

The Landmark Trust

THE PRIEST'S HOUSE History Album



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Updated by Caroline Stanford, 2019

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BASIC DETAILS

Built:	c. 1500, much altered subsequently
Listed:	Grade II
Acquired by Landmark:	1984
Tenure:	Freehold
Architect for restoration:	Peter Bird of Caroe & Martin
Builders:	Stansells & Wells Cathedral Ltd
Work completed:	1985

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The Priest's House stands in the characteristic position of a late-medieval church house, at the southwest corner of the churchyard. A blocked external entrance to the first floor can still just be made out in its north wall.

Summary

The name Priest's House is misleading, as this building was built as a church house, probably around 1500. This building type was successor to the communal, or Lord's, brew-house, and the predecessor of the village hall. Everything from church feasts and 'ales', to the feeding and housing of travellers and the poor took place under their roofs. Between about 1450 and 1550 just about every parish in England had its church house. Devon has more survivals than any other county, in part because of its durable local stone..

Church houses were built as a parish facility, and specifically to raise funds for the upkeep of the parish church, usually through communal feasts. In the 15th century the church decided that such fundraising that should no longer involve carousing in the church, as had happened so far, and so plots were found, often part of the glebe land, and donated to the parish to build their church house. After the Reformation, even off-site festivities began to be frowned upon, and church houses passed into other village uses from the late 16th to 18th centuries, becoming inns or poor-houses or schools, or simply houses or cottages, their original purpose often passing out of mind.

Village tradition has it that this one was at one time the priest's house, and hence its present name; this could have risen from a misunderstanding, but it could also be true, the building adapted for use as a lodging for the priest before the present vicarage was built in the 18th century. Single storey stables were added on the south, and at some stage wide openings in the east wall of the Priest's House were also made, perhaps during a phase of agricultural use. These openings caused the weakened front wall to bulge, so buttresses were added, and at some time in the 19th century, the openings were blocked up.

The building had been used as a poor house within living memory in 1904, but by 1858 had fallen into dilapidation. In 1904, the land agent for widowed Mrs Rayer of neighbouring Holcombe Court laid claim to the building on behalf of the estate, with a view to its demolition, no doubt for its unsightliness next to the church and mansion. Stripping out did indeed begin: the first-floor floor beams and the surviving ground floor partition screen were removed. In the nick of time, parish councillor Harry Bowerman wrote to his MP, and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings became involved. This led to an injunction on behalf of the heirs-at-law and trustees of the Holcombe Rogus estate, who wanted to save the building and also upheld the parish's claim to its ownership.

Arts & Crafts architect and designer C R Ashbee of Chipping Campden, who was already much involved with the SPAB's work, was employed to carry out the rescue restoration through 1906. He picked out the removed timbers from a builder's yard, and reassembled and reinstated them, and managed to salvage the screen. Ashbee also made a new staircase, whether itself replacing the original access to the first floor directly off the churchyard is unclear. Its fragment of finely carved newel post may perhaps be salvaged 15th-century fabric. The

project, funded by the Holcombe Estate, led to further dispute when the original estimate was exceeded, but completed it was, a 1906 photo showing the house looking much as it does today. With some irony, a 1915 Country Life article credited Mrs Rayer, recording that she had 'assisted to put in order the old Church House, which was falling into decay.'

Eventually, the building's ownership did finally pass from the parishioners to the estate. It was acquired by Landmark in 1983, by then again in a state of some dilapidation. However, its original configuration of three ground floor rooms and a single upper chamber was still, remarkably, intact.

The building itself was basically sound, and its restoration was completed in about nine months in 1984-5. The north gable and the two chimneys had to be taken down and rebuilt, but otherwise the walls only needed some repointing. Half the roof had been renewed in the 1960s when a tree fell on it during a gale, bringing down part of the west wall as well. As a result, the northern roof slope was covered in Welsh slate, and the southern in local Treborough slates. The latter were salvaged and used for the stable roof, but the house was re-covered with new Delabole slates, to be more in character with the originals. The roof structure needed only minimal repair.

The windows were also in fairly good condition, needing only minor repairs, and in some cases a new oak lintel or cill, and reglazing. Three new oak windows were inserted, copied from the originals; one on the west in the doorway to the Court, which, being no longer required, was blocked up; and two on the east in old openings, although to make one, an 18th century tombstone had to be carefully removed. Inside, the great fireplace lintel and the chimney above it needed some reinforcing with steel ties and bearers.

The burn mark on the west fireplace had only been made quite recently, while the house was used as a builder's store, so is not one of the ancient burn marks that so puzzle building historians. The floor frame needed some repair, and one charred section was renewed. The partition screens are entirely new, though in old positions, and copying what was there originally. Their oak, like that of the windows, has simply been waxed. The floor is of Hamstone flags, to match the sandstone in the great fireplace. Much old lime plaster survived on the walls, and this has been patched, and limewashed to a colour close to what was there before. The undersides of the ceiling boards, are, like the new staircase, painted a good medieval red. Traces of such a red remain on the oak newel post, which has been left uncovered.

Upstairs a ceiling and new modern partitions have been inserted because otherwise the bedrooms would have been too high for their size, and the northern half of the roof is in any case undistinguished. The big chimney breast was cut back to make extra room. To provide soundproofing and insulation, felt was laid on the existing deal floorboards - which probably date from 1906 - and then on top, lying crossways, wider elm boards.

Introduction

Church Houses

The name The Priest's House is misleading, because it was built, probably in about 1500 or a bit later, as a church house, which is quite a different thing. Church houses (sometimes called parish or guild houses) sprang up between about 1450 and 1540, in that period immediately before the English Reformation when the social influence and affluence of the parish church was at its height. They took a very characteristic form and it is now generally accepted that there would have been a church house in most parishes across southern and central England. They played an integral role in the broad sweep of religious and political changes experienced in the Tudor and Stuart periods. Yet as a building type, church houses had been almost forgotten until relatively recent decades, and many still linger unrecognised.

Throughout the later Middle Ages, parishioners were responsible for the maintenance of the nave of the parish church, and for this it was necessary to raise money. This was primarily done through 'church ales', communal fundraising feasts to which the whole parish contributed.

Before church houses came into vogue, these ales were often held in the nave of the church itself (no pews yet), important and bonding communal occasions in the only building in the parish large enough to hold everyone. As the 15th century wore on, however, church authorities became increasingly opposed to such secular activities being held in the church. Church houses sprang up as an alternative venue, generally after the completion of any major rebuilding work on the church itself. Most were purpose-built near the church, on manorial wasteland land or on a footprint given by a priest from his glebe, or by a monastery donating land to the secular parish. Most tended to be built to the west, or south west of the church.



Peasant Dance, by Pieter Breughel the Elder (c. 1568). Although painted in the Netherlands, this painting shows a village scene very similar to a church ale. The Dutch shared a tradition of a northern European equivalent of the church ale, the *kermis* (an annual festival then held on the patronal saint's day).

Wiltshire antiquarian John Aubrey, writing in the late seventeenth century, provides the best-known description of this phenomenon:

'There were no rates for the poor in my grandfather's day... the church ale at Whitsuntide did the business. In every parish is (or was) a church house to which belonged spits, crocks etc, utensils for dressing provisions. Here the housekeepers met, and were merry and gave their charity. The young people were there too, and had dancing, bowling, shooting at butts etc., the ancients sitting gravely by and looking on. All things were civil and without scandal.'

Church houses are by their very nature vernacular buildings and all vernacular styles are represented. However, as a building typology, they share various typical characteristics across regions, which the Priest's House shares. They were generally well constructed and unusually large for an otherwise fairly straightforward vernacular building. Some were built with a degree of embellishment, as parishes vied with each other to provide the best and most hospitable facilities. They have unexpectedly large rooms, two storeys and large fireplaces and chimneys for brewing and baking, at a period when all of these were still far from typical of the average villager's dwelling (albeit it is thought that the Priest's Houses current large chimneys were added in the 17th century, there would certainly have been large hearths for communal brewing and baking from the beginning).

The large rooms required long ranges, usually jettied in the case of timber-framed examples, and the upper room was generally open to the roof timbers. Often there was a separate external entrance for each storey, although individual rooms may not have had private access. Overall, church houses show a distinct departure from the plan form expected of a house built at the period for, for example, a wealthy villager. Communal baking and brewing took place on the ground floor, while feasting was done on the floor above or an adjacent large room. For official church ales, malt, barley and wheat were collected by young men going from house to house, and used to produce 'cakes' (bread) and ale. All were welcome, often bringing some small contribution to the feast, and paying a penny or two to get in.

Some examples of other former church houses, each reflecting the late-medieval vernacular style of its area. Most are now much altered, and their origins often unrecognised



Itchingfield, Sussex



South Tawton, Devon



Hurst, Berkshire



Bray, Berkshire



Crowcombe, Somerset



Islington, Devon

Some other church houses in Devon, often much altered.



