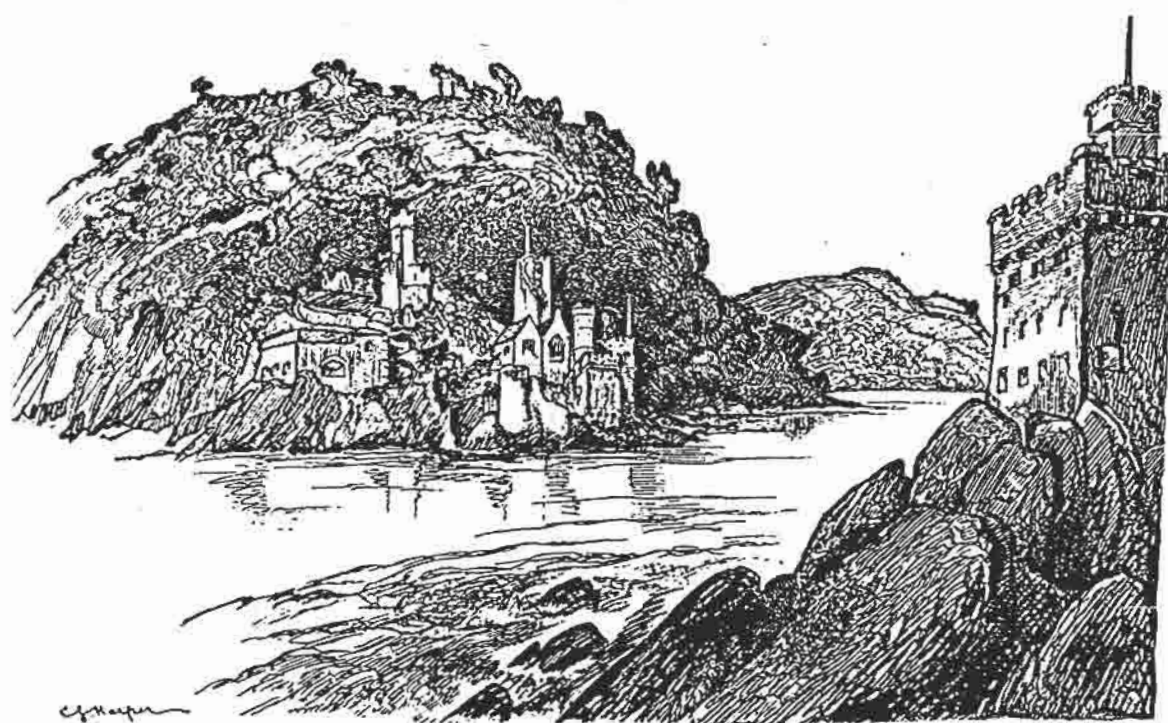


# DEVON BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 10



JULY 1991



Cover illustration is of Dartmouth Castle and the church of St Petrox, from Kingswear. From C.J. Harper, *The South Devon Coast* (1907).

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# DEVON BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 10, MAY 1991

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## EDITORIAL

At last year's AGM, I said that the Group needed to think about improving both the appearance and the range of its publications. This *Newsletter*, the tenth since the first was issued in 1986, is the first step in that process. One reason for the change was technical: the rapid advances made in word-processing, printing, and desk top publishing over the last five years, left the old *Newsletter* format looking cramped and amateurish. The fact that the Group is concerned with historic buildings should not mean that we have to use historic technology. The second, and more important, reason was to do with the way the *Newsletter* had itself developed. The original intention was for it to combine a Secretary's Report on recent cases and events involving the Group, short pieces on a range of historic buildings topics, and two or three longer articles. In fact, the composition of the *Newsletter* came to be made up almost entirely of the Secretary's Report and four or five articles. This gave the *Newsletter* quite a strong academic identity, but left it rather wanting as a vehicle for shorter, more occasional pieces, and for contributions from members who were, perhaps, put off by the thought that they would have to write a full-length article if they wanted to publish something through the Group. So the new format is an attempt to shift the balance of the *Newsletter* towards shorter items covering a wide range of issues, and thereby, I hope, to encourage more members of the Group to contribute to it. At the same time, it was important that the DBG should build upon its ability to produce scholarly and original work on the county's historic buildings. So the Committee decided that, as well as producing the *Newsletter* in its new form twice a year, the Group should also publish an annual *Journal*. This will be the future home for the longer articles that were previously part of the *Newsletter*. The emphasis of the new *Journal* will be primarily academic, concentrating on the analysis and description of the county's historic buildings, and encouraging original research in the whole field of such studies. We hope that in time it might grow to complement the excellent material already being published in the *Transactions* of the Devon Archaeological Society. We are planning to bring out the first issue of the *Devon Buildings Group Journal* in the late summer. I would be very glad

to have the views of any member on the new format *Newsletter*, and on the plans for the *Journal*. I would be even gladder to receive contributions to the next *Newsletter*, which will come out in the autumn. And if anybody has been building up to an article please let me know – the *Journal* should be just the place.

*Chris Brooks*

## THE ROADFORD OPERATION

On 18 December 1989 Roadford Reservoir was officially 'opened'. However in order to take advantage of the incessant rain falling over that period the River Wolf had been dammed two months earlier. Thus, by the time of the opening ceremony the Wolf Valley and its archaeological sites, important to the study of the Devonshire landscape, had already started to disappear.

This valley lies in what, even so recently, was a remote and unknown part of Devon and contained, in addition to a wide variety of species of flora and fauna, a number of single farm buildings. These, through research and excavation, proved to be settlements consisting of a number of dwellings.

To prepare the valley for the reservoir all buildings, trees and major hedgerow shrubs had to be levelled and removed. This allowed unique access for the Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit to carry out detailed examination of standing buildings and probable dwelling sites and, by their systematic demolition or excavation, to record their construction phases down to their foundations and beyond. The valley's landscape history was examined by a variety of means including excavation of test pits, valley transects, sectioning of hedgebanks and the recording and computer analysis of hedgerow species. Peat in some valley floor deposits were found to have been forming since the third millenium B.C., and contained pollen sequences continuing down to modern times. Analysis of the pollen suggests that the valley saw little cultivation before the mediaeval period.



### The Roadford Reservoir Site: Combe Park

Earliest settlement evidence is likewise of mediaeval date, but this does not preclude the likelihood of much earlier settlement. Early documentary evidence is limited for although some settlements are recorded in late mediaeval taxation returns the majority are undocumented before the C16 to C18. Such lack of early documentation could be a reflection of the small *independent status of the settlements*.

