A VIEW FROM THE RAFTERS

December 2020 **No. 2**

A visit to Barton Farm, Bradford-on-Avon in 2011

Editorial

A warm welcome to the 2nd edition of our 'extra' newsletter for you to ramble through at leisure with a cuppa. In this series we are looking back at extracts from old newsletters. If the spirit moves you, please pass this on to friends. WBR has produced 160 newsletters so far. In 2005, in the 100th issue, Pam drew attention to the improvements to office technology she had witnessed since starting out. Reading her article 15 years on, I am abundantly grateful for my laptop, scanner and digital photography! WBR produce commissioned reports for private home-owners and professionals. A house history could be a lovely gift. If you are not a member, please consider supporting us. Subscriptions are surprisingly inexpensive and membership helps us carry on. We hope you find something to entertain - topics are random and articles not necessarily in chronological order. Your feedback and contributions are appreciated. **Alyson Curtis**

Early WBR Newsletters (no 100, Jun 2005)

Pam hard at work forging a future for WBR (photo: Alan Thomsett in 1988)

Newsletter No. 1 was issued in September 1979. It was sent to the people who replied to our original letter to the newspapers in the Spring appealing for information, to people who came to the Inaugural Meeting in May, and other people who had shown interest in the project.

Members now numbered about 40 and the Committee had been set up.

We had been offered office space in the upper workroom of Devizes Library instead of the room originally offered in a private house in Long Street. I started work as Organiser for 10 hours a week, with the office open 10am-1pm on Tuesdays. We had an initial training session on recording led by Peter Nicholson at Pothecary's Barn, Stockton over three days in July. Peter was a good teacher, I remember learning what a purlin was that day!

I thought younger members might be amused to hear how our first newsletters were produced. I had to type them (with a typewriter of course) on 'skins' which were given to John Duxbury, Secretary of Devizes Museum to run off copies on their Roneo duplicating machine. The typewriter cut out the shapes of the letters in the wax on the top film of the skin. You had to try very hard not to make any typing errors. When, inevitably you did, you filled in the letter with nail varnish and retyped it when dry. The person working the Roneo machine had to refill it with ink at intervals and usually got it all over their hands. You had to clean the wax out of your typewriter letters or the impression became blurred.

The resulting duplicated newsletters were very variable in quality depending on how they were inked. On one occasion there were some bad ones in the batch, and I hesitated to send them out to members. I took them to the Committee meeting, explained and asked if they would mind having them. I remember Peter Treloar from Calne saying ruefully, 'I see, so this is Committee quality!'. What a blessing to have a word processor and a photo copier nowadays.

Pam Slocombe

Reader's feedback from last issue - The Man at Barton Farm

Responding to the article in the last edition about this charming picture of the dairyman at Barton Farm (left), we were thrilled when member Chris Peachey told us he was the proud recipient of a smock. He supplied a photo of more smock-wearing men. He went on to say, *"The photo is of father and son Ursall, whose mother-in-law/grandmother made the smock for me, the late (great and lovely) Mary Henley. So, son now wearing my smock, and Dad wearing one she had made for him, at her funeral. As you can see - much too good to go milking in - I wore mine for weddings and funerals - and Wassailing."*

Picture from Paul De'Ath's book 'Around Bradford-on-Avon'

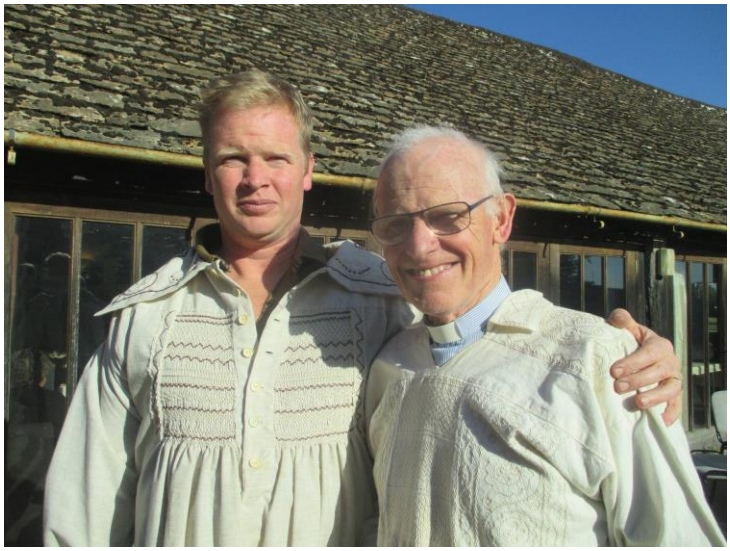


Photo supplied by Chris Peachey

Gauging rule for stone slates left in church roof – (no 110, Jan 2008)