Widecombe-in-the Moor, Devon



Swimbridge



Chagford, Devon



Drewsteignton



**Georgeham: Millie's Cottage
(? Church-house)**



Marwood (and Lych-gate)



Silverton



West Anstey



Shaugh Prior: from street



Walkhampton



Throwleigh

Funds could be further boosted by hiring out the brewing vessels, allowing local guilds (parish subgroups like maids, mothers or bachelors, or professions) to hold their feasts there, entertaining neighbouring parishes in Whit week or providing lodging for visitors to the parish, whether for religious or craft purposes. The accoutrements required for brewing and feasting can be traced through church inventories until well into the seventeenth century – trestles and benches, spits and cauldrons, trenchers and drinking bowls.

The function of church houses was therefore as much social as religious, however much religious institutions lay behind them. Church ales took place for a wide variety of purposes, not just at Whitsuntide, the main celebration in the year. They could also mark dedication and patronal feasts, or the memory of a generous church donor. 'Bride ales' provided a wedding breakfast for poor couples, other ales raised money for the poor and sick. 'Clerk ales' raised money to pay the wages of the parish clerk.

Such events were substantial money earners. At Morebath on the edge of Exmoor, the Young Men's Guild's 'grooming ale', convened to raise money to keep tapers burning before the patronal image of St George and on the rood screen, would bring in £1 or even £2 – a considerable sum given an annual parish income of only £7-8. Most parishes had such guilds in support of the accoutrements for a particular saint; occasionally they too had their own 'guild house'.

Church ales also provided a focus for secular folk traditions. Often, the costumes for May Games or Robin Hood plays were stored in the church house – at Bray, in Berkshire, we find five garters with bells and four morris coats, a costume for Maid Marion, a pair of breeches and a doublet for the fool. In Morebath, fees paid to the church by travelling players may well have gone for hire of the church house. At Dartington also in Devon, there is even reference in 1566 to a 'tenyse courte' at the church house.



Examples of the large first floor rooms typical of church houses, where the village gathered for church ales

Top: Parish House, Baltonsborough, another church house in Landmark's care. Methwold Old Vicarage is another possible Landmark church house.

Below: Crowcombe, Somerset.

To create the necessary rooms for a Landmark, a ceiling had to be inserted into the first floor of the Holcombe Rogus Priest's House, but its surviving roof timbers were in any case less fine than these examples.

A Whitsun ale in 1561 at Northill, Bedfordshire invited ten parishes and laid on a minstrel, two fools, six morris men and some fireworks. Refreshments often went far beyond 'cakes and ale.' When St Mary's, Bungay in Suffolk held 'church ale games' for the district in the late 1560s, a typical menu included eggs, butter, currants, pepper, saffron, veal, lamb, honey, cream, custards and pasties. Inventories show that church houses were well fitted out with all the equipment needed for communal baking and brewing: dough troughs, brewing vats and cauldrons, spits, trestle tables and benches, even tablecloths.

So church houses were at once village hall, sports club, youth club, theatre, guest house and sometimes even market hall, all rolled into one. The ales, of course, were not always a model of decorum. A complaint made from Yeovil in 1607 describes how the parish had revived their Robin Hood play that year, with dancing and drinking around the church house going on into the small hours. A boisterous procession headed by drummers and a lord of misrule went around gathering contributions, and the churchwardens allowed themselves to be carried on a cowlstaff amid great hilarity.

But this jumps ahead, to an era when church houses were under attack. At first, decline was slow, even if it came just as these buildings were hitting their stride. Henry VIII's religious reforms had relatively little effect on church houses as an institution, and could sometimes benefit them. As late as 1542 in Morebath, the parish bought a small wayside chapel (such as were outlawed in 1538), dismantled it and used its materials to rebuild their church house.

Church ales too had generally survived thus far, though by now were the only means of raising money for church maintenance, after the abolition of other sources of parish income for the church such as the local resources known as

'stores' - there was no need for them now that images and candles were outlawed.

Edward VI's religious reforms were a different matter. In November 1548, for example, the Commissioners for the West issued a directive that gave 'commandment unto the church wardens and other parishioners from henceforth to surcease from keeping any church ales, because it hath been declared unto us that many inconveniences hath come by them.' Adding insult to injury, the churchwardens were still required to raise just as much money for the church's upkeep.

Events in Morebath provide an early illustration of the typical demise of a church house. By 1549, the village was in financial crisis. To pay for the drawing up of an inventory of church goods required by the Commissioners, the parish's best crimson cope had to be pawned, its brightness anyway banned under the new austerity. To repay the parishioner who had advanced this money, 'by consent of the whole parish,' the entire contents of the church house were sold, stripping it of everything it needed for communal use. From 1552, it was let as a private dwelling. If only a Holcombe priest had left such a detailed account of the Priest's House.

The Elizabethan Poor Laws marked a further shift from the voluntary and sociable raising of funds through the church ales to an emphasis on the compulsory levies that we would recognise today. By the early 17th century, contravention of the ban on church ales risked being reported to the Star Chamber, a killjoy approach already satirised by the puritanical Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* ('Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' bellows Sir Toby Belch at Malvolio when the latter disturbs his night time carousing). The gathering puritan campaign against popular disorder and abuse of the Sabbath into the 17th century is well known. James I countermanded this process with his Book of

Sports in 1617, and the reissuing of the Book by Archbishop Laud and Charles I in would actively exacerbate the tensions that led to civil war. Church houses lay at the heart of these struggles for the soul of England's parishes. As church ales died out, and with the demise of the parish church as a communal institution and (some historians would say) its rise instead as a tool to control the behaviour of the masses, people had to gather elsewhere. Alehouses multiplied, with concomitantly greater potential for disorderly behaviour or secular conviviality, depending on your stance. Many church houses became inns themselves. Others remained in parish ownership and, as an extension of their original purpose in a different sense, became poorhouses or tenements. Others became schools. Rooms often continued to be used for parish meetings, though of a more serious kind than the ales. At another Landmark church house, the Parish House at Baltonsborough in Somerset, the ground floor is still used by the parish as a meeting room, the building's maintenance funded by the Landmark apartment above. Many church houses continued to serve as such community resources while partially available for other uses, rented out as tenements to house a curate, or sexton or parish clerk.

Church houses still await their full, published account. The only general work to date is Patrick Cowley's 1970 study, *The Church Houses*. Cowley's thesis, that church houses were a phenomenon of the south west, is one that still persists among some historians and seems to rely on the better survival of church houses' original typology in stone/granite areas, where the distinctive form of outside stairs, for example, is less susceptible to decay or conversion than in timber framed areas. This initial emphasis on south-western survivals may also result from the unusually high survival rate of churchwardens' accounts in Somerset: even though church houses present a recognisable building type, their definitive identification ultimately depends on such documentary evidence. Probable survivals have been identified in parishes across thirty-four counties, even if often disguised through later evolution of

form and purpose, and documentary evidence survives for many others since lost.

Church houses like the Priest's House thus lie at the very heart of the 'merrie England' of our collective folk memory, of games after church on a Sunday, of morris dancing and the mummers plays, of practising archery in the churchyard and dancing round maypoles. In a period when little of the humbler everyday was written down (except in court records when things went wrong), the churchwardens' accounts for church houses provide a glimpse of the many positive aspects of vibrant parish communities, but sadly such a record does not survive for Holcombe Rogus.

Holcombe Rogus' 'Priest's House'

The church house of Holcombe Rogus has many of the characteristics of the type: its position to the south-west of the church, its rectangular plan and two storeys, with separate external access (by the blocked doorway at the north end) to the upper floor (and eye of faith might even discern the shadow on the wall of doublesided stone steps leading up to this doorway), the wide kitchen fireplace, and the moulded beams of the first floor frame, all apparently of the same date, along with the jointed cruck roof and the mullioned windows.

It is clear, moreover, that the building has been put to various uses since its original one ceased. Village tradition has it that it was at one time the priest's house, and hence its present name; this could have risen from a misunderstanding, but it could also be true. Two fireplaces were at some date - but probably not after the 17th century - added on the first floor, one cut into the west chimney, the other having its own flue and chimney as the south end. This may have been done to adapt the building for use as a lodging for the priest before the present vicarage was built in the 18th century. The house eventually became a poor house, a use persisting until the mid-19th century.

A single storey waggon shed was also added on the south (it was later enlarged to become a stable) with wide doors opening towards Holcombe Court, the mansion next door. It is possible that the wide openings in the east wall of the Priest's House were also made then, and it was these that caused the wall to bulge, so that they were later blocked up, and the buttresses built to prevent collapse. However, this use of the stables by the estate seems to have caused some confusion about ownership of the Priest's House.



Holcombe Court, described in its listing description as the finest Tudor house in Devon, was built in successive phases through the 16th century by the Bluett family, who lived there until 1857. It was then brought by the Reverend W. Rayer who largely rebuilt the service wings and extensively modernised the rest between 1859 - 63. It is not open to the public.



