

**Building Recording in 2020 and 2021**

*SANHS Vernacular Building Research Group*

Extracted from the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society for 2021.

Volume 165, 256-262

© 2022 Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and the authors.

Produced in Great Britain by Short Run Press, Exeter.

ISSN 0081-2056

# BUILDING RECORDING IN 2020 AND 2021

SANHS VERNACULAR BUILDING RESEARCH GROUP

The Early Dunster Project (of the SANHS Building Recording Group) was launched in September 2018, sponsored under Historic England's 'Early Fabric in Historic Towns' initiative. Training followed, and some very able volunteers developed skills in different areas including surveying with recording; a major web-based event in 2020 provided opportunity for learning new skills. The work started energetically but has of necessity been slowed down by the pandemic. Nevertheless, 28 properties have been surveyed including the Old Priory, Lower Marsh Manor and the Castle Gatehouse (for the last, see Richardson 2021). Dunster owners have been extremely encouraging and helpful and at present about 53 properties are being considered. The amount of early fabric – particularly roof structures – is extraordinary, although suspected from earlier surveys by Commander Williams of SANHS Historic Buildings Group (all copies held at the Somerset Heritage Centre) and more recently by dendro-dating work carried out by Time Team (Ainsworth *et al.* 2019), which returned many dates from around 1300 to the early 16th century. The large number of medieval roofs is giving useful data for comparative purposes. The other surprise to us is the proliferation of early three-room cross-passage houses, 15 of which have been identified to date. The majority of these have been divided into two properties often in very complicated and varied ways. What follows is a small selection of the work conducted so far.

## 1. Dunster, 7 Church Street. SS 9905 4562

This is a three-room cross-passage house with four bays and dendro-dating by Andy Moir of Tree Ring Services (Moir 2018, 125) on behalf of Time Team, gives a felling date range of between 1299 and 1321. Two of the trusses are true or raised crucks and two of the principals are extended; one of these extensions at least appears to be original, but it is hoped to clarify that with further dendro-dating. The third truss (t1) is a jointed cruck, joined at the elbow in the usual way, but it has been replaced above first-floor ceiling level. The trusses have cranked collars but not arch braces as stated in the tree ring report. Wind bracing, however, is in evidence over what would have been the open hall. The two trusses t2 and t3 have different apex types (Figs 1 and 2). Truss t2 has a Type C apex,



*Fig. 1 Truss t2 apex*



*Fig. 2 Truss t3 apex*

with yoke above the principals, which are tenoned into the yoke and pegged. Truss t3, by contrast, has a Type H, with yoke below the principals, and the principals extending upwards to enclose the square set ridge purlin on three sides (Alcock 1981). The south blade of t2 has an inscribed hexafoil. Truss t2 has remnants of rush-based plasterwork infill above first-floor ceiling level, probably dating to when the house was divided into two properties with staircase inserted at each end. It is now all one house again.

The formerly open hall has a lateral stack in the rear wall and beside it were winder stairs to the first floor, but only the access door at first floor now remains, with the space behind taken up for storage.

## 2. Dunster, 12 and 14 High Street. SS 99180 43725

This property is known from a deed of 1463 between Thomas Hamelyn of Lullokesburgh, son and heir of John Hamelyn, and William Eylesworthy and his wife Joan for:

*Feoffment of a burgage called the George in Market Street, Dunster between burgages of the lord of Dunster south and David Harneys north, 3 yards in Marsh, a half burgage between burgages formerly John Ryvers and the vill of Dunster in the market street and 2a. arable between land of the prior of Dunster west and Robert Hamelyn east and the reversion of 2a. arable held by Thomas Porter and his wife Agnes for lives and their 4s. rent. (SHC, DD/L/P/8/2/208)*

It continued in use as an inn until at least 1871, but by 1891 had been converted into two dwellings. The northern one was occupied by employees of the Luttrell family, and became known as the 'Butler's House', and the southern one by a plumber and his family, who later opened a shop there.

There have been two previous reports on this property, but both were limited by access to only no. 14 High Street (Williams 1982; Wapshott and Morris 2017). Both properties are currently in commercial use, with living accommodation above at no. 12.

