupulous owners may often be tempted to allow a building to decay to such an extent that its reuse becomes impossible. It is the responsibility of the local authority to recognise when this is happening and to take steps against it. Wilful neglect of a listed building is a criminal offence and such a property may be compulsorily purchased by a local authority, with only minimum compensation.

In buildings left standing empty for long periods, the factors contributing to risk are cumulative. Redundancy, real or perceived, leads to the building being vacated; maintenance is reduced to a minimum or abandoned altogether; empty and uncared for, the building becomes an obvious target for vandalism. Every additional physical problem which affects a building increases the cost of restoration, thus reducing the number of potential purchasers and further limiting the possibility of reuse or rehabilitation.

Country houses pose particular problems since their size often makes them difficult to adapt to modern uses, and their owners are frequently reluctant to split up or sell large estates. When put on the open market such houses are vulnerable to being bought up by developers more interested in building on the



surrounding grounds than in conserving the house. One of the most cases in Devon currently is Maristow House, a large, multi-phase mansion just outside Plymouth. For many years the seat of the Lopes family, the house is now owned by a Charitable Trust formed from the Maristow estate. For the last eight years, since fire damaged the house, it has been shrouded in scaffolding and tarpaulins while the different parties involved have argued over its future. Two applications to demolish a major part of the house have been turned down. Both applications went to public inquiry, thus protracting the uncertainty about the future of the building. Although a potential buyer has come forward with a scheme to reuse the house by a conversion into residential units, the Trust is still very reluctant to sell. The local authority has had the difficult task of negotiating with both present and potential owners in the attempt to secure some kind of future for the building.

The problems facing buildings at risk are many and complex. In the end, it is frequently the local authority that is left 'holding the baby'. Clearly defined powers exist for authorities to take action on listed buildings that are being neglected, yet in Devon these powers have been invoked only rarely. There seems no obvious reason for this inertia. The presence or absence of a conservation officer is not a decisive factor. The council most active in serving repairs notices, East Devon, does not have any specifically-appointed or specialist conservation staff. By contrast, Dartmoor National Park, which has three officers variously involved in conservation, has apparently never served a repairs notice. Greater consistency in the way that local authorities use their powers would greatly improve the chances of survival for buildings at risk, and the adoption of a set of guidelines for dealing with such buildings might help councils to use their powers more effectively. The first step towards addressing the problem, however, must be to determine its extent; for this, it is essential that a register of buildings at risk be compiled. Here again, the picture across the county is totally uneven, and the level of information kept on buildings at risk varies enormously from one local authority to another. So far, only South Hams District Council has taken up the offer of English Heritage to provide financial assistance in compiling a buildings at risk register.

The reason generally put forward for not keeping a systematic record of buildings at risk is a lack of staff resources. Most planning officers are fully occupied in taking reactive measures towards planning applications. To deal successfully with buildings at risk proactive measures are needed, and officers need to be able to take the initiative rather than being forced to wait until they can implement the rule book. The workload of conservation staff has been greatly increased by the additional number of listed buildings generated by the recent resurvey of rural areas, and this load will be further increased as the results of the current revision of urban lists begin to emerge. Encouragingly, more specialised conservation staff are now being taken on by local authorities, despite continuing financial restrictions. However, the introduction of the Community Charge has further tightened available budgets. While conservation as a general issue has an increasingly high profile, this is not always perceived as including historic buildings, and councils have other financial commitments which take a higher priority in public opinion. This is particularly important as Charge-payers are encouraged to demand ever greater accountability; if they do not rate the conservation of buildings very highly, then it is unlikely to receive much funding. Against this difficult political background conservation officers need to tread carefully and are understandably wary of increasing their workload by actively seeking out problem buildings.

But problem buildings will not go away, and once brought to the local authority's attention there is no excuse for ignoring them. The sooner they are identified, the sooner their problems can be resolved, and this needs to be done before their deteriorating condition makes the cost of repair prohibitive. Furthermore, firm action by a local authority in a few cases can set a precedent that will deter any other owners of listed buildings who may be inclined to ignore the constraints and responsibilities involved in statutory protection. In the long term, it is essential that special measures are taken to safeguard buildings at risk, particularly as they form a significant percentage of the country's historic buildings stock. If they are not protected against negligent owners then the very principle of statutory protection is undermined, and listing becomes a pointless exercise.

Jenefer Chesher

---