In 1858, just after the Holcombe estate had been bought by the Reverend W. Rayner, an architect called Edward Ashworth gave a lecture describing Holcombe Court, and the church, to the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society, in which he mentions the church house, 'a substantial outbuilding of the mansion' which 'despite its ruinous condition, gives dignity to the entrance of the churchyard' and whose immense fireplace is 'indicative of the broad principle of good hospitality exercised there.'

It seems no action was taken to remedy this 'ruinous condition', and fifty years later, the building was to find itself in dire danger. A decaying and empty range of buildings would not have been in keeping with the newly modernised Holcombe Court, nor graced the entrance to the parish church. In 1904, the land agent for widowed Mrs Rayer laid claim to the building on behalf of the estate, and initiated its demolition. Stripping out did indeed begin: the first-floor floor beams and the surviving ground floor partition screen was removed.

In the nick of time, parish councillor Harry Bowerman wrote to his MP, and then the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, who took up the cause. His letters to his MP James Bryce and to Hugh Thackeray Turner, first Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, are still in the SPAB archive. Written in a careful and legible hand of a self-declared 'working man', the letters are full of useful context and are worth producing in full on the following pages.

Holcombe Rogus,
Wellington,
Somerset.
August 15th/04

The Right Honourable James Bryce, Esq. M.P., L.L.D.,

Dear Sir,

Knowing the interest you take in matters of the kind, may I be permitted to submit the following statement for your kind consideration.

We have in this parish adjoining the Church, an old picturesque Norman building locally known as the "Poor House" or "Church House".

This building was used, in the memory of some of the present inhabitants, as a poor house, but has been allowed of late years, to fall into disuse, and is now in a dilapidated condition.

Mrs C. Rayer (the Lady of the Manor) now claims the property as a portion of the Manorial Estate, and her steward has given orders for the work of demolition to be commenced.

The Misses Rayer, of Binwell, Tiverton, Devon, the heirs-at-law to the property, look on the "Poor House" as parish property, and consider it should be handed over to the parish authorities.

This in itself forms an important factor in the parish claim, so the estate being under Trustees in Chancery (during Mr Rayer's life) the Misses Rayer's consent and approval have to be obtained in everything appertaining to the

estate.

The Manor authorities have no deeds whatever to substantiate their claim, while there is a document extant, signed by the then Lord of the Manor, (one of the Blisset family), covering the period 1405-1408, showing that a sum of 10 marks was granted out of the Poor Rate for the upkeep of the building in dispute.

When the Steward of the Estate (acting for Mr. Rayer) brought the claim before the Parish Council of St. Albans Rogus, it was unanimously resolved to reject the said claim.

In opposition to this decision, and in face of a threatened injunction, the work of demolition has been commenced.

Although the Parish Council was unanimous in its decision, yet partly owing to apathy, and partly actuated by self interest, only three of the Members of the Parish Council (myself among the number) have made any determined effort to resist the claim. And of the whole of the Council, the onus of bringing action rests with me. This seems hard, as I am a working man, and unable to afford the costly litigation and possible appeals to successive Courts, that the bringing of such an action might entail.

I may state in conclusion that owing to there being no parish room of any kind, all meetings have to be held in private houses.

Hoping for your kind interest and advice in this matter and apologising for encroaching on your valuable time,

I beg to remain,
Your Humble Servant,
Harry Bowdeman

Holcombe Rogus,
Wellington;
Somerset.
August 23rd/04.

The Secretary,
The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings,
Dear Sir,

Regarding the Ancient Building here, known locally as the "Poor House" or "Church House", may I be permitted to state;

1. The work of demolition has commenced, and it was evidently the intention of the Manor Authorities, to destroy the building as expeditiously as possible, as, in addition to the contractor employed, men, usually engaged at Holcombe Court, were employed.

2. At 3 o'clock this afternoon, injunctions signed by His Honour Judge Beresford, were served on Mrs Rayer, the Lady of the Manor, and on the Contractor and workmen employed.

3. Work on the building, has since then ceased.

4. Up to the present the work of demolition comprises,

(a) The stripping of the slates off a considerable portion of the west side of the roof.

(b) The removal of beams and partitions from the interior.

With these exceptions the roof and interior remain intact.

The trial consequent upon the serving of the injunctions will take place on Monday September 19th.

I should deem it a great favour
for your further advice on this matter, and
your presence here would be greatly welcomed.

I remain Sir,
Your Obedient Servant,
Harry Bowerman

P.S. I should be glad of your
presence here, if it results in a question
of assessing damages, as having seen the
building your testimony would be of great
value.

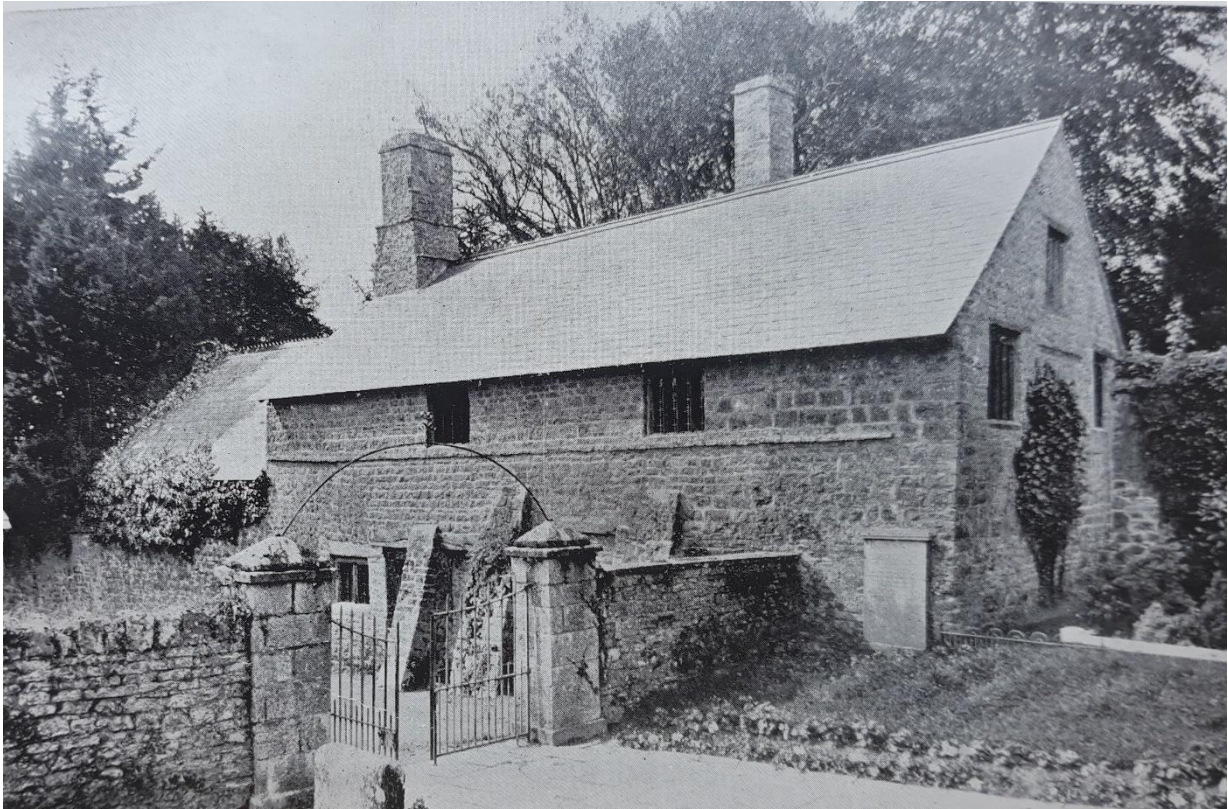
C. R. Ashbee's 1906 repairs

Harry Bowerman's intervention led to an injunction to prevent demolition, on behalf of the Misses Rayer of Tiverton, heirs-at-law and trustees of the Holcombe Rogus estate. The Misses Rayer wanted to save the building and also upheld the parish's claim to its ownership. They instructed London solicitors Wither & Wither to act on their behalf. It seems old Mrs Rayer and her steward complied since, with some irony, a 1915 Country Life article credited Mrs Rayer's role, 'during a long widowhood', recording that she had 'assisted to put in order the old Church House, which was falling into decay.'

Conservation work was done eventually done in 1906 by the Arts & Crafts architect, designer and polemicist, C. R. Ashbee (1862-1943). Ashbee set up the Guild of Handicrafts in 1888 in the East End of London, moving it to Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire in 1902, and indeed it was the Guild's craftsmen who carried out the work on the Priest's House. Ashbee was already working closely worked closely with William Morris's Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, founded in 1877 and subscribed wholeheartedly to their principles of honest repair in traditional materials.

