

Building Recording in 2020 and 2021

Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group

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Surveys were suspended in March 2020 with just three surveys completed for that year and it was another 18 months before restrictions were sufficiently lifted to allow the Group to resume surveys. The Group approached householders for their agreement to conduct surveys on the understanding that we would take whatever precautions they and Group members felt appropriate. Surveys included the final building of the series we had been conducting in support of the Darshill and Bowlsh Heritage Project in Shepton Mallet. Unusual times called for ingenuity and the Group experimented with a remote survey of another house, achieved through close cooperation with the owner who supplied plans and photographs. The Group was able to provide a basic appraisal of the house in terms of probable age and construction sequence which enabled the owner to proceed with plans for repairs and alterations. A conventional survey will be arranged there in 2022.

The lack of survey opportunities enabled the Group to find time to catalogue several hundred records of Somerset houses with cruck constructions and to forward the list to the compiler of the Vernacular Architecture Group cruck database, a task that had been in abeyance for many years. The Group hopes to make inroads now (2022) into the backlog of houses whose owners have requested a survey.

As always, the Group is indebted to the owners and occupiers of the various properties for their generosity in allowing access to their homes. Copies of the full SVBRG reports and survey drawings have been deposited at the South West Heritage Centre. They are also available through the continuously evolving SVBRG website, www.svbrg.org.uk where the summaries listed here can also be viewed.

Photographs by John Rickard (Figs 1-2, 4-6) and Tony Beresford (Fig. 3)

1. Chedzoy, Westfield Farm. ST 33785 37393

The main range of the house is two storeys with an attic floor under a clay-tiled roof. At the rear, a full height catslide extends over a two-storey range. The north gable has an additional two-storey unit attached under a lower pantiled roof. The walls are unpainted brickwork except for the front which is painted with unpainted heads over the windows (Fig. 1a). A large



Fig. 1a Chedzoy, Westfield Farm, Unpainted window heads enliven the brick frontage

fireplace with internal baking oven was situated against the south gable wall.

The building would seem to have been erected in late 16th/17th century, originally stone built of one-and-a-half storeys and three-rooms' length, and owned by Oxford University whose records refer to it being enlarged and raised in 1740 and sold off in 1850. On the 1886 map, the north extension appears as a wagon/carriage house with a Lias flagstoned floor and brick channels (wheel guides) and cobbles between them.

It was substantially rebuilt in the middle of the 18th century when a full upper floor was added; brick was extensively used in the rebuilding. An internal, perhaps original, wall of the main range is oak framed on a stone plinth with the head beam lower than the current ceiling and of wattle and daub construction (Fig. 1b). The principal staircase is a straight flight with decorative brackets, two tapered balusters at each open tread and a moulded handrail. The roof comprises four tie-beam trusses linked by two tiers of aligned purlins in an 18th-century construction manner. Beneath a Regency-style canopy porch is a six-panel door with the upper panes glazed. The door is double planked in a broad moulded architrave. The front windows are of three lights with opening casements and internal folding shutters on the ground floor.

The high catslide roof appears to date from the 19th century and although a south gable lean-to is seen on the 1836 map, the current construction is more likely to be of the 20th century.



Fig. 1b Chedzoy, Westfield Farm, Wattle and daub panels to an oak-framed partition

2. Coleford, Lydford Farm. ST 68842 49202

Over the last 50 years or so this house has undergone much alteration and restoration but retains a clear demarcation between ‘working’ areas and those used by the owner by the use of door-panel mouldings on the ‘better’ side. However, the detailed features are characteristic of an early 19th-century house. It is shown on the 1839 Tithe Map for Kilmersdon parish as Coleford parish was only newly created within Kilmersdon.

The two-storey house, linked to a single-storey north range, has a symmetrical arrangement of windows and a central pedimented entrance (Fig. 2), the north elevation being similar. The roof has modern, cement, double Roman tiles; brick stacks at the gables carry four flues. The house has a painted render finish except for a supplementary chimney at the west end. The house, window and door openings have stone quoins with walls of random rubble construction.

The windows at the front are six-over-six sashes with window seats. The ground-floor windows have fold away shutters with the same decoration as the doors. The windows at the rear have three-light casements with eight-pane lights.

The front stair hall bears the only evidence of cornice ceiling decoration. The stairs have enclosed treads and features a half landing that leads to a common upper floor level at the front and rear of the house. The simple handrails and newels are of pine. There are photos of original flag stone flooring in the passage and hall. Except for one rear room (tiled), all floors are boarded with possibly original elm boards in one rear upper-floor room.

3. East Coker, Ebenezer Cottage, North Coker. ST 52927 13299

The cottage has its front, west, elevation almost on the street as depicted in the 1819 parish map. On this map, and on the 1840 Tithe Map, a rear range is shown running east from the north end. By 1886 this wing has been replaced by a new range behind the front range. The east side of this new range is a gable wall and the new ridge is at right angles to that of the front range. A further single-storey range now attaches at the north end. The front range appears to be the oldest part, originating perhaps in the mid to late 18th century (Fig. 3). The long walls of the front range have a distinct batter internally, diminishing from 0.7m thickness at ground level to 0.5m at ceiling height. Other walls are 0.5m. There is a wide fireplace in the south gable with evidence of a baking oven to the left side though the fireplace lintel and the right jamb are modern. The roof in the front range has two unmatched collar trusses and a single tier of purlins; the carpentry was modified using reclaimed timbers



Fig. 2 Coleford, Lydford Farm, South elevation showing bracket and pedimented entrance



Fig. 3 East Coker, Ebenezer Cottage, Front elevation with windows under timber lintels

when the front eaves were raised. The roof on the front has clay tiles of triple-delta form; elsewhere they are single or double Roman.

