



## Report first published in SAHNS Autumn Quarterly Review 2006

### SOMERSET VERNACULAR BUILDING RESEARCH GROUP

During the year the Group has surveyed houses in various parts of the county. As a result a number of interesting buildings have come to light. For example, early and unusual features have been revealed at Lambrook House, Kingsbury Episcopi, Eastfield Farm, Lydford on Fosse, and Parsonage Farm, Over Stowey. The publication in 2005 of Jane Penoyre's *Traditional Houses of Somerset* (see book reviews in these *Proceedings*) has allowed individual houses and farms recorded in disparate parts of the county to be placed more easily in a wider context. Thus, both unusual and standard plan forms, roof structures and decorative features can be identified to enrich the study of Somerset's vernacular buildings. In addition, co-operation with the Victoria County History (VCH) has enabled the Group to enhance the story of sites for which documentation survives. Surveys of standing buildings may support or occasionally contradict the documents. See for example, the Old Rectory at Lydford on Fosse (below).

The detailed survey of Lytes Cary, undertaken at the request of the National Trust, has been completed and as will be seen below the Trust has also asked SVBRG to look at other buildings in its possession at Stoke sub Hamdon and Tintinhull. Work on the systematic recording of the village of Combe St Nicholas has been given an additional impetus following a success-

ful meeting held in the Village Hall in conjunction with the local history society with a large number of villagers attending.

The following buildings have been recorded and copies of the full reports and survey drawings have been deposited in the Somerset County Record Office and the National Monuments Record at Swindon. The photographs below were taken by John Rickard.

#### *Beckington, Church Hill, No. 3 ST 801517*

The house has been considerably altered so that its development is uncertain, but on the available evidence the details suggest a mid-17th century date. At that time it was two storeys with a gable at each end and comprised an inner room, hall, cross-passage, kitchen and rear service room. A two-storey wing was added later in the 17th century replacing one gable and providing a new kitchen. The former kitchen was then converted into a parlour. A two-storey store was added in the late 19th century.

#### *Combe St Nicholas, Clayhanger, Combe Dale ST 315113*

The house is comprised of four rooms in line with an entrance hall and staircase and an out-shut. The varying thickness of the walls and their alignments suggest that there may have been two phases of build, but the uniformity of

the roof structure of 17th-century type does not support this. However, whereas the western two rooms and entrance hall were upgraded in the 18th century and became the main residence, the eastern part remained unchanged and may have become a service range or separate dwelling. The two parts being amalgamated later.

*Combe St Nicholas, Frog Lane, Whitehall Farm ST 305113*

From the 16th century, Whitehall Farm formed part of the estate of the Dean and Chapter of Wells Cathedral. The main range originally comprised an inner room, hall, cross-passage and service room. The roof is of high status arch-braced trusses with a tier of curved wind-braces and may have been open to view. It has been dated to *c* 1500 by comparison with tree-ring dated roofs elsewhere in the county. The stairs may have been housed in a turret. At the end of the 16th century, the low end was rebuilt with a wider span as a kitchen, incorporating a curing chamber (and possibly a baking oven). The house was upgraded in the early 19th century when a new fireplace and stack were inserted. A projecting bay was added in the hall and a lateral fireplace and stack built to serve the hall chamber. Additions to the rear at the same time included a dairy with cheese loft over. Subsequently the house was divided at the cross-passage into two dwellings, but reverted to one in the 20th century. Of the former sixteenth-



Fig. 1 Barn at Whitehall Farm, Combe St Nicholas

century farm buildings, only a barn (Fig. 1) and a waggon and implement shed survive.

*Combe St Nicholas, Wadeford, Court Mill Lane, Jasmine Cottage ST 312108*

The house comprises two rooms with central entry; the details suggest an 18th-century date and documentary evidence indicates that it may have been built in 1735. An addition to the east originally may have been a cow shed or stable.