On July 12 1905 Ashbee wrote to Thackeray Turner that 'The enemy did much damage, they took down the screen, and they cut one of the great timbers clean in half. We have however succeeded in saving them from destroying the screen, and I think with a little care the big timber can be put back in place, and be shored up by a pier.'

Ashbee picked out the removed floor frame timbers from a builder's yard, and reassembled and reinstated them, and did manage to salvage the surviving screen (although this had gone by the time Landmark acquired the house). Ashbee also made a new staircase, whether itself replacing the original access to the first floor directly off the churchyard is unclear. Its fragment of finely carved newel post may perhaps be salvaged 15th-century fabric.



The Priest's House soon after C. R. Ashbee and the Guild of Handicrafts' restoration of it in 1906. Ashbee wrote, 'The preservation of these things is a form of ancestor worship, necessary to any community that would save its soul.'



The Norman Chapel in Chipping Campden, also repaired by Ashbee, was given the same irregular buttresses as the Priest's House.

The project seems to have generated further dispute when the original estimate was exceeded, but completed it was, a 1906 photo showing the house looking much as it does today.

Ashbee used the Holcombe Rogus church house among the examples of his life's work in his book of essays *Where the Great City Stands: A Study of the New Civics* (1917), though he knew the building as 'the "guild" or "poor" house.' In Chapter VIII ('The Growing Regard for Amenities and the Preservation of History') Ashbee writes of a war against commercial vandalism,

*'that made men turn to the past as a citadel that had to be defended. For the artists the things the things most worth preserving seemed to be within. Inevitably, men said, "If life is to be beautiful as a whole, as we see it in the past, what better objective can we have than to save the best things of the past?" We were producers were inspired not just to create beauty but to preserve it....Most of my professional work has been the preservation and protection of beauty.'*¹



Architect C. R. Ashbee, who oversaw the 1906 restoration of the Priest's House.

¹ C R Ashbee, *Where the Great City Stands: A Study of the New Civics* (1917), p. 22.

Ashbee also records in the same book his preference for buttresses to be 'romantically irregular' and he must have appreciated the already well-weathered buttresses at the Priest's House. As one of three examples of this approach, he included a photograph the Priest's House, alongside the Hadleigh Guildhall in Suffolk and a building he describes as The Norman Chapel in Chipping Campden. The Priest's House looks much as it does viewed from the churchyard today, the building looking neat and newly re-roofed and -pointed.

Writing in 1985 of Landmark's restoration, Charlotte Haslem, apparently unaware of the Ashbee connection, described Landmark's puzzlement about the works done in 1906 at some length:

On closer inspection during Landmark's restoration, problems of interpretation started to emerge, centring on the moulded first floor frame. It turns out that this will only fit the building if the east wall is in its present, leaning position; there would not be room for it if the wall was vertical. A wall is not very likely to be built leaning, so is the ceiling itself an addition, but an early one, in that it appears to be of much the same date as the rest of the building? An argument in favour of this is that the wall above the string course is not only vertical but also of better masonry, and possibly indicates a heightening of that wall after the removal of an earlier, spreading, roof.

Unfortunately there is no evidence elsewhere in the building for such an alteration, the chimneys being tied in to the walls and obviously all of the same build – unless only the front elevation was so rebuilt.

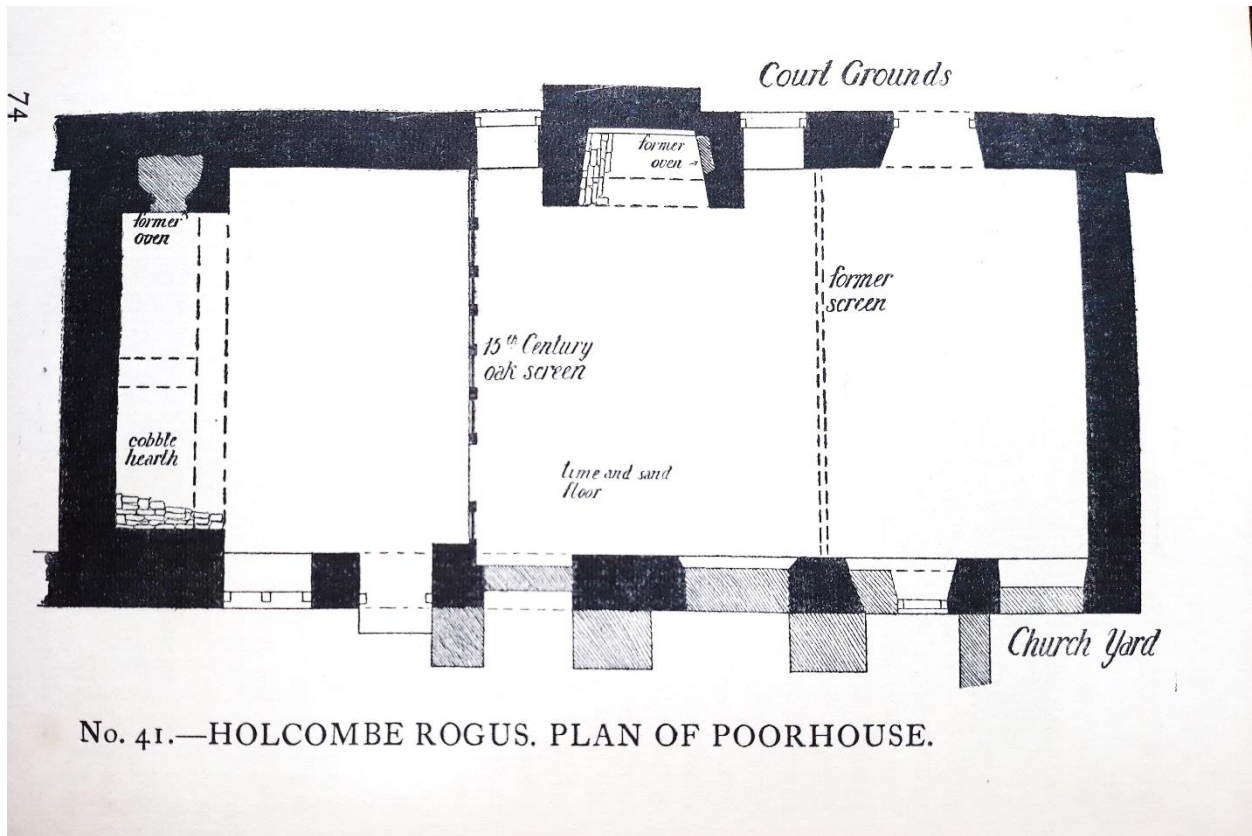
There is a village tradition that the floor frame came out of Holcombe Court, which would be perfectly possible, especially if it was done as part of Mrs Rayer's restoration c.1900. Much of Holcombe Court dates from the early 16th century, and much restoration work was done there in the late 19th century under Mrs Rayer's husband, so that there may well have been original materials to be re-used - the oak newel-post and the stable door, which is earlier than the wall it is in, could easily have come from there, for example. One of the beams was slightly fire-damaged, in fact, and this could have happened in the Court, and be the reason for the removal of the ceiling. Some alterations have been made to the ceiling, but this could be due to repair rather than resemble.

However, the positions of the original partitions, now reinstated, were clear from the mortices in the undersides of the cross-beams, and they fit in very well with the probable lay-out of the original church house, which distinctive layout seems unlikely if this ground floor ceiling came from another building (that would also have to be exactly the same dimensions. In addition, the evidence for the partitions also came from floor level, where a section of sole plate and one post survived but, with typical perversity, right in the middle of the southern wide doorway, and partly build round by the back of a buttress. If Mrs Rayer and Ashbee had put both ceiling and partitions into the building c.1906 they would hardly have been removed subsequently, even though it has only been used since as a store for a local builder, or if they had the fact would be recorded. The sole plate must mark the site of an earlier partition, though how this comes to be in the middle of an opening to make way for which it should have been removed is not clear.