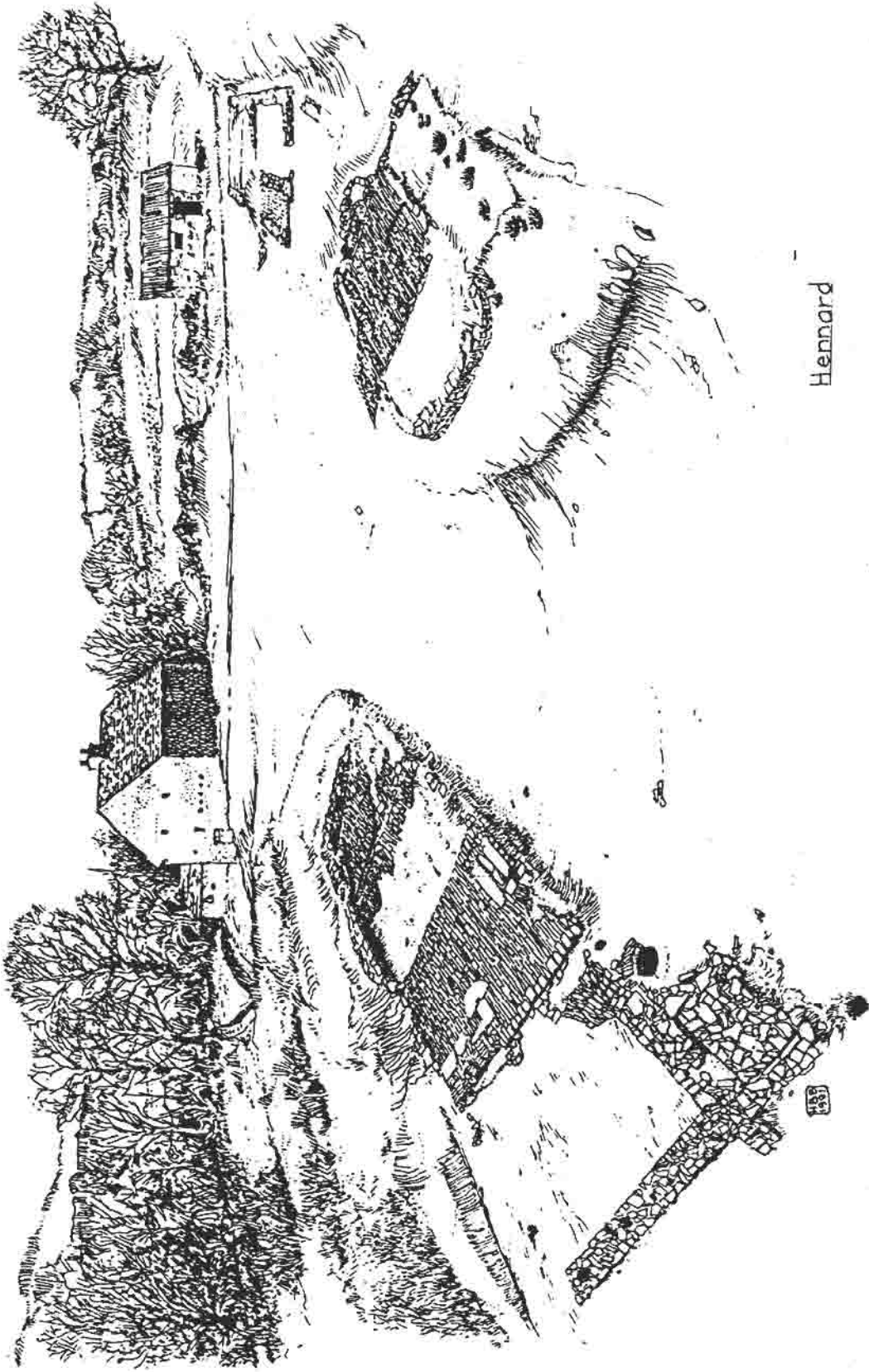
Time and money precluded a comprehensive archaeological survey being carried out throughout the valley. Those about which documentary evidence gave promise of archaeological interest, and which were available were natural choices. Others which could have been of interest had to be omitted because of their location in relation to the dam construction works.

Combe Park farm is the best example of those in the latter category for its position just north of where the take-off tower and bell mouth spillway now stand caused it to become an immediate casualty to contractor's heavy equipment. However this was not before it had been recorded by Miss Debbie Griffiths (then of DCC Property Department), who also carried out much initial documentary research into the area. This

farm was of particular interest on two counts. Firstly, its impressive range of C18/C19 cob and stone farm buildings which included a fine linhay, had not been subject to any recent major alterations, and still held much of its old equipment. The 15m water wheel, which drove a number of in-barn equipments, and which had superseded the horse power from the extant horse engine house, is now in place in Okehampton Museum. Secondly, its early C18 farmhouse was unusual for this area being built of brick. On its first floor the front rooms were originally entirely separated from those in the rear (tenants and servants rooms), each area being served by its own staircase.

The major excavations took place at Hennard and West Wortha, whilst detailed examination of two standing farmhouses was made at Shop.

Documentary research showed that whereas Hennard at this time consisted of only one small dwelling and two outbuildings, it had originally comprised at least seven tenements including a corn mill, which was probably that serving the Domesday Manor of Southweek, and a fulling mill for which documentary evidence seems to give a limited working life within the C17/C18.



Hennard

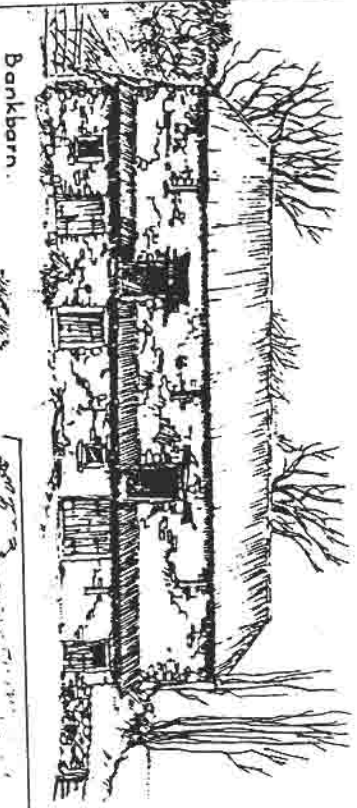
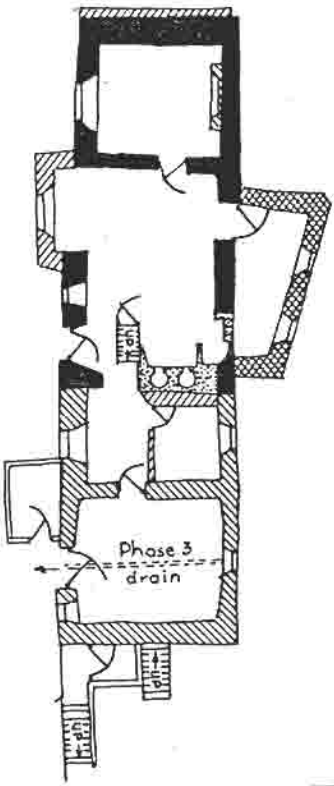
The Roadford Reservoir Site: Hennard



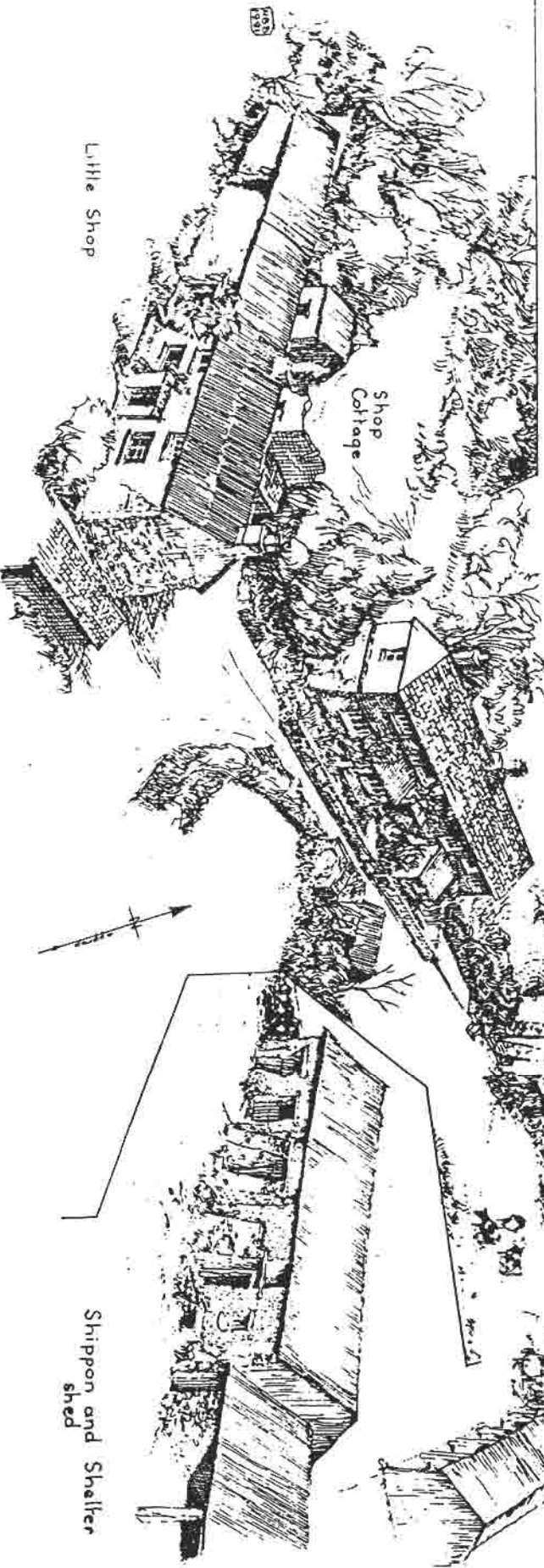
# SHOP

Formhouse  
-showing development sequence.