*Corfe, Church Cottages, Nos 1, 2 & 3 ST 232196*

Taken as a whole there are four rooms in line with a central cross-passage, but the northern half is substantially different from the southern in plan, detail and development. The plan form is irregular and, as much of the roof space is inaccessible, the following conclusions are provisional. Cottage No. 1 (northern part) may date from the 16th century, but there is no indication of its form at that time and a non-domestic use cannot be discounted. It was upgraded in the mid-17th century becoming a two-unit house. Cottages Nos 2 & 3 (central and southern parts): the post and truss construction suggest a mid-16th century date when the house comprised the hall/kitchen and two unheated service rooms. The south end was upgraded *c.* 1600 when the south gable and west wall were realigned creating the parlour with a framed ceiling. The stair turret was constructed at the same time. In the early 19th century the three cottages were altered arriving at the present divisions and creating a picturesque appearance.

*Corton Denham, Corfe-ton Cottage ST 634223*

The house has been considerably altered, but the first phase dating from the mid-17th century originally comprised a kitchen, cross-passage and parlour. The attics were then used either as accommodation or for cheese storage (a narrow space between two roof trusses may have housed a hoist). The house was upgraded in the early

18th century and a service room was added to the east. In the 19th century it was divided into two dwellings and converted back into one house later in the 20th century.

*Ditcheat, Alhampton, Willow Cottage & Canada House ST 627348*

Together the two houses now form an L-shaped plan. Willow Cottage comprises three ground-floor rooms on two levels and Canada House two rooms also on two levels. A room in each



Fig. 2 Willow Cottage, Alhampton, 15th-century doorframe



Fig. 3 Willow Cottage, Alhampton, principal rafter

house dates from the 15th century (based on tree-ring dating of similar features elsewhere in Somerset) (Figs 2 & 3) and the smoke-blackening shows that they formed part of two open-hall houses. With the limited evidence available, it is not possible to establish the plan form of these medieval houses. In the second half of the 16th century, upper floors were inserted in one of the houses (now divided between the two cottages) and the other was ceiled late in the 16th century. The 1888 OS map indicates that the properties were then divided into three and extended further to the north and east.

*Fivehead, The Crown Inn ST 353229*

On the evidence of the beams and the roof structure – tie-and-collar-beam trusses with no smoke blackening – the house dates from c 1600 and originally comprised a kitchen, cross-passage, hall and inner room (unheated), all with chambers over. There was probably a curing chamber next to the kitchen fireplace, which also has a shallow salt hole in the back wall. The rear outshut (now gone) was probably a service room. The building is marked as a Beer House on the 1886 OS map.

*Haselbury Plucknett, North Street, Bramble Cottage & No. 493 ST 472108*

The house is currently divided into two at the cross-passage. The extent and degree of the smoke-blackening together with the details of the jointed-cruck roof indicate that the house probably dates from c. 1500. Originally built of cob, it comprised a service room, cross-passage, hall (all open) and an unheated inner room with a solar chamber over. The irregular alignment of the back wall cannot be explained, particularly as the roof structure is considered to be of one build. In the late 16th century, upper floors and a smoke-hood were inserted (Fig. 4). This appears to be the only surviving smoke-hood in the village. The kitchen fireplace and stack (and possi-





Fig. 4 Bramble Cottage, Haselbury  
Plucknett, smoke-hood

bly the curing chamber) were also built at this time.

*Kingsbury Episcopi, East Lambrook, Silver Street, Lambrook House ST 433188*

The house stands gable-end to the street, is two storeys and comprises four rooms in line with an added wing. The arch-braced collar-beam roof with two tiers of cusped wind braces, partly smoke-blackened, is dated to the mid-15th century and by comparison with contemporary examples elsewhere in Somerset, it is assumed that the roof was open over the first-floor chambers. Originally the house comprised a small hall with probably a lateral fireplace on the back wall, an inner room (unheated), cross-passage and kitchen. On the first floor were two rooms open to the roof and a small chamber. Access was by means of a turret stair, now gone. In the early 16th century it appears that the lateral stack was removed and a smoke-bay created. Later in the 16th century the house was upgraded and ceilings were inserted in the chambers over the hall. The smoke-bay and the former kitchen were removed and the eastern half of the house extended when the north wall was realigned, as-

simulating the stair-turret with new stairs installed, and new upper floors and roof constructed. On the ground floor the additions included a fireplace with smoke-hood, cross-passage, kitchen and service room. An interesting and unusual survival in the kitchen is a stone stewing stove (perhaps best described as an early ancestor of the Aga). In the late 18th century the west half of the south front was re-faced in ashlar and moulded stone door and window surrounds added. A two-storey service end was added, perhaps as a dairy. The two-storey south wing was built in the early 19th century as a 'back kitchen' and a cheese room with cheese loft.