In the first floor and loft of no. 14 can be seen a fine open arch braced truss (t2) shown in Fig. 3; the other truss (t3) has its lower part in the first floor of no. 14 with the top of it being visible only in the second floor of no. 12 (Fig. 4). The trusses have been dated by Tree Ring Services on behalf of Time Team to 1322/3 (Moir 2018, 125). Truss t1 is mostly buried in later masonry. This and some other timbers show evidence of smoke blackening, notably on t2, west purlins and on the ridge purlin at the north end. The apex (Fig. 5) is thought to be type L1, with yoke below the principals and a diagonally set ridge, although the ridge timber at this point is irregular in shape and seating in the truss has been cut to accommodate it.

The elbow of the principals cannot be seen, but the bases of the trusses are both visible in the first floor of no. 14 (Fig. 3). There are remnants of rafters (7 x 9cm) laid flat over original purlins.

The plan of no. 14 includes the open hall and inner room of the original burgage plot. A huge (36 x 40cm) beam supports the first floor and was altered at the east end when a lateral stack was inserted in the back wall (Fig. 6). A similar, but smaller, half beam is now partly against an inner wall. Major alterations were made in the 17th century, including a new entrance door opening, door and frame and runs of ovolo moulded windows to each side of the party wall.



Fig. 3 Lower section of arch braced truss



Fig. 4 Top of arch braced truss



Fig. 5 Apex with later ridge purlin

The cross-passage is now in no. 12 as was the outer room. A fine medieval door frame may be original to the house (Fig. 7). On entering, there are remains of a screen between the cross-passage and the former



*Fig. 6 Floor beam in no. 14*



*Fig. 7 Medieval door frame*

open hall (Fig. 8). In the framing is a small section of a formerly shoulder headed door frame which would have led into the open Hall.

Little else remains of the earlier structure on this side of the building which, from roof construction appears to have been rebuilt in the 19th century. The only other indication of earlier structure is the continuation of a long row of ovolo mullioned windows from no. 14 to no. 12 (Fig. 9).

### **3. Dunster, 30 High Street. SS 99174 43799**

This is another commercial property at the north end of the High Street and is known to have been the Packsaddle Inn in the early 18th century, and became a saddlery in the early 19th century. The shop front is early 20th century when the name was given as 'Dyers' after the then proprietor. It continued as a leather goods shop until 1970. Old maps suggest that boundaries have been altered many times and this is borne out by the odd remaining elements of early fabric. Essentially no. 30 is formed of three separate blocks of differing periods and of two and three storeys. An alleyway to the north may have been necessitated by the saddlery business as it gave access to yard and stables at the rear of the property, but was once a part of what is now the main shop as evidenced by matching beams. The foot of one of these overhangs the first floor where the wall is canted with a fireplace and stack, the hearth for this being supported from below by two pillars of bull nosed bricks in the alleyway (Fig. 10). Stonework has been corbelled out in the attic to support the top of the truss t1 (Fig. 11).

In the main block (block 1) to the north are remnants of two trusses with collars buried in the



*Fig. 8 Remnant of shoulder headed door frame in former screen*



*Fig. 9 Nos 12 and 14 High Street*



Fig. 10 Brickwork in alleyway

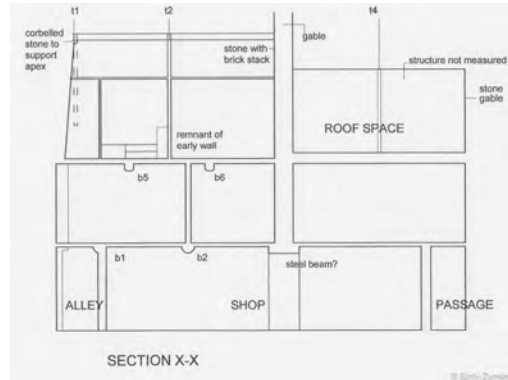


Fig. 11 Long section

walls. The foot of truss t2 is visible in the second floor and has a mortice for missing wind brace (Fig. 12). However, evidence of pit sawing on the principals suggests that the property is not as old as others seen in Dunster and indicates a date seemingly too late for internally decorative roofs – a bit of a conundrum.