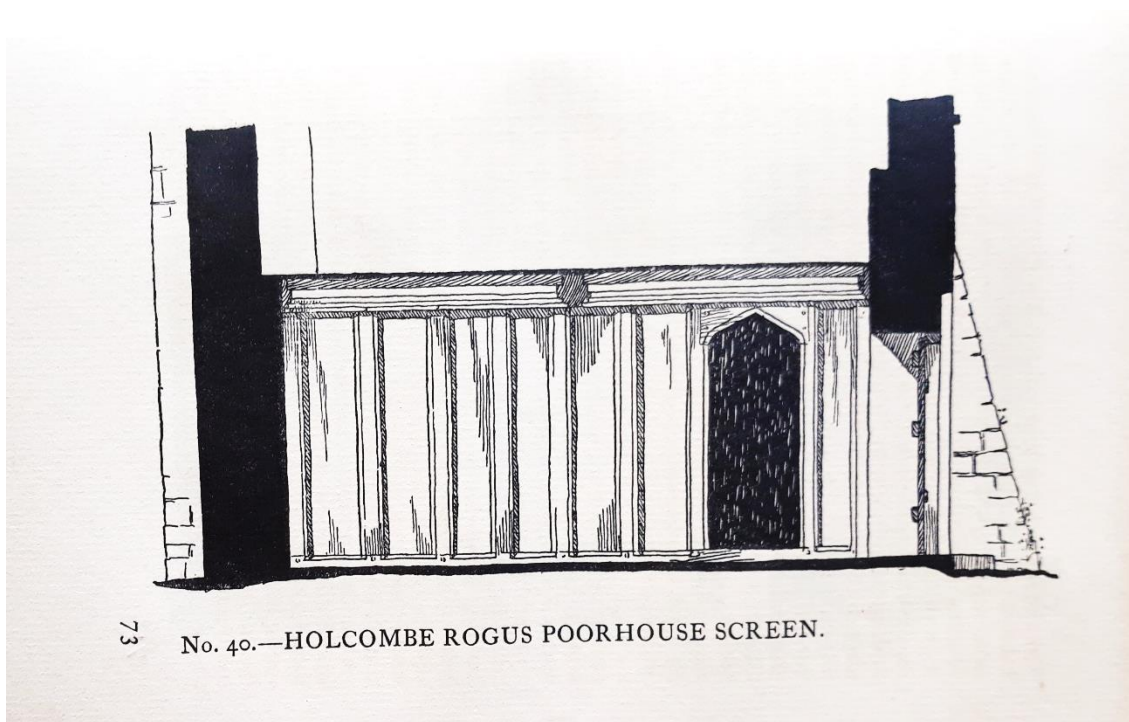
So there you have two arguments: the ceiling as nearly original, or as a recent insertion. Against both theories counter arguments can be produced, and nothing very solid can be said in favour either. It would help if there was a detailed description of the work carried out by Mrs Rayer, or if there was a record of an earlier restoration, perhaps under the tenure of Peter Bluett, the supposed Cornish cousin who inherited in 1786 under the will of Buckland Bluett, after no direct male heir could be traced, who was an improving landlord and lived until 1825. (Disaster after disaster fragmented the Bluett family in the 17th and 18th centuries, in one case the death of grandfather, eldest son, and eldest grandson all within six weeks). Such evidence has yet to be found.

In fact, Ashbee solves the enigma still further in an earlier book, *A Book of Cottages and Little Houses: for Landlords, Architects, Builders and Others* published in 1906. He includes his work on 'the Holcombe Rogus Poorhouse, 'which I am at present setting in order' as a case study, writing:

'That newer social conscience which is beginning to touch us – an awakening of conscience, perhaps, after our long spell in individualism – is having the result of making us look with greater care and reverence upon works of this character. More and more of such buildings are being revealed to us. We are beginning to realise their purpose and object in the past. We are beginning to ask ourselves whether in the village life of our own time it should not be our duty to put them again to communal service. The new life that is beginning to shape itself often grows articulate in these beautiful settings of long ago. They seem once again to have for us an imaginative purpose....



C R Ashbee's plan of the Priest's House in 1906.



Ashbee's drawing of the surviving screen in 1906.

Like all Gothic village buildings, there is a noble and broad simplicity about it [the Priest's House]. It is so obviously not the work of the complex designer from afar, but of the village craftsman schooled in centuries of tradition. In this case, too, a peculiar interest attaches to his handling of timber.

A glance at the plan [opposite] will show the extraordinary dignity obtained in the two fireplaces by the placing of the two immense timbers that carry the chimney stacks, of which one is shown.

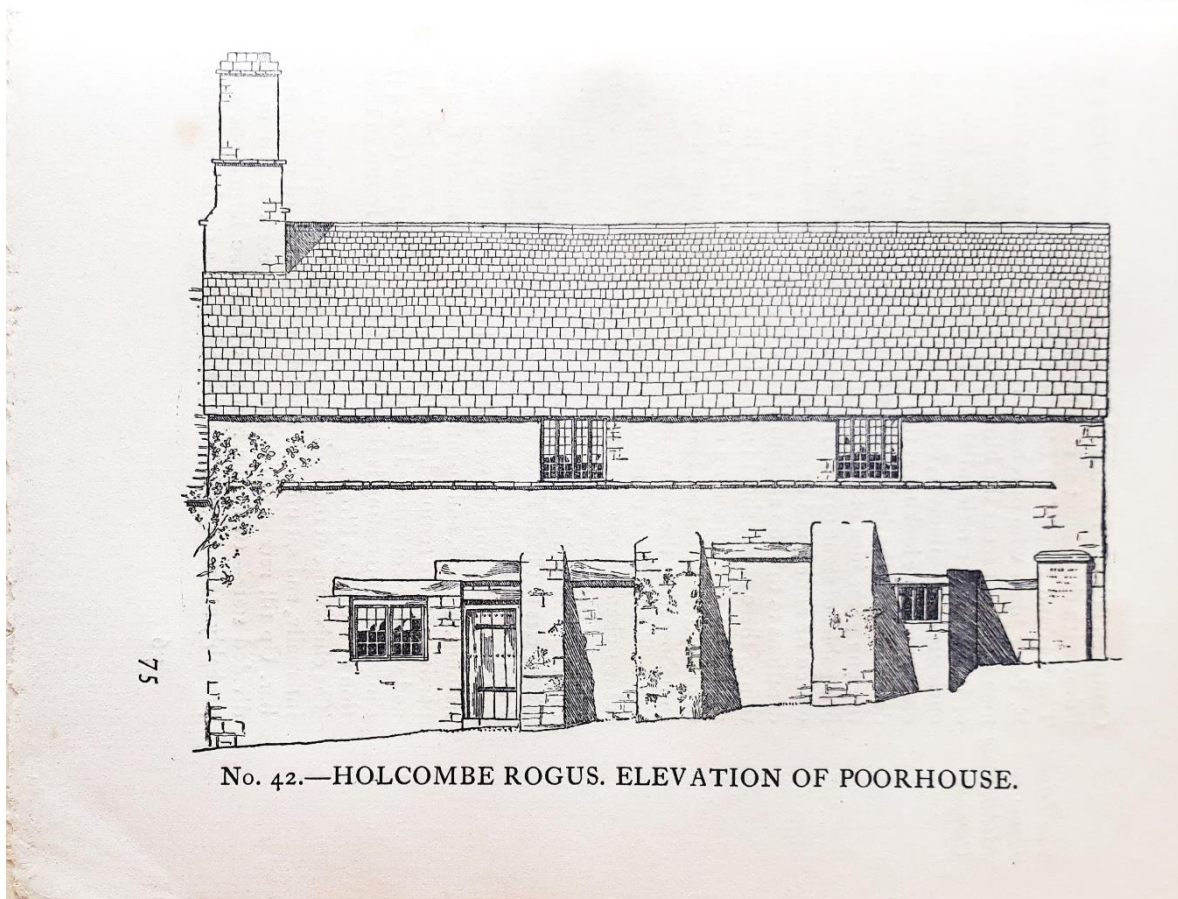
The two screen also have a character and style of their own. Like other similar buildings, especially such as had an ecclesiastical connection, there was once an external staircase in the Holcombe House on the church side; and the large screened room on the ground floor is so disposed that it must to my thinking have been used for some communal purpose in the village, some guild or fraternity. Medieval life was infinitely various and delightful, and its building shows this; but, as the historian knows, it rested upon local government, upon an order corporately regulated by the villagers or townsmen. The architectural unit or shell in all cases was duly blessed by the church, & was committed to the care of the "religious", using the word in its old sense, i.e. to the keepers of some chantry, to the chaplains of some guild.

*By a disastrous mistake, the result of the handing over the building to those who did not appreciate its importance, the screen and upper floor were removed and the great beam that carried the rafters had been sawn across. I had as my guide a report drawn up by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings before the demolition; and the bulk of the old timbers, which had been somewhat unceremoniously stacked together in a local builder's yard, were carefully sorted out and set once again in position. The great central beam was tied with iron, flitched, and supported under the beam.'*²

Tantalisingly, Ashbee's account ends here, so does not mention a rebuilding of the wall heads. His account demonstrates the resilience of timber framing even when dismantled, and the required forensic attention to detail in reassembling and reinstating the same - even if the fact that his repairs were so exemplary that they confused a conservation architect as experienced as Peter Bird in the 1980s does rather run confuse the SPAB philosophy of honest repair.

² Pp. 71-2.

However, in his writings, and in the careful SPAB archive, we do indeed find



the trail to follow, underlining yet again how important it is for all of us who deal with historic buildings to record our own interventions into their fabric.

Drawing of the Poorhouse, as Ashbee knew the Priest's House, in 1906.



The west elevation – 1983



The east elevation. The roof repairs to the northern half, after a tree fell on the building in the 1960s, are clearly visible.