*Lydford on Fosse, West Lydford, Fair Place, Eastfield Farm ST 571321*

The absence of the original roof structure makes interpretation difficult, but the plan appears to be a farmhouse of three rooms in line, comprising kitchen, hall and central unheated service room. Adjacent to the kitchen fireplace was a curing chamber (now gone) and access to the room above is by an elaborately carved door on the first floor (Fig. 5). Details of the beams indicate



Fig. 5 Eastfield Farm, Lydford on Fosse, decorated door on first floor

that the eastern half dates from the 16th century, but the other half has 17th-century characteristics. It is possible that when the house was built in the 16th century, the plan was transitional, that is, the hall and service area were still open without an upper floor. Alternatively the hall may have been damaged, for instance by fire, which necessitated rebuilding early in the 17th century. The existence of two contemporary staircases and two entrances suggest that the house was divided into two dwellings at an early date and was still divided at the time of the 1886 and 1903 OS maps.

*Lydford on Fosse, West Lydford, The Old Rectory ST 566319*

Documentation provided by the VCH reveals that in 1635 the house had a detached kitchen, barn, stall, stable and dove-house set in 14 acres of meadow and pasture. In 1799 it was demolished and a new house built in 1800 by the Revd William Hungerford Colston. In 1812 the Rector built a dovecote, in 1819 a walled garden and shortly after a stable, coach-house and kennels. However, inspection of the existing house indicates that the front range dates from the early 19th century, but the remainder is of the 18th century, suggesting that not all was demolished in 1799. The surviving outbuildings include a stable and coach-house (now converted to domestic use) and a small square duck house next to a large pond.

*Nailsea, Coombe Grange ST 473693*

The house is comprised of two parallel ranges; the older being three units of one-and-a-half storey and the other being a double-fronted two-storey addition. The details of the earliest phase suggest a date in the 16th century (Fig 6), but the original layout remains uncertain. In the 17th century the house was remodelled and it appears that a cross-passage was created utilising part of a parlour and a new staircase was inserted. An addition, accessible from the house on the

ground floor, may have been used as a dairy. The house was significantly enlarged in the early 19th century by the construction of the parallel south range, the entrance aligned with the for-



Fig. 6 Coombe Grange, Nailsea, 16th-century doorframe

mer cross-passage. A later single-storey addition completed the rectangular plan.

*Nether Stowey, Over Stowey, Parsonage Farm ST 186386*

The house plan has three rooms in line with a cross-passage and two wings and a stair turret at the rear. The roof structure of the north-east wing suggests a mid-16th-century date and may be the remnant of an earlier building. The drainage channels suggest that it was later used as a dairy/cheese room with cheese loft over. The main range dates from the late 16th century and originally comprised the kitchen, cross-passage, hall and an inner room (probably unheated). In the early 17th century the east end of the house was substantially upgraded and extended to accommodate a new parlour and parlour chamber. The parlour chamber has a plasterwork over-

mantel depicting Adam and Eve (see John and Jane Penoyre, *Decorative Plasterwork in the Houses of Somerset 1500-1700*, 1994). At the same time the north-east wing was incorporated into the house and the stair turret built. The north-west wing, probably of this period, then became the dairy with cheese loft over. Further substantial alterations took place c. 1816 (noted by the then vicar of Over Stowey, see *Paupers & Pig Killers, The Diary of William Holland, A Somerset Parson, 1799-1818*, 1984). The kitchen and former cross-passage became a reception hall and the north-west wing became the kitchen. The front walls and roof were raised, the porch added and the front re-fenestrated. Most of the buildings of the former farmstead also survive and the surrounding earthworks have been surveyed by English Heritage.