The next block on the High Street to the south (two storeys), has a comparatively modern roof which was probably built at the same time as the rebuilding of the former market house to the south (late 19th century). This block has a little bay window with pent roof on the front elevation (Fig. 13). A wide opening was knocked in the now internal wall between the two blocks on the ground floor front, this now forming a larger shop. The access to the rest of the premises (a dwelling) is in this second block.



Fig. 12 Reused timber stair support

The third block is at the rear where there is a large stack with shadow of former bressumer and beside which is a now blocked opening to the section at the rear, which is a separate dwelling (no. 30a). Sections of secondhand timber have been used for the bressumer, for beams and to support the upper stairs.

#### 4. Dunster, 6-8 Marsh Street. SS 99364 44373

The plan form of this house was noted in a report by Commander Williams (1983a) to have been very similar in size to that of another house at 15/17 Marsh Street which he had also surveyed in 1982 (Williams 1983b).

His survey here only covered no. 8, but the presence of a thick rear wall in no. 6 confirms his conclusion that this was a three-room cross-passage house with rear lateral stack to the service room as at 15/17 Marsh Street. Features in no. 8 suggest that it was raised to a three-storey height in the 17th century. The roof for this has a notched half lap joint comparable to others found in Somerset at that time (Fig. 14).



Fig. 13 Ground-floor bay

Other features include a spice cupboard and

mouldings with stop ends that generally fit nicely with this date. No. 6 was rebuilt in the 19th century as suggested by the front wall thickness and in the roof



*Fig. 14 Notched half lap collar joint*

it has a convenient chalk mark with the date '1858'.

#### **5. Dunster, 18-22 West Street. SS 9897 4350**

The owner and occupier of plot 86 in the 1840s title apportionment, William Lettey, was listed in Robson's 1839 Commercial Directory as 'Grocer, Draper, Auctioneer, and Agent to the Atlas Insurance Company'. At that time the property was known as Broadgate, and was undoubtedly used for commercial purposes as well as being a substantial main residence. An earlier map of c. 1780 shows the property as having another range parallel to the street at the rear, surrounding a small courtyard (SHC, DD/L/1/10/35A). The description of occupations indicated may account for the size of the property, now four dwellings all in separate ownership. It is likely that the property was used as the main residence as well as for commercial purposes.

No. 18 has an appearance and internal details which would fit with this period of the early 19th century, but a blocked opening and doorway are indicated in the front elevation by brick arches (Fig. 15). Other signs of rebuilding are clearly visible in the front of no. 20. At the rear of the covered walkway to the left of Fig. 15 there is, in the stonework, a door jamb and cut off lintel remaining from an earlier opening (Fig. 16). This is in a wall of 72cm which continues into no. 18 although less obviously here due to later rebuilding. It is possible that the jamb indicates the location of an earlier cross-passage. The roof to nos 18 and 20 was renewed at the same time, probably when the house was rebuilt or refronted in the 19th century. Internally there are some good features of this period including a staircase with unusual balustrade quite unlike any other seen (Fig. 17). It has pegged joints and may date from this period or, showing little sign of wear, perhaps from the Arts and Crafts trend, from which other features have been noted around Dunster.

The plan of the house is not at all regular and



*Fig. 15 Front elevation of no. 18*



*Fig. 16 Former door jamb*



*Fig. 17 Staircase details, no. 18*

seems to have been rebuilt around earlier fabric. This is also likely from the amount of re-used timbers built in to the fabric, particularly at the rear. The



*Fig. 18 Collar joint cut into principal, truss t1*



*Fig. 19 Truss t2*

rear of no. 16 faces directly on to the garden of no. 18 and it has been completely rebuilt and extends beyond the earlier site. No. 20 has the main rear wall mentioned above (as in Fig. 16) running through it, although the stonework has been extended to the rear to accommodate a kitchen. Internal lintels suggest former wider openings with later adaptations to make a separate house. There is a flying freehold over the walkway to the back gardens. In the rear garden is a small barn which is now divided into two between no. 20 and no. 18.