The ground floor in 1983. At this point, neither screen is in place (compare with Ashbee's floorplan above), the one he recorded having been removed during the 20th century. The large fireplace in what is today the entrance hall would have been used for the communal brewing and baking necessary for the church ales.



The ground floor 'parlour' fireplace in 1983 (today's sitting room). This would have heated a relatively high status meeting room (note the moulded ceiling timbers).



The first floor in 1983. Such integral fireplaces are a distinctive feature of church houses as civic buildings, at a time before they were still relatively rare in domestic dwellings. However, this one has probably been inserted at a later date.

Restoration by the Landmark Trust

In 1983, the owner of Holcombe Court, Mrs Dobree, put the Priest's House up for sale, with planning permission to turn it into a house. She was concerned for the building's future, and this seemed to be the only way of securing it. The sales particulars waxed lyrical about the Priest's House as 'a superb example of medieval England and [it] offers immense potential for imaginative conversion to a dwelling house with a wealth of character features [sic]. Planning permission obtained for the modernisation of this property and architect's plans are available for the alteration.'

However, the site is a very constricted one, squeezed between the lane, the churchyard and the garden of the Court, with only a small patch of land that would go with it to the south of the stable. And although the exterior of the building would remain the same, the interior, if it was to become a home, was unlikely to have been restored to anything like its original form. So when Landmark heard of the sale, there seemed to be good reasons for trying to buy it (these were the days when the Trust was still largely funded by our founder John Smith's Manifold Trust). Mrs Dobree agreed, both that the house would be well preserved and that its use as a Landmark would not be as intrusive as a permanent home, and the sale was concluded in August 1982.

The restoration of the house did not prove complicated, and was completed in only about nine months. This was because the building itself was basically sound. The north gable did have to be taken down and rebuilt, as did the two chimneys, but otherwise the walls only needed some repointing. The northern half of the roof had been renewed in the 1960s when a tree had fallen on it in a gale, bringing down both part of the west wall as well. As a result, the northern half was covered in Welsh slate, and the southern in local Treborough slates. The latter were salvaged and used for the stable roof, but the house was re-covered with new Delabole slates, which are more in

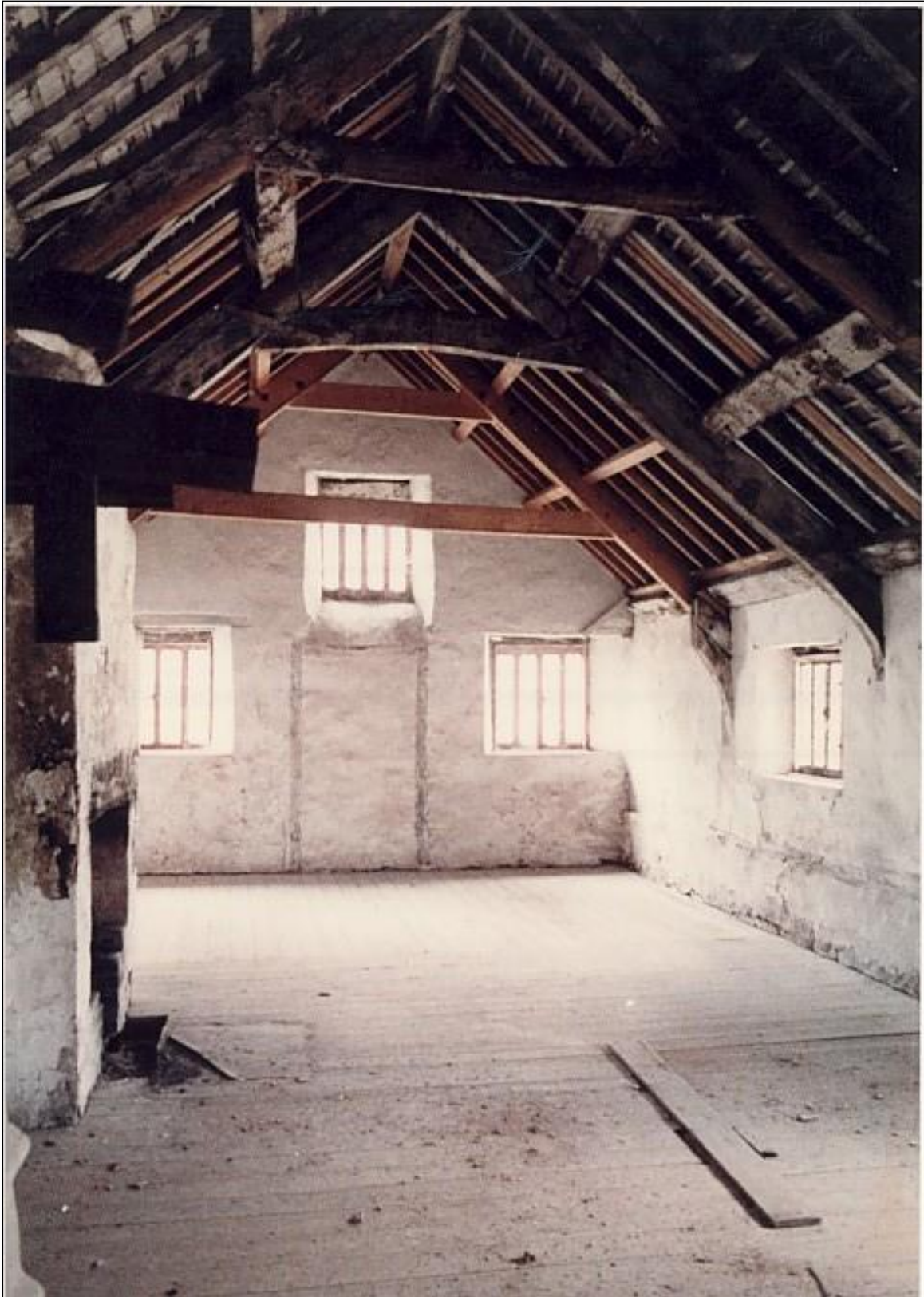
character with the originals. The roof structure itself needed only minimal repair.

The windows were also in good condition, needing only minor repairs, and in some cases a new lintel or cill, and re-glazing. All the repairs were made in oak. Three new windows were inserted, also of oak, and copied from the originals; one on the west in the former doorway towards Holcombe Court, which being no longer needed, it was desirable to block up; and two on the east in old openings. To make one, an 18th-century tombstone used as blocking had to be carefully moved. Inside, the great fireplace lintel and the chimney above it needed some reinforcing with steel ties and bearers, and the lintel itself, which was found to be hollow, has been strengthened by the injection of epoxy resin.

The floor frame itself needed some repair, to the end of beams for example, and one section which was charred has been renewed. The burn mark on the west fireplace was only made quite recently however, while the house was used as a builder's store.

The partitions are entirely new, though in old positions, and copying what was there originally. The oak, like that of the windows, has simply been waxed. The floor is of Hamstone flags, which matched the sandstone in the great fireplace. Much old lime plaster survived on the walls, and this has been patched, and then limewashed to a colour close to what was there before.

The soffits, or undersides of the ceiling boards, have, like the new staircase, been painted a good mediaeval red. Traces of such a red can just be seen on the oak newel post, which have been left uncovered.



The first floor in 1983, the original external entrance in its north elevation clearly apparent. Seen here before the inserted ceiling was added by Landmark in the 1980s, the roof timbers are revealed as relatively plain.

Upstairs new partition walls have been inserted - there would not have been any originally, since the village feasts would have been held there, with people seated at trestle tables - and also a ceiling. This was necessary because otherwise the necessary bedrooms would have been too high for their size, and the northern half of the roof is in any case undistinguished.

The big chimney breast has been cut back to make extra room. To provide soundproofing and insulation felt was laid on the existing deal floorboards - which probably date from c.1900 - and then on top, lying crossways, wider elm boards.

Church houses are building type whose construction died out centuries ago. Yet in them, as C. R. Ashbee knew, there took place some of the most popularly imagined scenes of medieval and Tudor life - the stomping of feet, the banging of tankards, the merriment of revellers and mummery. Such imagery is deeply entrenched in our collective memory of Merrie England, perhaps not just because of the Victorian revivalism whose disciple Ashbee undoubtedly was. In this house, if anywhere, it should be possible to catch an echo of this village life of long ago.

Charlotte Haslam

October 1985

Updated by Caroline Stanford

June 2019

2021 refurbishment

In late 2021, we added a second bathroom and housekeeper store by converting the (little used) single bedroom overlooking the church, realigning the partition wall to add a communicating door from the double bedroom. Partition walls were

also realigned in the north east corner of the landing and a door from the landing was added leading into the original bathroom, which now becomes a shower room.

Extract from *Devonshire Church-Houses* by G.W. Copeland F.A.M.S

held, with more or less profit to the adjoining church, the parish feast, which, as befitted a place where ale could often be bought, was attended by much drinking. It thus bore some resemblance to the modern parish hall, just as the feast is vaguely, if more soberly, represented by the modern church bazaar.