- Phase 1
- Phase 2
- Phase 3
- Phase 4 et seq
- Original Phase 1 restuctured during Phase 4 et seq
- Existing window openings inserted in Phase 3 and later



Bankbarn.



Shippon and Shelter shed

The Roadford Reservoir Site: Shop



The excavated houses were grouped around the 'town place', and exhibited a uniformity in plan of a living room with cobbled floor and fireplace separated from an unfloored area possibly for occupation by box beds. Animal houses were attached to one or both ends of the dwellings, and three small shippons were identified, placing these buildings in the Devon longhouse tradition (*Archaeological Review*, 1989-90).

The excavations at West Wortha revealed a sizeable enclosed mediaeval settlement which may have had its origins in late Saxon times, and surrounded by a substantial enclosing ditch. The most notable features found were two mediaeval buildings each containing a pair of corn driers. Plant remains showed that gorse was used as a fuel. The remains of the substantial farmhouse was shown on excavation to have started as a two roomed dwelling.

Shop, the farmyard of which even at this time had a very individual feeling about it, was revealed on excavation to have been an earlier settlement than previously thought, though with evidence of an early field system. Significantly two substantial curving ditches were found which may have served to enclose a small settlement as in the manner of West Wortha. A floor plan of an early dwelling was excavated north of the existing farmhouse, of a type similar to those found at Hennard, and which preceded the farmhouse, the building of which cut through its demolition material.

The farmhouse was shown to be originally a two roomed unit, eventually incorporating, as domestic rooms, a shippon which had been built against its east wall.

I am indebted to the Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit for the information which has formed the basis of this article. More detailed information is available from this unit, which is in the process of producing a series of reports on the historic building sites of the Roadford area.

*Brian Blakeway*

## REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT CONTROL DIVISION IN MID DEVON

Last August Mid Devon District Council recognised that it had serious problems within its Development Control Division. A back-log of planning applications had accumulated with 513 applications awaiting determination on 30 August 1990. Due to staffing and recruitment difficulties, as well as a significant increase in planning appeals being lodged, this back-log was not being reduced.

A Development Control Sub-Committee was set up to look into the matter and was given the power to authorise the necessary action to resolve the problem. They suggested a range of measures should be introduced for a trial period of six months, the main points of which were as follows:

1. A weekly list of intended decisions on planning applications should be produced and made available to ward members and members of the Planning and Transportation Committee. Any of the above could request that an application should be determined by the Planning and Transportation Committee.

2. A policy of not forwarding letters to the Committee nor circulating letters at the Planning and Transportation Committee meetings should be adopted, and that agents etc., should be notified of *this change*. Also, that a precis of letters be adopted for the plans list, with the letters being made available to ward and Committee members at Ailsa House and the Great House, Tiverton and at the Crediton Planning Office for their inspection. Any late representations should be included in a folder for inspection at the meeting.

3. Non-statutory consultations should be avoided. Applicants should be requested to display a site notice, and told that failure to do so could delay their application. Lists of applications should be placed in the local press and publicity of applications by Parish Councils on their notice boards should be encouraged by providing them with poster-sized notices of applications.

4. Telephone calls to planning officers should be intercepted between 10.30 a.m. and

3.30 p.m. to allow them an interruption-free work period, and that a previously adopted appointment system for consultations with planning officers, making them available for meetings only between 9.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. by prior appointment, except in exceptional circumstances, be continued.

5. The District Planning Officer be given authority to go out to consultants to deal with informal hearings and enquiries relating to appeals.

It was recommended that this package of proposals be implemented by mid September 1990 and that letters should be sent to Councillors, the press and all the professional bodies concerned about the procedure prior to implementation.

This six month trial period expired at the end of March 1991. Assessment of the implemented resolutions and a decision on whether to extend the trial period, drop some or all of the resolutions, or to make some or all of the resolutions permanent was necessary. A report, which forms the basis of this article, was produced by the Director of Planning with Technical Services, Mr R. L. Dightam with recommendations for how things should proceed. This was put before the Planning and Transportation Committee on 27 March 1991.

An assessment of the trial period resolutions and any progress made shows that the back-log of planning applications has been reduced to 350, although it is of some concern that this has been achieved during a period of few applications. Should the economic climate recover, the numbers of planning applications will undoubtedly increase with the risk of a return to the back-log figures of last summer. Target figures set last autumn by the District Planning Officer, after consultation with his staff, for the number of applications to be outstanding by a given date this year and the percentage of applications to be dealt with within eight weeks of being lodged were not met during this trial period, although it is suggested that these figures may have been over ambitious.

The precis of letters has saved a considerable amount of officers' time, releasing them to attend to other considerations, although the files of representations which have been prepared and deposited for viewing at the Great House, Ailsa House and the Crediton Office have taken con-

siderable preparation time and have apparently not been utilised by either committee members or the general public. A separate file of late representations has been available for scrutiny at the Committee meetings.

The approach to publicity of planning applications by way of site notices, Parish Council notice boards and publicity in the press has been welcomed by some, supported by others and received fewer complaints from the public than it seems were anticipated. The conclusion appear to be that this approach is basically acceptable to all, although the Development Control Sub-Committee were advised when they recommended this procedure that 'Ombudsmen can be critical of Councils who do not carry out discretionary neighbour notification'.

'During the trial period consultants have been used for the preparation of evidence and attending at one informal hearing and four public enquiries'. The District Council seems to be impressed with both the quality of service they are receiving from consultants and the cost effectiveness of the venture.

'It is interesting to note that the overall number of appeals received by the Authority is continuing to rise and the proportion to be dealt with by either informal hearing or public enquiry is also showing an upward trend'. However, despite the satisfaction of the Authority with the service it has received from consultants their preferred policy is to keep the handling of appeals 'in-house', except for in particular cases.

The appointments system for consultations with planning officers is apparently working well, and the practice of intercepting telephone calls to allow planning officers 'continuity of thought and work' is generally considered a success.

The report contained these recommendations to be voted upon by the Committee.

1. That the 'weekly list of intended decisions' is retained as a permanent feature.

2. That the style of presentation of letters of representation on the plans list continues in the manner as identified in the Development Control Sub-Committee resolution, but that the preparation of files of representations be discontinued (with the exception of the file referring to representations received after the preparation of the plans list).

3. That the procedures for neighbour notification and publicity of planning applications continue for a further trial period of one year.

4. That the practice of 'telephone free periods' continues.

5. That the use of consultants for preparation and presentation of evidence on behalf of the District Council at either informal hearings and (or) public enquiries continues as necessary for the time being, subject to consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, and subject to the availability of financial resources.