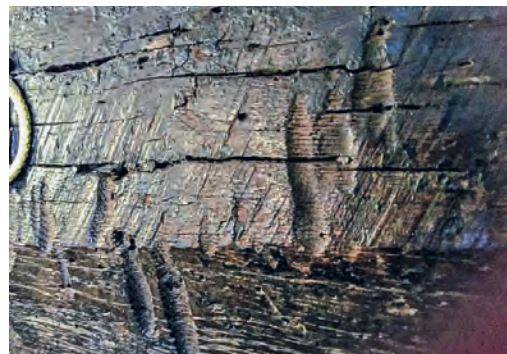
In no. 22, there are two original arch braced trusses which have been dendro-dated to 1377 (by Tree Ring Services, as before; Figs 18 and 19). This range ran at right angles to West Street so may have formed an original L-shaped property with what is now no. 20. The front is rendered with a later roof extending from no. 18 and across no. 20. The early roof timbers are heavily smoke blackened, with a shiny surface in some places, possibly indicating a house fire. Both trusses gave dateable samples, but differ in that in t1 (to the east), the collar is housed into the principal timber (Fig. 18 – a feature not yet found elsewhere in Dunster), whereas with t2, the joint is flush (Fig. 19). Otherwise, the arch braces seem to match. The apex to t2 is a notched diagonal joint with diagonal set ridge purlin (type E - Cruck survey), very common locally. The other apex is missing.

Truss no. t1 has carpenters marks in the form of relatively long, scored Roman numerals and are sequenced per joint, ie III at N-blade principal to arch brace; V at N-blade principal to collar (Fig. 18) and II at S-blade principal to collar.

Another interesting feature is a remnant of external framing above the rear extension roof of no. 20 at what was the junction between the two ranges (Fig. 20). The curved heads are reminiscent of a doorway in an external timber framed house in Kent (Banwell



*Fig. 20 Extant external framing*



*Fig. 21 Fireplace lintel showing diagonal saw cuts*

and Adams 1994, 19) and also of arcaded first floor walkways to medieval inns (as at The New Inn, Gloucester). Here, it may have been either, providing access to a stair turret set in the corner between the two ranges or, alternatively, may have been part of a

medieval courtyard inn. This might account for the apparently courtyard plan in the 18th-century map mentioned above.

The inserted fireplace (stack as in Fig. 21) has a lintel with clear diagonal saw cuts indicating that it was trestle sawn (before pit sawing became common) and the profile of earlier burn marks can be seen. These have been found widely in this area and are now believed to be apotropaic marks (ritual protection marks).

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements are due to Tony Harding for providing all images, to Barbara Hoffbauer for documentary research, and to all the volunteer surveyors, who have worked hard on this project. Thanks are also extended to the kind hospitality of Dunster owners.

#### REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, S., Allen, J., Parker, R. and Taylor, T., 2019. 'Unearthing Dunster: Time Team Digital Dig Village Project 2012-2018', unpubl. rep.
- Alcock, N. W., 1981. *Cruck Construction: an introduction and catalogue*, York: C.B.A. Res. Rep. 42.
- Banwell, P. S. and Adams, A. T., 1994. *The house within: interpreting medieval houses in Kent*, London: HMSO.
- Moir, A., 2018. Tree-ring date lists 2018, *Vernacular Architecture* 49:1, 121-26.
- Richardson, I., 2021. 'Dunster Castle gatehouse – mismatched windows, the wrong coat of arms and a lost lower ward', *SANH* 164, 183-202.
- Wapshott, E. and Morris, B., 2017. No.14 High Street, Dunster, Exmoor National Park: Rapid Building Appraisal, South West Archaeology Ltd, unpubl. rep.
- Williams E. H. D., 1982. Vernacular building report on 14 High Street, Dunster, SHC, DD/V/WIR/3/11.
- , 1983a. Vernacular building report on 6-8 Marsh Street, Dunster, SHC, DD/V/WIR/3/7.
- , 1983b. Vernacular building reports on 15 and 17 Marsh Street, Dunster, SHC, DD/V/WIR/3/2 and 21.