*Otterhampton, Steart, Cox's Farm ST 277463*

The existing house is comprised of two rooms with a central entry and outshut at the rear. The details of the beams, fireplace bressumer and roof structure indicate an early 17th-century date. However, there are some anomalies: the house does not fit the traditional plan-form for that period and the spacing of the beams in relation to the windows is unusual. Therefore, it is suggested that the house has been truncated and that formerly the parlour at the west end was longer and contained a large fireplace in the gable end. At some date, probably in the 19th century, the west end was lost and the present arrangement was created and the windows on the front re-positioned to give a symmetrical appearance. The rear outshut was probably added at that time.

*Somerton, Market Square, White Hart Inn ST 491285*

Standing on the south side of the Market Place, the east range was probably a gable cross-wing of a larger property with its gable end facing the road. The roof is supported by three arch-braced

jointed-cruck trusses, not smoke blackened, and two tiers of wind-braces, probably dating from the late 15th century (indicated by tree-ring dating of similar features elsewhere in the county). The building then comprised a heated ground-floor hall with a framed ceiling and a chamber over, which was open to the roof. Also this range may have extended further to the south and possibly included service rooms and a solar. The west range at right angles (including what is now a carriage entry) is of three bays with collar trusses and one tier of wind-braces. In the early 17th century the building was re-fronted and extended. Further modifications took place in the 18th century, when new windows were installed on the front, the carriage entry was formed and the buildings around the yard were rebuilt. According to the VCH, volume III (1974), the inn was earlier known as The Bear.

*South Petherton, Over Stratton, Old Harp House (formerly South Harp Farm) ST 435150*

The plan consists of three rooms in line with a cross-passage and stair turret. The original roof was destroyed by fire in the 19th century. The details of the beams and the stair turret suggest a date in the 16th century, and the proportions indicate that the room arrangement was much as



Fig. 7 Old Harp House, Over -Stratton, remains of bressumer and access to curing chamber

now. Interestingly, the central hall is unheated so it does not accord with the traditional plan-form for that period, but two contemporary examples,



both with stair turrets, have been recorded at Brompton Ralph and North Petherton. In the early 17th century the house was re-fronted, when the inner room became a parlour with a new fireplace inserted and the curing chamber in the kitchen was replaced by an oven (Fig. 7). By the 18th century the kitchen had been upgraded to a living room.

*Spaxton, Barford Road, Clerk's Cottage ST 231361*

The house comprises a main range of three rooms in line and a two-storey two-room rear wing. The main east-west range was originally single storey with possibly a low partition dividing the inner room from the hall and a similar partition may have divided the hall, including the cross-passage, from the outer room. The extent of the smoke-blackening together with the jointed-cruck trusses and the type of apex joint suggest a date in the 14th century (similar apex joints elsewhere in Somerset have been tree-ring dated to 1315 and 1338). A floor was inserted over the inner room, perhaps in the 15th century, but the hall remained open. During the 16th century a floor was inserted over the hall and a smoke-hood created. The two-storey north wing was added at the same time. The outer room remained open, but a fireplace with oven and curing chamber was installed. In the 17th century a masonry stack replaced the fire-hood. After remaining unoccupied for many years, the house is currently being extensively restored.

*Stoke-sub-Hamdon, The Priory Farmstead ST 473175*

The Priory House and the collection of high-status farm buildings are listed Grade I and owned by the National Trust. However, this was never a priory, the name dates only from 1902, but was part of the Parsonage estate of Stoke Beauchamp (see VCH, III, 1974). The SVBRG was asked to produce measured surveys of the following surviving farm buildings. A large me-

dieval barn, re-roofed and the porch rebuilt in the 18th century. A second barn, basically medieval but largely rebuilt in the 18th century. This was gutted by fire in 1969 and is now roofless. The stables were originally of two rooms with a hay loft over, but were rearranged internally in the 19th century. A cart-shed with granary over, formerly with a lean-to, is also now roofless. Lastly, the medieval dovecote (Fig. 8)



Fig. 8 Dovecote at Priory Farm, Stoke-sub-Hamdon

was fully described and illustrated in *The Dovecotes of Historical Somerset* by John and Pamela McCann, published by SVBRG in 2003.