6. That the practice of an 'appointments system' continues'.

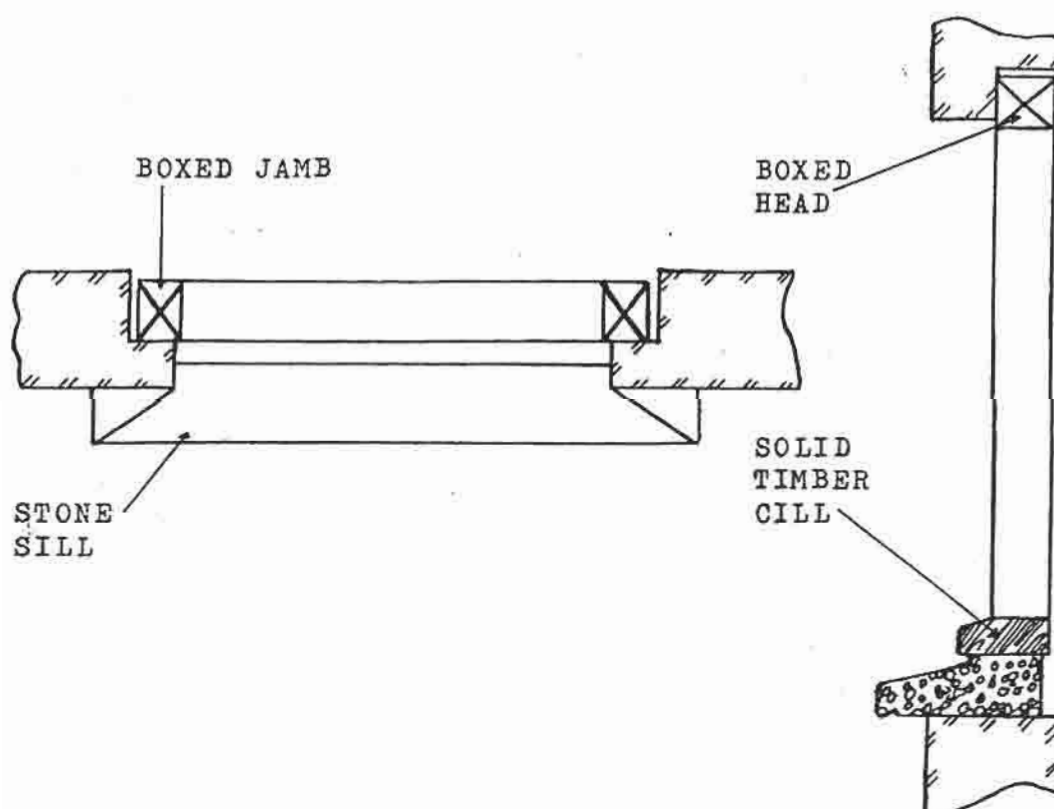
These recommendations were all supported by the Committee and have been put forward for ratification by Mid-Devon District Council on 1 May 1991.

*Mark Lewis*

## SOME NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOX FRAME WINDOW

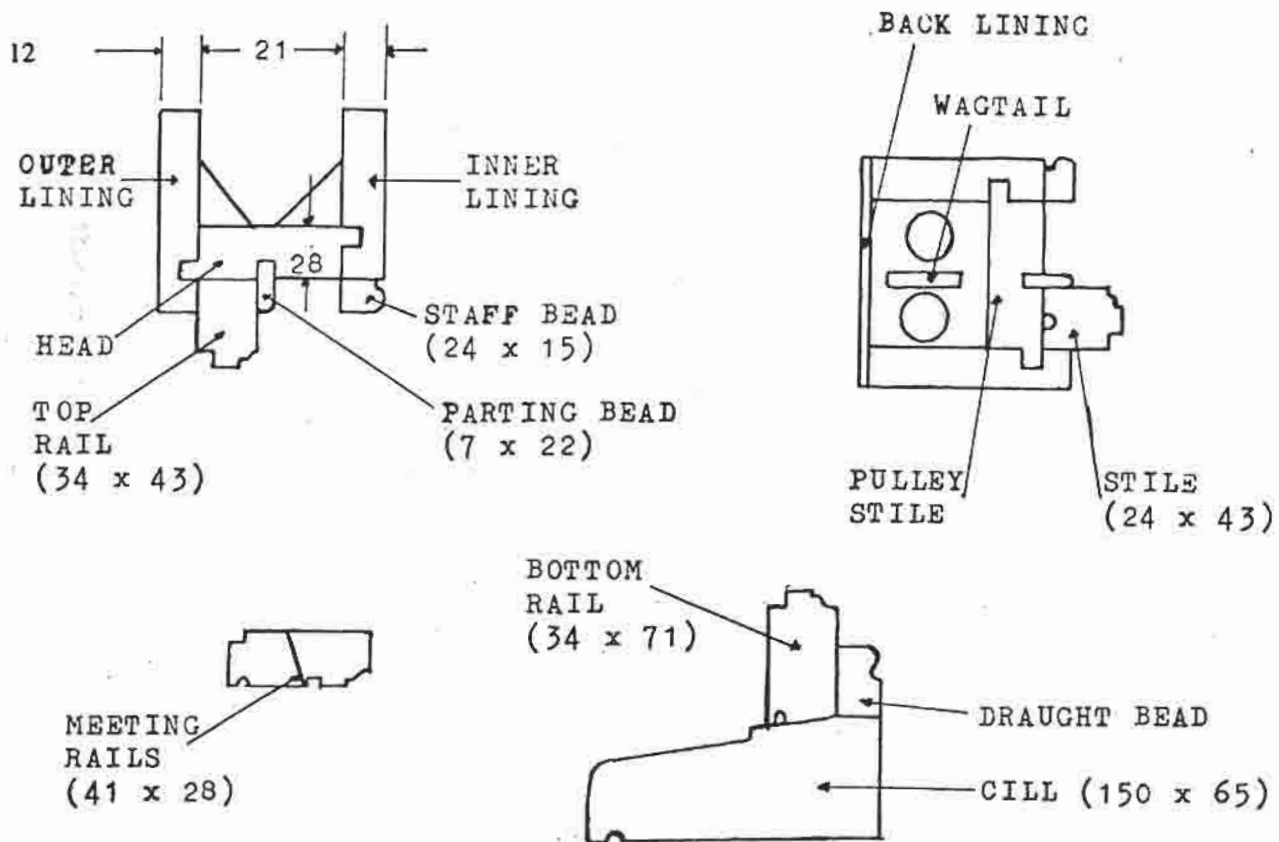
The box frame window in England is found in better quality buildings from the late seventeenth century, and was fairly dominant in this context up to the middle of the nineteenth century. It seems that this style of window was originally developed in Holland early in the seventeenth century. Since most of European architecture was under Italian influence at this time, they are not often found elsewhere in Europe, but were popular in North America, and other British and Dutch colonies.

The general sections (fig.1) show the position of the window relative to the masonry. As can be seen, these windows can only be installed from



(Figure 1)  
The Box Frame Window: General Sections





(Figure 2) The Box Frame Window: Detailed Vertical Section and Jamb Section

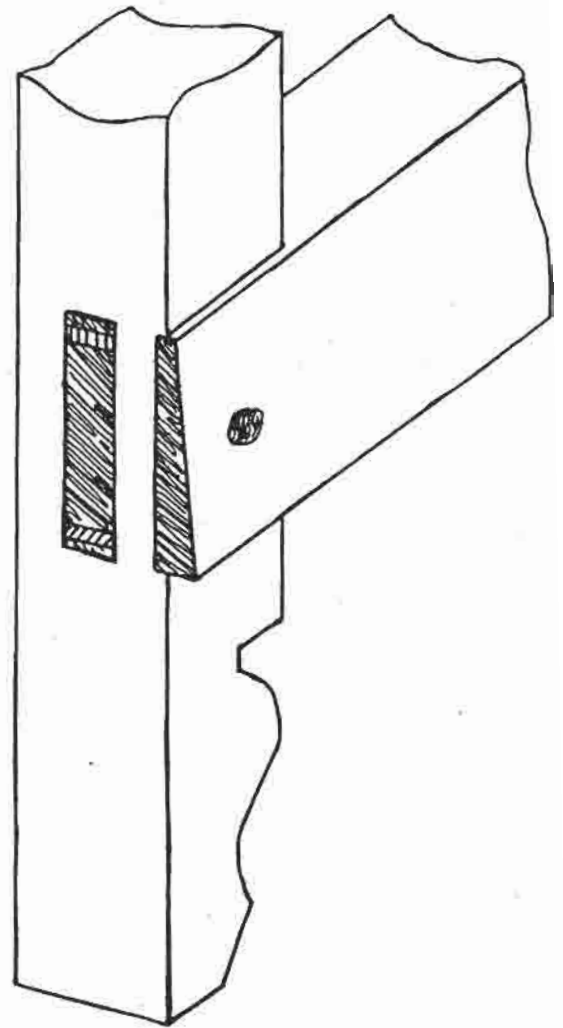
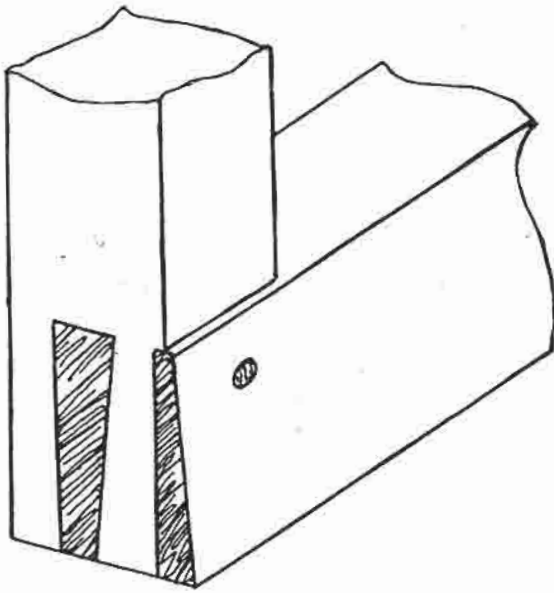
the inside, which is the reverse of normal practice when fitting external joinery. The detailed sections (fig.2) show the constructional arrangement and names of most of the component parts of the window, with typical dimensions in millimetres.