The lord's brew-house, or the common brew-house, does indeed appear to have been in existence as early as the 12th century. It was held in common by the tenants of the manor and the lord thereof, and for its use a quarterly rent was usually paid. In the early days the building had many designations: scot ale-house, tap-house, give ale-house, church ale-house and merely ale-house, or parish-house, with all of which the term church-house is more or less cognate. The ancient origin of these buildings accounts for the many very early ascriptions of the existing structures.¹ But the present church-house is a descendant of the lord's brew-house and not a rebuilding of it.

From an inventory delivered to the churchwardens of Yatton, Somerset, in 1492 we learn that the church-house in that village contained the following equipment:—

a kettle, or great brewing-cauldron
 2 great crocks, or earthenware pots
 2 smaller crocks
 4 pans
 a bottom for a pan
 a brandiron, or gridiron
 5 tun-vats
 a keeve vat, or tub for brewing
 2 troughs
 9 stands for barrels
 21 trendles, or brewer's coolers
 6 tablecloths

We may assume that such contents could be found in most brew-houses. But a church-house, in the full meaning of the term, had many more. The Yatton example, from 1492 to 1545, had a chamber, sometimes called the 'high chamber', on an upper floor. This room contained trestles; a broach, or spit; and a cowle, or measure for ale. In 1473 it had a well lined with stone, and the well was furnished with a

¹One Church House Inn flaunts a sign proclaiming its establishment as an inn in 1028!

DEVONSHIRE CHURCH-HOUSES

BY G. W. COPELAND F.A.M.S.

CHURCH-HOUSES, particularly in Devon, constitute a branch of minor antiquities which has not hitherto received the consideration which, in the opinion of the writer, it deserves. Though generally of a simple and straightforward plan and arrangement within, they nearly always have some architectural pretensions, so that they not only merit study for their former social importance but have some claim to retention and preservation as buildings.

Miss Lilian Sheldon, in a paper on Devon inns read to the Devonshire Association in 1937 (*Transactions* lxi), stated that there was a church-house in nearly every ancient parish in this county. This is probably true, and she adds that the sign of the 'Church House Inn' is a commoner sight in Devon than in any other part of England.

The theory has been propounded that church-houses as such were erected before the churches themselves to serve as shelter for the craftsmen engaged in building the churches. If this were so, there would surely be some remnants of this early architecture. Without exception, however, the architectural evidence offered by the buildings indicates that, as they are, they were erected from the mid-15th to the late 16th century and certainly not much earlier. The Rev. H. R. Evans hit the nail on the head when he said, in a paper on the history of Broadhempston read at a meeting of the Parochial History Section in 1959, that when the church at Broadhempston was rebuilt early in the 15th century a church-house had also been *built*. There is no evidence that the latter was *rebuilt*. Documentary evidence, however, important though it may be, is often capable of being misinterpreted and must on occasion give way to the comparative and stylistic system of ascribing dates.

The church-house evolved from the lord's brew-house, which is the earliest type of building in which there is any definite record of the national beverage having been brewed. It was not an inn, as the term is now understood, but in it was

bucket and an iron chain. In 1508 this well was called the 'church well'. In 1516 the churchwardens accounted for ten yards of crest cloth, a kind of linen used for making meat-cloths, for use in the church-house. In the following year it had a pump and 'segges', or seats or benches. In 1526 it acquired a dozen and a half drinking-bowls; in 1538 a fireplace with a 'clavey', or wooden lintel; in 1531 two kilderkins, two salt-cellars and a ladle; and in 1555 it was let to a tenant. It will be noticed that the arrival of the fireplace was a rather late event, which must have necessitated some structural alteration.

Again, we may safely assume that the growth of this brew-house into a church-house indicates what took place to a greater or lesser degree elsewhere. Some church-houses even had gardens, and we learn that the stock of trenchers, cups, bowls, etc. was constantly being replaced, or replenished, by the churchwardens. They had virtually become places of entertainment, and inns more or less as we know them to-day. In addition to the normal uses to which these buildings were put, as Miss Sheldon points out, they were the rendezvous of people after the church service, and neighbouring parishioners visited one another in them, and freely spent their money together. Housekeepers met and made merry; young people danced, bowled or shot at butts outside; and on holy days the neighbours met there and unhesitatingly fed on their own victuals and contributed a small amount of their own to the general stock. It was therefore natural that the brewing and baking for church feasts should be carried out under the same roof.

On plan the church-house is generally rectangular; it is usually, but not always, of two storeys. In some examples the upper floor is reached by an external lateral flight of stone steps. The fireplace, open and often of very generous width with an oven at one side, is on the ground floor in a room which corresponded to the kitchen of a private dwelling. A part of this room was very often partitioned off to accommodate a cellar or a store-chamber. The upper floor is partly upheld by stout oak beams, sometimes plainly chamfered and simply end-stopped but sometimes quite elaborately moulded. This floor has either an open-timber roof or a plain flat plaster ceiling, probably inserted later; and there

are frequently rectangular wall recesses to serve as cupboards. Occasionally the windows have inner wooden shutters. The walls are of either granite or freestone ashlar, rubble masonry, cob or an admixture of cob and masonry. If of cob, they are plastered and colour-washed. In short, we have in the late medieval church-house the essential arrangements that form at least part of large and small private houses of the same period throughout the county. The writer knows of only one example which has preserved the name 'church ale-house'. This is at Stockland, where it now forms part of the outbuildings of Churchstyle Farm, quite near the church. It has a thatched roof, like so many others, and is of one storey only. The church-house which enjoyed the late medieval luxury of a garderobe or its counterpart still remains to be discovered in Devon.

In some cases unfortunately it seems to have been found necessary to alter the fronts of the buildings, so that it is only by going round to the rear that the antiquity, and perhaps the function, of the building is revealed, e.g. in the survival of a projecting rectangular stair-turret abutting into the churchyard and (as frequently) retaining its original little stone-framed window. The staircases in these 'turrets', whether of stone or wood, were entered through a doorway in the principal downstairs room, as in other houses of the period.

Usually the church-house stood, and in many cases it still stands, very near the parish church, and often it abuts into the churchyard. In 1636, for instance, we hear of a feast being kept 'in the Church-house joyning to the Church'. Whether 'joyning' means 'annexed structurally', which is unlikely, is not clear, but it undoubtedly means 'very near to'. In 1593 a writer named Nashe wrote: 'Hath not the diuell [devil] hys Chapell close adioning to God's Church?' Again, in 1696, there is the statement: 'As like a Church and an alehouse, God and the divell, they manie times dwell ncere together.' Ale was indeed sometimes sold in the church itself or in an annexed building such as the porch.

I have records so far of 64 church-houses in Devon. Of these 18 are inns; 3 were inns until comparatively recently, but are now private dwellings; and 2 are derelict or fragmentary.

Broadhempston	Holne	Stoke Gabriel
Churchstow	Marldon	Stoketeignhead
Denbury	Rattery	Stokenham
Harberton	Staverton	Torbryan

At the following villages the signs have been changed:—
 Broadhembury (the Drewe Arms; formerly the Red Lion)
 Buckland Monachorum (the Drake Manor; formerly the Manor)
 Meavy (the Royal Oak)
 Newton Poppleford (the Excter)
 Whitchurch (the Whitchurch)
 Yacombe (the Yacombe)

Those that were inns until a few years ago are at:—
 Bickington Walkhampton Woodleigh

The most interesting architecturally of the structures still remaining are the following:—

Bovey Tracey	Isington	Stoke St. Neñian (Hartland)
Braunton	Lamerton	Throwleigh
Broadhembury	Marldon	Thurlestone
Churchstow	Meavy	Torbryan
Dowland	Pinhoe	Walkhampton
Drewsteignton	Rattery	Widcombe-in-the-Moor
Harberton	South Tavton	
Holcombe Rogus	Stoke Gabriel	

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Surviving documents throw some light on a few examples. The earliest mention of a church-house at Alphington (now no more) appears to be 3 October 1499 (*temp.* Henry VII). By a deed of December 1575 (*temp.* Elizabeth I) William Courtenay granted to some parishioners a piece of land at a rent of 1d. per annum to build a church-house. The rental was paid to viscount Courtenay until 1821. This church-house became the Admiral Vernon inn, which, however, stood farther north than the present inn of the same name. It appears to have stood at a corner and to have had a thatched roof. It was burnt down c. 1875, and the land was afterwards sold for the site of the present schools. The money invested now yields c. 18 guineas per annum. Note that this church-house was built, not rebuilt, in 1515.

According to Kelly, the small church-house at Exbourne, now reduced to one wall, was built in 1506-7. It was of rather crude granite construction and retained the remains of a granite-framed window and a large rectangular fireplace which occupied almost the whole width of the building, a frequent characteristic of these houses. On the left was an oven with a granite-domed roof. The house actually stood in the north-west corner of the churchyard. Note again when this example was built.