*Tintinhull, The Dower House ST 500198*

The house, listed Grade II\*, stands prominently in the centre of the village. It dates from the late 17th century and was then two storeys with attics and comprised a parlour, hall and kitchen with a stair turret. This is an unusual plan-form for the period, notably the entry directly into the hall. It appears that there was no fireplace in the north-west wing, which may have been a cider house. The history of the estate is given in VCH, volume III (1974). In the early 1930s the Dower House was bought by Charles Pullen, who un-

dertook a comprehensive restoration with extensive alterations. A major feature was the replacement of the timber casements on the front elevation with 17th-century stone mullioned windows brought from elsewhere. Also he imported a staircase, panelling and other features from Frampton Court, near Dorchester, demolished at that time.

*Tintinhull, Farm Street, Tintinhull House ST 502198*

The history of the estate is given in VCH, volume III (1974), and the house, listed Grade I, was described by Arthur Oswald in *Country Life* (19 April 1956). The parsonage estate, including



Fig. 9 Tintinhull House, spandrel at foot of back stair

Tintinhull Court and the Dower House (above), had been acquired by the Napper family in the mid-16th century and was in the possession of Thomas Napper from 1628. Owing to later



Figs 10 Tintinhull House, details of hand-rail to back stair



Figs 11 details of handrail to back stair

changes it is difficult to determine the original plan-form of Tintinhull House. The inscription ‘1630 N’ on the gable of the cross-wing is likely to represent the date of the earliest phase of building and the conjecture is that it was two storeys and L-shaped (Figs 9-11) The house was enlarged to a rectangular plan with the addition of the two-and-half storey west front in classical style – described by the VCH as “an unusually perfect example of its period”. This work was probably undertaken for Andrew Napper, who acquired the property by 1722 (Fig. 12). Further



Fig. 12 Tintinhull House, 18th-century chimney-piece

alterations took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was bought in 1918 by Revd S. J. M. Price, a distinguished botanist, who redesigned the grounds and in 1933 it was sold to Edward and Phyllis Reiss. She transformed the gardens over nearly thirty years and in 1953 gave the property to the National Trust.



*Tintinhull, Queen Street, No. 25, Plowman's Cottage ST 498202*

The house appears to have originated as a typical three-unit and cross-passage plan, but intriguingly this is doubtful. The remnants of a jointed-cruck and a smoke-hood indicate an original 16th-century date. In the 18th century the front elevation and perhaps the rear were rebuilt and re-fenestrated and a new fireplace inserted. Sometime in the 19th century the south gable wall was rebuilt. A rear outshut for animal housing appears on the Tithe Map. A two-storey building attached to the south gable is dated 1897 and either housed a horse and trap or accommodated an apple store and cider press. For a century after 1865 the house was used as shop and a bay window was inserted in the front. The roof was completely replaced in 1977. The absence of any evidence that a large traditional fireplace existed in what should be the kitchen (or evidence that the north gable end has been rebuilt) precludes the possibility that the house was originally a typical three-unit plan. However, it appears to follow a plan found elsewhere in Tintinhull, where, although there are three rooms in line, the room at the 'low end' of the cross-passage, perhaps together with the room above, originally may have had some non-domestic function.

*Tintinhull, Vicarage Street, Leach's ST 499195*

The house was originally part of a farmstead, but the associated buildings have been converted to domestic use. The main range appears to date from the end of the 17th century, comprised of two storeys and two rooms with a central entry into a cross-passage and stair hall. There are lean-to additions at the rear, built *c.* 1800 and the mid-19th century.

*Wells, Market Place, No. 14 ST 355148*

The building was formerly a wing to the 15th-century Bishop's Eye gatehouse to the cathedral precinct and the front range was perhaps ac-

commodation for a gatekeeper. A large doorway (now blocked) suggests that there was a contemporary building at the rear. In the late 16th or early 17th century the domestic accommodation was upgraded and the seven-bay rear wing added. In the late 17th century moulded paneling and doors were installed. A painted over-mantel of a landscape is attributed to French prisoners-of-war of the Napoleonic period.