4. Godney, Lower Godney House. ST 47137 42734

This two-storey house with its newly rendered elevations comprises two parallel ranges, both with separate slate roofs between coped gables and with a stack at each gable. The windows are replacements which, on the ground floor, imitate former multi-pane sashes (Fig. 4a). The south range is the older, dating to the late 18th century and contains two principal rooms separated by a wide stair hall in which there is a panelled and partially glazed store cupboard (Fig. 4b). The stair has open treads with bracket decoration. The north range similarly has two rooms and a through passage and both parts of the house have large, Lias, flagstone flooring. The Tithe Map of 1842 shows only the south range with two small additions on the north side, probably single-storey service rooms. By 1884, however, the north range is shown on the O.S. map. The difference between the ranges is evident in the wall thicknesses, the south range having 0.5m walls and a 0.6m south wall, the north range being only 0.3m and probably constructed of brick. The roof of the north range is a simple tie-beam roof of 45° pitch with softwood principals prepared from roughly hewn baulks, sawn in half to 20x8cm finished size. The 51° south roof is possibly of ash principals with elm rafters and, although now in a tie-beam configuration, was formerly a wind-braced collar truss roof, the threaded ridge and the butt purlins suggesting 16th-century origins.

Some 10m to the north of the house, and shown on the Tithe Map, is a one-and-a-half-storey annex building; its slightly thinner (0.45m) walls suggest an early 19th-century date. A substantial fireplace within has an orthostatic jamb stone supporting a timber lintel (Fig. 4c). The building has been refurbished and the roof timbers are now exposed revealing three, collar trusses where the collars are lap-dovetailed to the principals and staggered purlins with pegged through-tenons support the rafters.

5. Shepton Mallet, Bowlish House. ST61258 43959

This listed house has a rendered Palladian-style west-facing frontage on two floors and dormers set in the slate-clad hipped roof (Fig. 5a). The entrance, below a triangular pediment, is supported on plain columns in the Tuscan style. To either side there are three windows in moulded architraves that have either a segmental or a triangular pediment above. Below the cornice a pair of cast lead rainwater heads are decorated with the Howe family crest and the date '1732' (Fig. 5b). The wide entrance hall gives access



Fig. 4a Godney, Lower Godney House, Rendered south elevation with replica sashes on ground floor



Fig. 4b Godney, Lower Godney House, Panelled and part-glazed cupboard in stair hall



Fig. 4c Godney, Lower Godney House, Annex fireplace with single Lias orthostatic jamb at right

to the two rooms at the front of the house and to a fine, open-well stair as well as leading to rooms in

two rear wings that create a U-shaped floor plan for the building. A brick-vaulted cellar lies beneath the north wing. Internal features, including doors and fireplaces, reflect the various alterations resulting from the house becoming a hotel; however, there were survivals (in addition to the front elevations) from the early 18th century. On the upper floor of the south wing the windows are stone-mullioned in 17th-century transom style, though the window architraves have a flat form with a raised outer lip and beaded inner edge usually attributed to the 18th century. The same style of architrave appears in a Venetian-style window in the north wing. The transom and Venetian windows reflects the transitions of style in the late 17th and early 18th centuries to which must be added the rising popularity of classical design.



Fig. 5a Shepton Mallet, Bowlsh House, Classical west front with dormers in the hipped roof



Fig. 5b Shepton Mallet, Bowlsh House, Rainhead dated 1732 and bearing the Howe crest



Fig. 6 Wanstrow, Brook House, Rendered front elevation with masonry buttress to right

6. Wanstrow, Brook House. ST 71497 41933

This modest probable yeoman farmer's house from the end of the 17th century is of two-room cross-passage plan. It is shown on the 1838 Tithing Map; in the O.S. 1885 and 1903 surveys, the house is shown as two dwellings with small additional buildings, one of which had disappeared by the 1960s. The owner has plans, drawn in the 1960s, which reflect the time when the house was subdivided and show that the house originally had two upper floors. There were three rooms on the first floor and two rooms in the attic. It has since been returned to a single occupancy house with two storeys and a loft.

The windows and doors are modern, however remnant pieces of stone framed and mullioned windows (probably three light with hollow profile externally) were found in the garden. Blocked two-light windows can be seen in the loft.

The north room has an inglenook fireplace with a baking oven. The deep lintel that spans the opening has 15 burn marks and the only original beams, also in the north room, have 8cm deep chamfers and cyma stops. The burn marks and the cyma stops both date to the late 17th century.

The south room too originally had a (now blocked) inglenook, beside which was the original spiral wall staircase, still partially visible in the loft. The walls are of random rubble construction, rendered and painted externally, with a shallow buttress to stabilise the thin staircase wall (Fig. 6). The floors are solid, originally of differing levels.

A new roof oversails the earlier common rafter roof which would have been suitable for a thatched covering. One original elm collar truss remains with remnants of a lath and plaster infill on both sides that may date to the time when the house was divided.