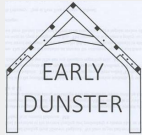


SANHS Building Research Group (West Somerset)



Newsletter 13 – Autumn 2019



Early Dunster Project

The Early Dunster Project is now halfway through its original term and the work has just been awarded an additional two years, in view of the extraordinary extent of early building fabric in Dunster. This will lead to a final event in 2022.

To date 12 properties have been surveyed, including the Old Priory and the Castle gatehouse. Many of the individual houses we have investigated as part of the project have been found to have been divided from early open hall houses.



In order to explain better the form of medieval hall houses to the general public, one of our volunteers constructed a wonderful model based on a property surveyed in West Street. It incorporates various different features seen locally. In September the model was presented to the new Dunster Museum, where it was a focus for the Exmoor National Park Buildings Festival.

Photo (above): Tony Harding
Left: Lizzie Induni



The last Dunster Village Walk for this season will be on Wednesday 23 October. Starting from the Exmoor National Park Visitor Centre on Dunster Steep at 11:00, this stroll around the village explores some aspects of its history and takes about an hour and a half. Booking is essential! - phone the Visitor Centre on 01643 821835.



Mary Ewing (above) inspects a very narrow passageway in Church Street.

The Early Dunster Project now has its own website. Visit it at <https://sanhs.org/early-dunster-project/>

The Old Priory

- Dunster Priory was a daughter-house of Bath Abbey. There is reference to a religious house for monks here in 1177, and mention of a sumptuous building being erected between 1338 and 1345.
- After the Dissolution, the Priory and its immediate farmlands were bought by the LUTTRELL family. Many of the Priory buildings were dismantled and the materials re-used in other buildings in the town – it's probable that much of the Cloisters was plundered when the north aisle of the church was built
- The present building may have been the Prior's Hall. Timber samples in the roof of the West Wing have been dendro-dated to c.1286
- The South wing is later (c1455), and its ground floor may have been the refectory – there is a large elaborate fireplace, and also a drain to the east wall, possibly for a piscina.
- 18thC records show that the Priory Farm was leased by the Luttrells to a succession of tenant farmers.
- The 1843 Tithe Apportionment lists the occupier as Thomas OATWAY, but the census records tell us that he lived at Higher Marsh (which he also farmed), and the Priory House was divided into three dwellings, occupied by farm labourer families.
- It was still three dwellings in 1911, one occupied by the village curate, Rev. MACKENNAL (later Archdeacon of Ely), one by a coachbuilder/wheelwright, and the third by the widow of a carpenter and her son.



Volunteer Barbara Hoffbauer — a member of Somerset & Dorset Family History Society — is investigating the history of the buildings surveyed and their occupants over the centuries. Here (above) she summarises her findings for the Old Priory.

Exmoor National Park held its 2019 Historic Building Festival in September. Medieval buildings showcased during the festival included:

- Barlynch Priory, founded in 1174-89 and dissolved in 1536. Earthworks and some remains of buildings are still clearly visible.
- The late medieval Gallox Bridge (or "gallows bridge"), used by packhorses when Dunster was a centre of the wool trade which underpinned England's wealth in the thirteenth century.
- The fifteenth-century Church of St Petrock in Timberscombe, and Parracombe's thirteenth-century church of the same name. Originally from Wales, St Petrock is primarily known for his monastery in Padstow, but dedications to him throughout Devon and into Somerset show the extent of his sixth-century ministry.
- Elworthy's thirteenth-century church, now in the hands of the Churches Conservation Trust. Dedicated to St Martin of Tours, Elworthy Church has a distinctive tower with battlements and an external staircase.
- The settlement of Wootton Courtenay, which dates back to the Domesday Book, although today its only identifiable medieval feature is the thirteenth-century parish church and the churchyard cross, which is some two centuries younger.

SANHS Geophysics Comes to Milverton

Lucky Milverton hosted a Geophysical Survey and Training day on September 21st 2019 — a beautiful dry day.

Liz Caldwell and her knowledgeable team Nigel and Neil explained to six eager trainees how to use two very expensive pieces of equipment: a resistance meter and a gradiometer.

The resistance meter can detect archaeological features, like buried stone walls, up to a depth of 1.5 meters.

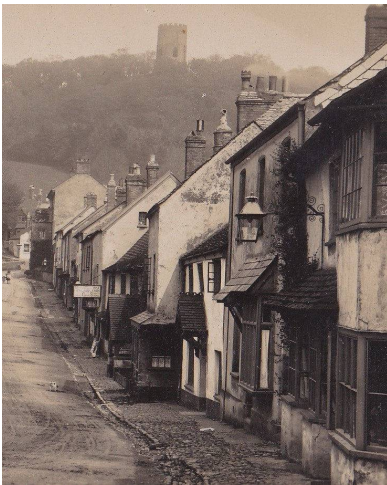
The gradiometer is used to measure the very small magnetic fields associated with buried archaeological features up to 3 m deep.

The readings need to be fed into a computer for the results to be interpreted.

Initial findings appear to be promising and it is hoped to follow this up with test pit digging.



Report and photos: Maggie Dinning, Milverton Archives and Local History Group. Above: Members of the group look on as the intricacies of geophysical surveying are outlined for them. Left: John Clements tries out the gradiometer.



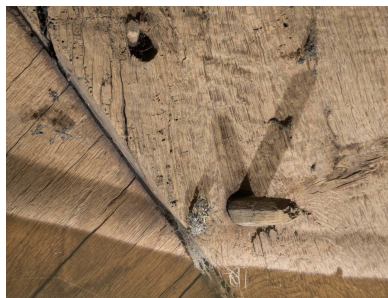
Above & right: Photos from the Early Dunster gallery

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

SATURDAY 26 OCTOBER 10am
 SANHS Associated Societies with Banwell Society of Archaeology: John Haynes of Banwell Caves will give a presentation at Banwell Village Hall on the developments at the caves. Lunch £5.00 (book at www.sanhs.org by Wednesday 23rd October), or bring a packed lunch. After lunch there is a visit to the exterior of Banwell caves, (access not available inside, since the bats are hibernating) and the buildings around.

SATURDAY 9 NOVEMBER 10am
 SANHS Symposium: Victorian Architects and Architecture in Somerset. Speakers Julian Orbach, Jerry Sampson, David Rabson, John Crockford Hawley. Topics Victorian Architects, Church Restoration, Nynhead Rectory, Hans Price. Venue St Andrews Church Hall, Taunton (TBC). Tickets including buffet lunch, tea and cake, £12. Book at www.sanhs.org by 31 October.

SATURDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2 - 4.30pm
 A special seminar in Tintinhull Village Hall to celebrate the 40th birthday of Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group. Key speaker Nick Griffiths: "Heating, Lighting & Cooking in Medieval Cottages & Townhouses." Also short presentations on: "The declining cost of light through the ages" (Alan Cort); "Taper marks in the Vernacular House - deliberate or accidental?" (Denny Robbins); "40 years of SVBRG" (John Rickard). Refreshments to include a celebratory vernacular birthday cake, arguably the first of its kind. See www.svbrg.org.uk



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