Vertically sliding sashes are counter balanced by weights on cords, located in the boxed jambs; the cords pass over the pulleys and are nailed into the groove on the hidden edge of the sash stile. Earlier and less advanced specimens had fixed top sashes, with raised lower sashes held in place by wooden pegs or metal pins inserted into the jamb. Many modern designs use springs to counter-balance the weight of the sashes; these windows, and the earlier ones just described, are much simpler because the jambs do not have to house any weights, and can therefore be much cheaper.

There are many considerations relating to the variety of glazing divisions encountered. Originally, the availability of large panes of glass, and then desired pane proportion and fashion, account for the diversity seen, and these trends will apply to most types of window. However there is one variable of box frame window design that is directly affected by these differences, and that is the decorative horn, or joggle, on the stile

of the top sash. In earlier windows where many glazing bars are present, these bars constituted a very significant structural element. During the 1840s, as larger panes of glass became affordable and popular, fewer glazing bars were used, and the weight of the glass in the top sash imposed a greater strain on the joint between the stile and the meeting rail. Extending the stile with a decorative horn allows a much stronger joint to be used (fig.3). However, there are a large number of more modern box frame windows that have been made with many glazing divisions, and most of them retain the joggle as a feature.

As well as the number of glazing bars, their design has undergone a fair amount of change (fig.4). The earliest glazing bars were of a fairly heavy flattened T-shaped section, with a rounded or otherwise simply moulded inner face. By Victorian times a more slender section had been adopted, with a large range of internal mouldings, including the ovolo. During the early part of this century the ovolo became more ubiquitous, but is nowadays seen as an up-market embellishment over the bevelled design that will be seen on just about all mass-produced joinery.



(Figure 3) The Box Frame Window:  
Dovetailed and Doweled; Morticed, Wedged and Doweled

EARLY

VICTORIAN

MODERN



ASTRAGAL

GOTHIC

CYMA  
REVERSA

OVOLO

(Figure 4) The Box Frame Window: Glazing Bar Sections

The other widely varying component of box frame windows is the pocket. This is a section cut from the pulley stile in a manner that allows a stable push fit. It is situated several inches up from the cill, its purpose being to give access into the boxed jamb for the replacement of sash cords and maintenance of weights. The pocket should be found between the parting bead and inner lining, and is therefore not visible when the window is closed. This arrangement also protects the pocket and pulley stile from the weather. It is important that the pocket is long enough to withdraw the weights easily, the rule of thumb being that the length of the pocket in inches is equal to the perimeter of the frame in feet. Many deviations from this ideal will be encountered, most of which could lead to difficulties. Pockets that are badly cut may require screwing in place, which wastes a lot of time when it comes to removing them. Pockets that straddle the parting bed look untidy as well as letting rainwater into the outside longitudinal cut. Sometimes pockets are too short, requiring the weights to be withdrawn bottom first; this can be difficult (or impossible) and generally leads to bruised fingertips and foul language. I have even seen a complete lack of pockets in one case; at that time there was only one broken sash cord, meanwhile, I am avoiding that area. These variations have astounded and confounded me at times, but I have found no reasonable explanation for them, except poor design.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the box frame window is a complicated beast with a long pedigree that has only been *lightly examined here*. As long as people want to retain their heritage I envisage many generations of carpenters approaching these masterpieces of joinery design with both love and trepidation.

*J.R. Flint*

## SUDDEN DEATH IN DARTMOUTH: an Obituary for the Methodist Church

In the last week of February 1991, after a long history of neglect patiently borne, Dartmouth Methodist Church left this world with a bang. Although the building had reached the advanced age of 117 and had been in poor health for some time, the suddenness of its demise came as a surprise to its friends. The immediate cause of death was bodily collapse brought on by a severe shock to the building's system. The source of the shock appears to have been an internal explosion. Though stricken, the church lingered for several days after the fatal trauma; but there was no hope of a long-term recovery. After a careful examination by specialists from the police forensic department, the building was quietly put down, and the body removed by local builders. The deceased, mourned by a number of conservation societies, leaves a large hole on the north side of Dartmouth Market Square. Foul play is definitely suspected.

The Devon Buildings Group has been concerned in the sad case of Dartmouth Methodist Church since 1987, and I gave a detailed account of the history of the building and its architect in *Newsletter Number 5* (April 1988). It was the second church on the site, built 1874-5, replacing an earlier Methodist church of 1816. A clear assertion of nonconformist pride and confidence, it was designed to dominate its side of the Market Square. The architect was John Wills. Born in Kingsbridge, Wills moved to Derby in the later 1870s and became a major nonconformist church designer in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Methodist Church in Dartmouth was his first church and his first major commission. The grand neo-classical manner that he adopted for the building and its relationship to the surrounding townscape made it unique in Devon.

The church's problems began with declining attendance in the 1960s. Unable to afford the upkeep of a building that was far larger than they needed, the Church Council began to look for other ways in which it might be used. A scheme



Dartmouth Methodist Church: now deceased

of 1981 for conversion to flats with a nice combination of 'church and parking facilities', was given planning consent by South Hams District Council but proved financially unviable. This seems to have exhausted the Church Council's interest in retaining the building. The contents were sold off in 1984 and the interior virtually gutted: at the same time permission was sought for demolition and redevelopment to provide fifteen flats. The church was by now in a Conservation Area, though this appears to have been of little interest to the Town Council, which supported the scheme. Rather more surprisingly, demolition was also advocated by the Dartmouth and Kingswear Society, an organization which is concerned, among other things, with preserving the historic fabric of the town. Presumably, on this occasion, the other things took precedence. South Hams, however, was unconvinced that an alternative use was impossible and turned down the application – largely on the grounds of inadequate car parking and sewage disposal, but also because the building was, after all, a major feature of the Conservation Area. With demolition refused other potential purchasers hove into sight and a variety of schemes were mooted. Eventually, proposals for conversion to create workshops emerged and were granted planning permission in 1985. Again, however, the scheme failed.

With ideas from the private sector apparently exhausted, it was the turn of the public sector to have a go. South Hams District Council obtained an option to purchase at the end of 1985 with a view to converting the building to community use. Unhappily reports commissioned from architects and engineers concluded that the building was no longer viable and that the only option was 'redevelopment' – a careful euphemism for knocking the church down and putting up something else. Nevertheless, the Council persisted in wanting to keep the building and, we are assured, conducted lengthy negotiations with a whole host of private and public bodies – the latter ranging from the Community Council for Devon to the European Commission. One appreciates South Hams's efforts. Even so, it seems extraordinary – as perhaps it did to South Hams – that there was nobody from here to Brussels who could think of a way of re-using what was essentially a stone shell with a grand front occupying a prime site in the middle of one of the most important historic towns in the South West.