It is stated of Sherford that the wardens and parishioners held the church-house there at a rental of 2d. per annum (*temp.* late Henry VIII or later). 'Henry Hingston holds by lease of the grant of ye Lady Trevelyn, dated 1 April, 1689, the moiety of a messuage commonly called the Church House and a p[arcel] of land, being 20' in length and 8' in breadth next adjoining thereto, for 99 years' if Pancras Hingston, son of Henry, live so long.' The yearly rent was 5s., a 'fatt' hen, heriot and suit of court. 'Philip Davys holds by lease of the grant of John Willoughby, Esq., dated April 2, 1679, one moiety of the Church House, viz: all ye south, or lower, part of the said house, as the same is now divided, and a parcel of waste ground containing 20' in length and 8' in breadth, being at the north end of the said house; together [with] the moiety of all that piece of land lying at the higher end, and next adjoining to Tuckerman's house, for 99 years; another lease of like grant determinable on the death of Mary: Rent 6/8, Herriot 5/-, Suit of Court.' (Lady Trevelyan was Willoughby's daughter and heiress.)

The earliest deed with reference to the church-house at Thurlestone (which is unusual in that it is not anywhere near the church) dates from 1536 and the latest from 1616. A certain Nicholas Aysford was one of the joint patrons of the benefice when the land for the building of the house was given. For a time a half of it was rented by the overseers of the poor as a poor-house. On a buttress in front of the building there still remains a freestone shield on which are carved the arms of Aysford: argent between 2 chevrons sable 3 ashen keys proper. The shield appears to have been held by an angel. Of the use of the building as a poor-house there remained as reminders a large table, a form, some pewter plates and a broken bedstead.

RELATIONSHIP TO POOR-HOUSES AND PRIEST'S HOUSES

Although the church-houses that we have been considering are not likely to be confused with the modern buildings sometimes used for ecclesiastical business, changes of function in the course of history have led to a certain confusion between church-houses and both poor-houses and 'priest's houses', so that it is desirable to examine briefly the relationship between them.

In a paper on 'Church Houses in Devon' read to the Devonshire Association in 1900 (*Transactions* xxxii. 209-11) The Rev. John B. Pearson, D.D., enumerated 61 church-houses, of which, however, he pointed out that the following had been entered in the Charity Commission's records in 1818 as 'poor houses':

Ashpington	Hatherleigh
Aveton Gifford	Heanton Punchardon
Berrynarbor	Heavitree
Bishop's Tawton	Holsworthy
Bridgerule (and school)	Ideford
Brixham (one of four)	Ilington
Chagford (and school)	Kenton
Cheldon	Manaton
Cheriton Bishop	Moretonhampstead (one of three)
Cheriton Fitzpaine (and school)	Otterton
Combeinteignhead	St. Thomas (two)
Cornworthy	South Brent (let as such)
Dean Prior	Talaton
Diptford	West Alvington (two)
Dittisham (rebuilt as such)	Whitestone (and school)
Dowland	Widecombe-in-the-Moor
East Worlington	Winkleigh
Exminster	

At Bradninch the house was the dwelling of the sexton and served as a vestry. At Brixham it was *replaced* by a poor-house; at Chudleigh it was a house for the sexton and the schoolmaster; at Halwell it was the house of the parish clerk and was occasionally used by the curate; at Littleham-by-Exmouth it was again a house for the sexton and a vestry room; at Dartington it was a school-house; and at Holcombe Burnell it is described as having been formerly a house but 'let down' in 1780. It seems clear that the church-house,

built as such, sometimes became a poor-house but that some poor-houses had not necessarily been church-houses.

It is curious that the author describes only one in the list as a 'church house' (at Alphington), but that some of the others were church-houses seems clear from the documentary evidence which he cites:

'At Heavitree, by a deed of 11 Sept., 1516, John Kelly, lord of the manor, granted some of the parishioners a piece of land, 66 feet long by 26 feet broad, to build a *church house*, on condition that the soul of the said John Kelly should be commemorated in the church as a benefactor. Under this clause the house lapsed to the Crown in the reign of Edward VI, but was purchased again in 1573 from the grantees of the Crown and renewed as a parish-house, which it continued to be in 1820.'

'At Dean Prior, in 5th Henry VIII (1513), the prior and convent of Plympton granted a piece of land for building a *church house*, at a yearly rent of 4d. In 1820 this house was used as a poor house, the overseers paying the churchwardens a rent of £4.10s. per annum, which was expended on the repairs of the church.'

'At Highweek . . . the *church house* had been granted by Richard Yarde, in 1513, to Owen Babb and others, at a rent of one penny.'

'At Bridgerule . . . in 1535, the Stukely family granted to some inhabitants of the place a piece of land, 60 feet by 24, to build a house to be called the *church house*, at a yearly rental of 12d. This rent continued to be paid to the lord of the manor at a recent date, the house being used partly as a school, partly as a poor house.'

It seems fairly clear that the poor-house was but an occasional, and late, evolution of the church-house proper.

Whatever their purposes were or became, these houses appear to have been invariably vested in trustees or *seoffees* and not to have been a part of the property of the benefice. The rent from them, however, was not infrequently devoted to church repairs. Mr. Pearson suggests that some of them were lost owing to the fact that the parishioners were unable to establish a title against the lord of the manor, whose property rights at the dawn of the 18th century were more extensive than they are now. He also suggests that 'some

few' may have been sold under the provisions of the Poor Law.

It is not altogether clear why certain obvious church-houses are still known, at least locally, as 'priests's houses' (e.g. at Lamerton and 'Priesthill' in Kentisbeare). Houses were indeed granted by the dean of the cathedral for the use of the vicar as a dwelling on certain conditions, e.g. keeping the house in repair and contributing an annual sum to the parishioners, who in turn contributed towards the vicar's maintenance, as at Halwell in 1474. But we must not infer that the parish priest dwelt in a church-house in its proper sense. A church-house may have been used temporarily as a dwelling, but at best it would have been an exiguous one, not at all comparable to the many well-known late medieval parsonages.

It is also curious that only 13 out of the 61 are among the 64 in the list compiled by the present author, which admittedly includes some that are doubtful and does not profess to be a complete list of surviving examples.

The Ashprington house was demolished in 1865; that at Culmstock suffered a like fate; and that at Bridford was destroyed by fire in 1894. The church-house at Chagford may have originated in St. Mary's guild chapel. At one time it was a school-house. The date on a shield to be seen on the front of the house seems to be an indication of some alteration or change in the function of the building, which is clearly earlier than 1709. It is quite possible that its present use as a church-house may be a reversion to its original purpose. The church-house at Colyton was formerly the grammar school and is an attractive building bearing the date 1612. That so called at Exeter appears to represent No. 73 in the Abstract of Rentals, and as far back as 1441 the original house was classified as one of the canons' houses. That at Sidmouth is an attractive, fairly late 18th century quasi town-house, once in its own grounds.

BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS

BROADHEMBURY

A house of two adjoining and aligned wings, that south the principal one, and thatched. The entrance is through a small porch of a single stage in the north wing, which is of lower elevation. In the right wall of the porch is a very narrow

squint. The inner doorway has a moulded oak rectangular frame and an old door. The larger wing has a very good stone-framed late 15th century rectangular window of five lights to the ground floor front. It is well moulded and has carved spandrels. The rooms have occasional old oak ceiling-beams; at the porch end of the main room is some lincen-fold panelling; and at the other end is the large open fireplace. This house is near to, but not quite in, the churchyard, to the north. Now an inn.

CHURCHSTOW

Unlike the above, the walls of which are plastered and colour-washed, the walls of this house are of well cut and jointed ashlar. At the west end of the slated roof is a very prominent chimney-stack. The windows are wooden-framed replacements, but in the centre of the upper floor is a round-headed window with incipient wooden tracery over a good example of the South Hams type of round-headed doorway, slightly chamfered and with long voussoirs. The front retains its chamfered plinth and the remains of a similarly moulded stone wall-plate. The rooms have massive oak ceiling-beams; and in the bar is a huge fireplace with a segmental head of red stone. This house is on the main road and opposite the south side of the church. Now an inn.

DOWLAND

A picturesque thatched house south-east of the church and abutting into the churchyard. A rather large example. On the churchyard side the windows are restorations and/or copies of the original oak-framed ones, with round-headed lights and sunk spandrels. The wall on this side is of exposed stonework; and there are good stone chimney-stacks, especially on the end-gables. The interior has been somewhat modernized to meet the requirements of a dwelling-house but retains a few original structural features.

DREWSTEIGNTON

An interesting and well-restored two-storey building, largely of granite ashlar, abutting into the south side of the churchyard and now used as a parish hall. It is very strongly built of granite, with thick walls and splayed window embrasures. At the west end is a prominent chimney-breast supporting a stack with a conical cap, of the same material as the rest. The windows are all modern wooden-framed replacements. To the front are two plain doorways reached