By the end of 1987 the District Council had had enough and announced plans to knock the church down and replace it with a community centre. There also seems to have been an alternative proposal to clear the site and use the resultant hole as a handy route for an inner ring road. A



DBG member alerted the Committee to the threat and I wrote to the South Hams Director of Planning, Mr Carpenter. It was a kindly, supportive letter with lots of information about the church and John Wills; it suggested the building merited listing and asked the Council to think again and to keep the Group informed of developments. The reply was curt: Mr Carpenter accepted that the church 'had a large facade within the setting of the Market Square', rejected my 'strong assertions that the building is worthy of listing', said he was 'doubtful over the value of retaining it', and regretted his inability to let the Group know about future proposals. It seemed odd for Mr Carpenter to deny that the church had any interest apart from being big, when his Council had apparently scoured Europe for three years in an effort to find a new use for the building. Could it be that the South Hams Council's pan-European quest had had less than the enthusiastic support of its Director of Planning? Whatever the truth, one thing was testable: was the church worthy of listing? The Group contacted the Victorian Society and together we asked English Heritage to carry out an assessment of listability. Within a fortnight an Inspector had visited Dartmouth and the Secretary of State had agreed to his recommendation that the Methodist Church be afforded statutory protection as a Grade II listed building.

South Hams District Council was not pleased. Neither, it seems, were the good folk of Dartmouth. *The Dartmouth Chronicle* carried all sorts of spluttering comments about 'outsiders' who poked their noses into affairs that were only of concern to locals. This seems oddly parochial for the inhabitants of a town that is of national historical and architectural interest. It also seems hypocritical when a large chunk of the local economy depends on tourists, who are also 'outsiders' and who come to Dartmouth, pounds jingling merrily in their pockets, because it is full of old buildings. South Hams continued to talk about 'redevelopment' and the town's mayor Mr Don Webb, enthused about demolition. Meanwhile, the opinions of the Dartmouth and Kingswear Society had shifted from the knock-it-down days of the mid-eighties – though not a lot. By a single vote the Committee decided to support the retention of the church. Peter Wyatt, the chairman, gave a fair indication of the Society's enthusiasm for conservation by saying 'we think the building is grossly out of scale', though added, kindly, 'it

has been there so long it seems like an old friend'. While individuals and organizations lined up for or against the church – or, like Mr Wyatt, both for and against – South Hams decided to sell. Listed Building legislation obliged the Council to offer the building for sale on the open market before any plans for demolition would be countenanced.

Re-enter the private sector, in the form of Mr Peter Denega, property developer of Torquay. Mr Denega bought the church with permission to convert to residential use. Consultations with officers from South Hams followed and, by November 1988, Mr Denega's architect, Mike Richards, produced plans to turn the church into twenty one flats. Subsequently, following further negotiations, the total of flats was reduced to eighteen. Essentially, the design that emerged by the beginning of 1989 was a facade job. The elevation to Market Square was retained, the rest rebuilt. This involved a new entrance front concocted out of the rear of the church, with pediment, giant pilasters, and a ground floor loggia – an effort in the heftiest post-modern manner that completely changed the balance of the original and effectively turned the building round. At the same time, the attempt to get in as many flats as possible led to the roofline acquiring a set of dormers. While accepting the principle of residential conversion, the DBG, along with the Victorian Society and the Ancient Monuments Society, objected: in our joint view the proposed design was far too assertive, and was inappropriate both to the listed building and to the conservation area as a whole. We did not expect our opposition to count for much, particularly as the plans had been agreed with the officers of South Hams, who were recommending acceptance. But we had reckoned without the quixotry of Dartmouth Town Council. Although, for years, the Council had supported demolition and the Mayor had been particularly keen to knock the old church down, a facadist scheme to turn it into flats was not to be tolerated. After much huffing and puffing in the press, after accusations and counter-accusations between the town authorities and the district authorities, Dartmouth Council rejected the scheme, while the Mayor, the quotable Mr Webb, vowed to 'fight to the bitter end'. Not, of course, because the council had suddenly realized it had a major historic building to deal with, but because it wanted the site redeveloped differently. When the scheme came before the District

Council Planning Committee it was turned down.

Not surprisingly, Mr Denega appealed against the refusal of planning permission and listed building consent. This put the South Hams officers in a tricky position: their advice to support the scheme had been rejected by their own Planning Committee, but the legislation obliged them to defend their Committee's decision at the appeal hearing. This they could only do by calling in an outside authority, which happened to be me. The hearing took place in January 1990 and I presented the conservation case for rejecting the proposals, evidence that supported South Hams but that was necessarily opposed to the evidence of its officers – who were also trying to support the council's decision. It was all very contradictory: indeed, the officers hardly knew whether they wanted the appeal rejected, which would have vindicated their council, or upheld, which would have vindicated them. In the end the Inspector found for the appellant, so Mr Denega had permission to go ahead and convert Dartmouth Methodist Church to flats.

And then nothing happened. One can only assume that Mr Denega had bought the church in the hope of profiting from the property boom of the late eighties, but that his ambitions foundered on the collapse of house prices and the recession that has followed. When the DBG held its conference in Dartmouth in October, the church looked as abandoned and unwanted as it had been for a decade. By the New Year the local press was muttering about neglect and dangerous structures orders.

Poor Dartmouth Methodist Church! Built to express the hopeful confidence of late-Victorian nonconformity, in its latter years it fell, if not among thieves, then among the bureaucrats and the philistines – which may not be worse, but is infinitely more protracted. At various times, the Methodist Church Council, the Dartmouth Town Council, the South Hams District Council, and even the Dartmouth and Kingswear Society, had all wanted the building demolished. On the last day of February they got their wish. At three o'clock in the morning, an explosion set off inside the church reduced it to a ruin. A day or so later what remained of the outer walls, dangerous, and damaged beyond repair, was pulled down.

I understand that Mr Peter Denega and a young man described as a quarry-worker have been charged with causing the explosion.

*Chris Brooks*

## STICKLEPATH FARM TAVISTOCK BARNSTAPLE

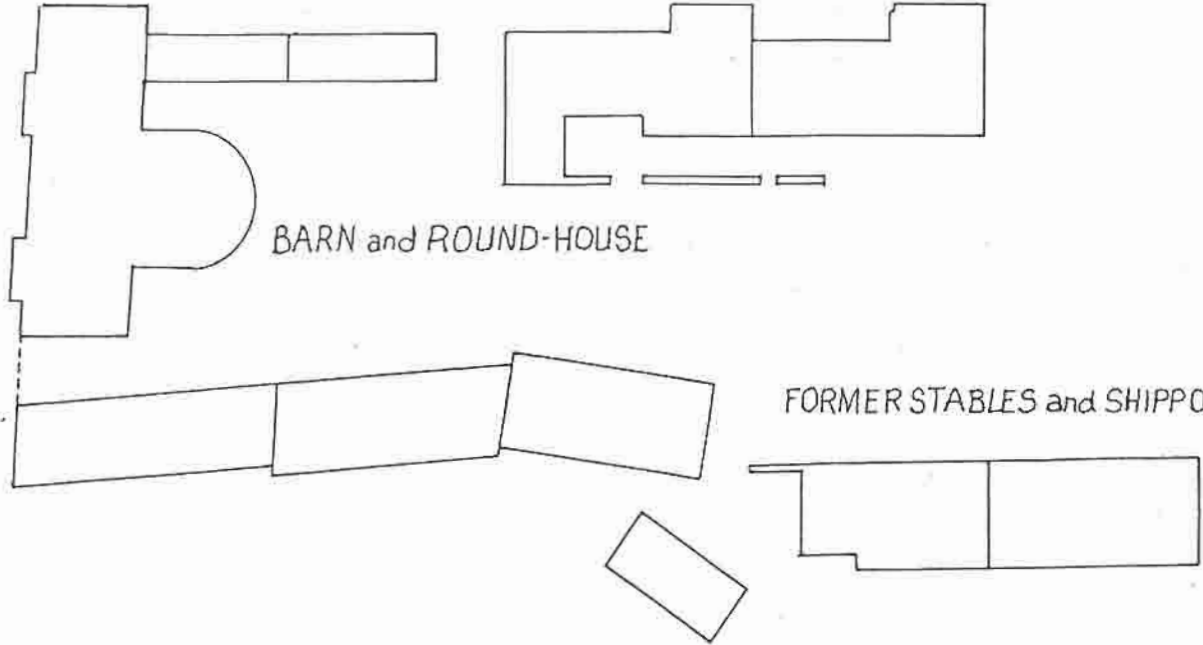
I first saw Sticklepath Farm in 1985 when I was conducting a search for what remained of our traditional barns in North Devon for the SPAB barns project. At this time it was uninhabited and I understood that the former farm-land had been sold. Around the same time I was accompanying James Moir on his re-survey of the built heritage in rural parishes for English Heritage.

On entering the courtyard the main barn was set at the top of the yard in a slightly elevated position at right angles to the other ranges of buildings and farmhouse. The barn itself built of stone rubble was large for this area being seven bays with two pairs of opposing entrances. What made it unique for me was the prominent round-house with its conical roof and superb fan shaped supporting rafters – without doubt the most impressive I had found during my nine-parish survey. The massive horizontal winding beam and shuttered ventilation openings were still there. Following assessment by James Moir and Peter Chapman of English Heritage, the barn and round-house became one of the comparatively few individually 'listed' nineteenth century farm buildings in our area.

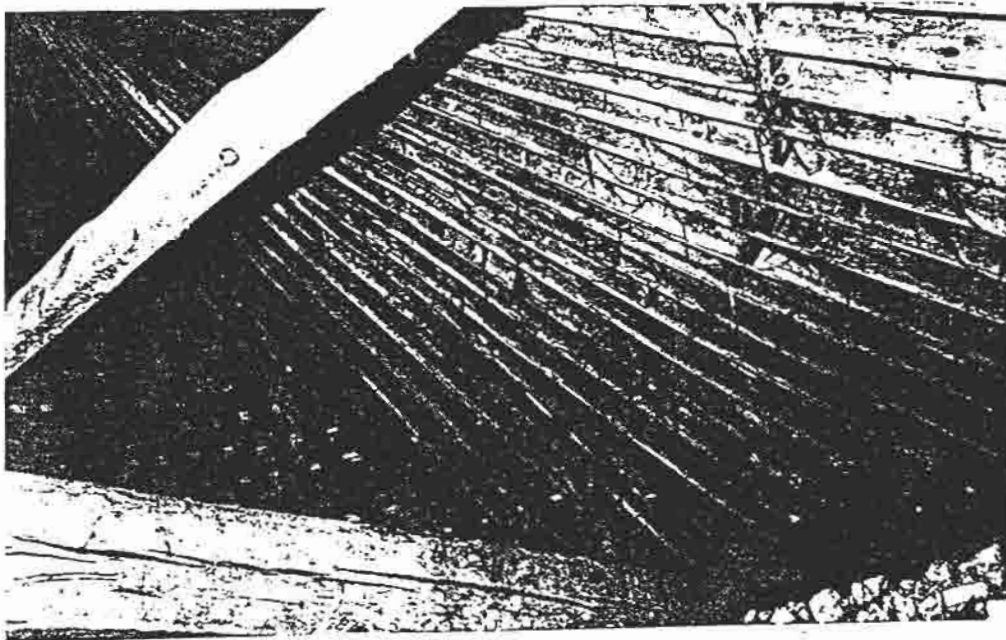
In line with Devon C.C. and North Devon C.C. policies for redundant farm buildings these were to be converted to dwellings and in November 1985 '£250,000 project for an old farm into eight quality homes with the emphasis on conservation known as *Sticklepath Court*' was announced. A farm building converted to a four bedroomed show home was already available for inspection.

OPEN CARTSHED/LINHAY (new dwelling allowed on appeal)

ORIGINAL HOUSE (divided into 2 units)



Sticklepath Farm, Tavistock: Site Plan



Sticklepath Farm, Tavistock: the Round-house roof

The subsequent events leading to the present owners' making a listed building application for demolition of the barn and round-house are many and complex. On behalf of the North Devon Conservation Society I have persistently opposed planning applications which we felt would threaten the future of the listed buildings. We have repeated our request for a listed building repair notice to be served and we have been assured by NDDC several times that this would be done. A minuted decision of the Planning Committee in March 1991 re-affirms this approach subject to funding.

There have been several changes of ownership of the main portion of the farmstead including a reported insolvency. Most units are now completed with individual owners in residence. Natural slate roofing was removed from the listed buildings in 1986 and planning permission was given by NDDC in 1988 for a further dwelling to be formed within the building formerly designated as garaging for the barn conversion. The situation was further exacerbated when following refusal by NDDC the DoE allowed an appeal by the present owners of the barn and round-house to erect a new dwelling forward of the building line adjacent to and encroaching on the curtilage of the listed buildings. Whereas this should have provided the economic impetus for restoration and conversion of the old buildings they are now perceived as being a visual intrusion and detrimental to the setting of the new house.

In a letter accompanying the listed building application for demolition the owners state that 'Despite the property being one of a group it is not of any particular architectural or historic merit' and 'the condition of the stonework and of the building generally indicate that for many years it has been beyond economic repair and should thus be demolished and that in all probability given the foregoing a mistake was made in listing it in the first place'.

Needless to say I alerted the main amenity societies as soon as I was aware of the demolition application. English Heritage have stated that 'continued neglect does not constitute good cause to remove it...and the description on the re-survey list makes it apparent that there were strong reasons for its inclusion...we certainly do not believe that this was a mistaken listing'. Devon C.C. Conservation Department, The Georgian Group, SPAB, CPRE, NDDC, Tawstock Parish

Council and of course the North Devon Conservation Society are all opposed to the application.

Estate Agents acting for the owners are already blatantly advertising the listed buildings as barn conversions or building plots priced from £65,000 each.

This is not a unique case and at many DBG committee meetings instances of neglected abused and gutted listed buildings are cited. What is perhaps of greater concern is that in this instance the local authority and local amenity society have not stood on the sidelines. There has been vigilance and a will to ensure the preservation of these historic buildings but we have still ultimately found ourselves in this invidious position.

What price the rest of our built heritage if we allow these attractive historic buildings to be swept away? And how can we ensure that owners of similarly 'protected' buildings are made aware of and forced to face up to their statutory obligations?

*Pauline Brain*

## SOME ASPECTS OF ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION IN FRANCE

This summer much to my surprise, as I don't speak French, I was lucky enough to win a bursary from the French Government to study Architectural Conservation in France. The biggest obstacle was understanding that the French have a very different approach to their Historic Monuments which is part and parcel of their attitude to the national culture. The system is bureaucratic, slow and protective of those that work within it. The roles being played by the various specialists are clearly defined.

For an architect to be appointed to oversee work on listed buildings s/he first has to sit an examination/competition that spans over nine months: the architect produces project work, and sits oral and written examinations. Only those architects who have the highest marks are then entitled to apply for the appointment. For exam-



ple this year the competition is being run for the first time in 4 years, there are 52 candidates and only 10 positions available.

It would appear that even an eminent conservation architect from Britain for example, would not be able to be the architect on a listed building, simply because he has not been appointed an *Architect en Chef des Monuments Historiques*. This appears to be in direct conflict with the spirit of the EEC.

There are three classifications for listed buildings. The highest classification '*le classement*' can only be given with the owners consent and entitles the owner to grant aid for the maintenance of the structure and the listed part (25% from the department, 50% from the state).

The second classification '*le inscription*' is reserved for buildings not considered to be of sufficient merit to be in the upper classification, and for buildings whose owners do not consent to the building being put in the higher classification; grant aid is discretionary. The third category, '*l'instance de classement*' is our equivalent of spot listing. Once the building is listed the onus is on the owner to keep the listed part in good repair.

It was some time before I realised that France has no listed vernacular buildings. Equally a Norman keep or the home of a national hero, such as the home of Emile Zola, is not considered of sufficient merit to be protected by law. To the English this approach appears to be absurd. The current criteria for listing are based on the building as work of art, ie. the quality of craftsmanship and not as a building of important historic interest.

The approach to listing is changing as from 1991: each department will be able to list 10 vernacular buildings. The low number of vernacular buildings to be listed can be explained by the additional financial burden imposed on the Department and Central Government in the maintenance of buildings that are *le classement*.

If an owner applies for grant aid, first he has to wait for the work to be considered to be of sufficient priority within the Department, after which there is a two year time span before the monies become available and the work can start. In this time many buildings suffer further deterioration. It would appear that the financial burden on the authorities is already too great, without the addition of vernacular buildings. Buildings owned by public bodies such as communes and departments

appear to fair worst under the system as funds are limited. As a result the work appears to operate on a drip feed system, where only the worst parts of the building are repaired. It would then seem that other areas of the building have to deteriorate further in order to reach the top of the list, and have the repairs carried out.

The amount of work carried out on buildings that are *le classement* is limited by what one person, the *Architect en Chef des Monuments Historiques* for the department can physically supervise. The *Architect en Chef des Monuments Historiques* is employed as an agent of the state, but his/her fees are paid for by the owner/client. Here the architect has a conflict of interest, in that s/he is primarily responsible to the state and not the owner. The owner is obliged to employ the *Architect en Chef des Monuments Historiques* for their department.

I spent just over two weeks with Monsieur and Madam Mouton at their small office based in Versailles. Monsieur Mouton, an *Architecte Chef des Monuments Historiques* for the departments of Eure and Eure-et-Loir, is also the chairman of the *Compagnie des Architectes en Chef des Monuments Historiques*. Madam Mouton, a conservation architect, works on historic buildings that are not classified. Unlike her husband most of her work appeared to be done speculatively.

Whilst with the Moutons I visited many sites, including Quimper Cathedral in Brittany. *Architectes en Chef des Monument Historiques* are also given work on one or two major buildings outside their own department. For example, Monsieur Mouton has the department that Chartres is in, but he is not responsible for the cathedral, which is in the care of an older and more experienced architect.

At Quimper the roof is pushing the walls out; an unsuccessful attempt was made to tie the structure together in Victorian times. Monsieur Mouton was using a system of post-tension cables that are inserted into the flying buttresses to tie the building together. The technique used is a system that has been pioneered at York Cathedral.

The second part of my visit was spent in complete contrast on the 2nd International Historic Buildings Training Session at Saint Antoine Abbey in the Dauphine. The course, organised by *Jeunesse et Patrimoine* (Youth and Heritage), had participants from twenty two countries, many from Eastern Europe.

The course in French and English is aimed to give young people concerned with conservation an insight into the practical skills and approaches needed to conserve historic buildings. We spent three days in each of the four workshops under the direction of master craftsmen, working on various aspects of the restoration of the abbey buildings. The studio workshops were complemented with lectures and visits to various buildings in the area. I was most impressed with the high standard of detailing and the quality of work seen in nearby Geneva.

The workshop projects under the direction of master craftsmen involved restoring seventeenth-century plaster work, uncovering, cleaning and restoring frescos, carving a replacement stone balustrade, and repairing and making up seventeenth-century panelling and doors. All the workshops formed part of an actual project. Thus, I discovered at first hand how easy it is to obliterate frescos; the skill required to restore plasterwork; how important it is in an arch to lay the stone bedding correctly to avoid structural failure; that a stone mason can always determine the bedding plane of the stone; and last, but not least, how to make your own wood polish.

The course gave me a greater understanding of working with historic buildings and contact with people from other countries. It was also a wonderful opportunity to exchange ideas. Anyone interested and under the age of thirty five who would like to participate in the next course can find out more from me on 0803-834520.

Whilst in France I got the impression that as a nation, the French are much more aware of their cultural heritage than the English. This is reflected in the financial commitment made by government at regional and state level. The French are much more selective about listing buildings, a reflection on economic factors and recent history.

If you asked me is the French system for protecting listed buildings better than ours, all I could say is that both systems have their plus and minus points. We can benefit from learning from each other.

*Caroline Fay*

## COB

Half the buildings in the world are made of subsoil, ie. cob.

Conservative estimates report that there are innumerable cob houses and barns in Devon (and more if the adjoining counties of Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset are included).

As a response to the ever increasing interest in the repair and creation of cob buildings English Heritage and Teignbridge District Council held a Clayworks day earlier this year. The event was attended by representatives from both bodies, the County and District Councils in Devon along with some practitioners.

The report of the proceedings by Ray Harrison of English Heritage summarizes the address given by Ms J.M. Teutonico of ICCROM on technical aspects of subsoil analysis and the 'GAIA' project which is being run in conjunction with CRATERRE in Grenoble, France and the subsequent discussion on cob repair in the South West. These included: the relevance of local work in the international context; cob and the 'Regulations'; the need for exhibitions; practical demonstrations and education initiatives; and finally the efforts that are being made in recording, research and development.

The Gaia project aims to use the experience gained by Craterre in the creation of new buildings of subsoil in the third world to inform methods used in the conservation of subsoil buildings.

'There is an almost universal view within the building trades of the South West, and also, it should be said, throughout Britain, that cob is difficult to repair, let alone to build with. This attitude has become dominant because, since the last war, the material has been little used so that it is now a largely unknown quantity. The demise of the craft knowledge of cob has been hastened, amongst other things, by cheap transport to carry modern factory-made materials, the rise of the thin cavity wall, the apparent labour-intensive nature of cob building and its effective exclusion from the national Building Codes'.

'Since the end of World War One, the technique that along with daub and thatch might be described as one of our most rural and least academic building methods has always caught the interest of those seeking to revive crafts

regionally. In the early years of the century those involved were Gimson and Clough Williams Ellis. After the last war at least one series of experiments with cob is recorded while observers such as the late Rex Gardiner subsequently contributed valuable insights. In the late 1960s the architect John Deal directed a team of architectural students in repair and build works at Dunsford, similar to those now going on at Bowhill. And the more recent revival work of the National Trust, Mr Alf Howard and Mr Larry Keefe (Teignbridge District Council) is known to those with a concerned interest regionally. These last two initiatives have benefited from Mr Howard's local background and continuity in the tradition. Indeed it should be said that he has proved, and continues to prove, an inspiration and an education to all those with any interest in the future of the material in Devon. In addition to the invaluable practical works mentioned above, the Devon Rural Skills Trust, a charitable body seeking to perpetuate rural craft skills – hedging, stonewalling, hurdle making etc – has recently funded an apprenticeship training post in cob building under Mr Howard'.

'With this groundwork of experience and example already in place and continuing to develop, we are in a position to begin to think about further raising of public awareness of the issue – the need for serious conservation of the material. Year by year buildings and boundary walls of cob are butchered or lost, simply because of fear of the material from which they are made. This is the same in Britain wherever cob (elsewhere 'mud') is found, only in Devon it is less noticeable because the stock of vernacular cob structures is comparatively so vast. The public needs first to be convinced that this is a serious matter, then to be shown that like-for-like conservation is perfectly attainable and indeed preferable to other methods. Both client, ie. building owner, and builder, must be reached if such a programme is to succeed, as must their agents the architects and surveyors, who also advise the Building Societies'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. J.R. Harrison: Report on English Heritage P.I.C. South West/Teignbridge District Council Clayworks Day and Seminar, 6 February 1991.

*Paul Bedford*

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Traditional pegged slates

Traditional pegged slates are becoming increasingly rare in Devon. Keystone is carrying out a research project to record pegged slates, both on roofs and slate-hanging on walls, hoping that the techniques will be properly understood and perhaps revived.

If you know of or come across pegged slates, especially those where there is evidence for plastering underneath, please contact Jo Cox or John Thorp, Keystone (0392) 59304. We are most interested in pegged slates in domestic buildings and churches (they are quite common in farmbuildings in the South Hams). If you know of any builders, probably of a certain age, who have repaired or replaced peg slate roofs, like for like, we would also like to hear from you. Any information or contacts would be fully acknowledged.

*Jo Cox and John Thorp*