A 'whippet stick' (left) was found in the roof of St Michael's Church, Brinkworth during repair work. The visit to see the re-roofing was arranged by Liz Smith, Conservation Officer at Swindon Borough via Brian Gibbons for Andrew Townsend Architects on 5th December 2007. It is supposed that the stick was used very much as the one on the right, being wielded by Chris Mattingley of Everest Roofing, to size stone tiles during the last re-roofing and was left there.

Dorothy Treasure

Old 'whippet stick' left in church roof

Chris Mattingley measuring stone tiles

A Plaster Pair (no 140, Jun 2015)

Member, David Feather is a room steward at Westwood Manor who has been researching the wonderful plasterwork there. He was struck by the similarity of a frieze in the King's Room and that in Priory Barn Cottage in Newtown, Bradford-on-Avon. At Priory Barn cottage, the frieze was re-installed in 1972 after the demolition in 1970 of Merchant's Barton, a modest 17th century clothier's house in Frome.

He writes:

"…after I obtained information about the ceiling in Priory Barn cottage in Bradford-on-Avon, I finally got to see and photograph it a couple of weeks ago. I showed my photographs to Emily Aziz at Westwood Manor and she agrees with me that the frieze must be from the same moulds as that in the King's room at Westwood.

The ceiling also has similar characteristics to that in The Great Parlour at Westwood. So it seems highly likely that the same group of plasterers worked in Frome on Merchants Barton, where the Bradford-on-Avon ceiling came from, and at Westwood, although we cannot name them."

Frieze at Priory Barn Cottage

Frieze at Westwood Manor ***(Photos: David Feather)***

The position of smoke louvres in medieval halls (no 109, Sep 2007)

In the Jan 2007 newsletter of the Vernacular Architecture Group John Walker of Ipswich requested information on the above. Sarah Pearson in *'Medieval Houses of Kent'* had stated that the louvres tend to be in the low end bay, close to the central truss.

Base of smoke louvre at Rowde. Note pegging for slipped board on right.

The low end is the service end in a standard medieval 3-room and cross passage plan. The parlour is at the high or most prestigious end, then comes the hall followed by the cross passage and finally the service room or rooms which later became the kitchen.

The houses of husbandmen farmers and tradesmen tend to have the hall in one single bay with a roof truss at each end. The houses of yeomen farmers, the clergy and more important people have a hall two bays long, and therefore having a central open (not partitioned) truss. Large manor houses and other very important houses often have halls 3 bays long.

John thought Sarah's comment was broadly true of Kent, Sussex and Hampshire but was not the case elsewhere. So he had drawn up a list of examples from elsewhere, and had found some with the louvre over the cross passage, some at the central truss and others over either the high or the low end of the hall.

Robin Harvey sent him our Winsley example, where the louvre adjoins the central truss on the low end side. I looked at nine other Wiltshire examples to send and was surprised to find that Wiltshire does seem to conform to the Hampshire and South East pattern. In the earliest cruck examples, the cruck was partially cut away at the apex on the low end side to accommodate the louvre base. In later examples, the louvre was up to a yard (300mm) from the central truss on the low end side.

Clearly this is another thing for us to look out for when studying medieval roofs.

Pam Slocombe

Fieldwork report [Dorothy's first site visits for WBR] (no 57, Sep 1994)

Since starting with WBR in July, I have been to visit the remains of an 18th or 19th century cob wall in Bratton which enclosed part of the Old Manor farmyard, now a housing estate, a possible sheephouse at Moors Farm, East Knoyle and 10 High Street, Wootton Bassett, an 18th century town house with the date '1768' scratched into an attic window.

Possible sheephouse at Moors Farm

Do any of our members know of any other possible sheephouses in the county? Salient features include a low eaves height (approx. 5 ft at Moors Farm) and being set in an isolated site. Previous possible examples out of the county are in a variety of materials including timber framing and cob. They could be anything from about 20 to 150 ft long.

The building at Moors Farm once had a thatched, hipped roof and was 4 bays long with vertical boarded walls. It probably dated from around 1800.

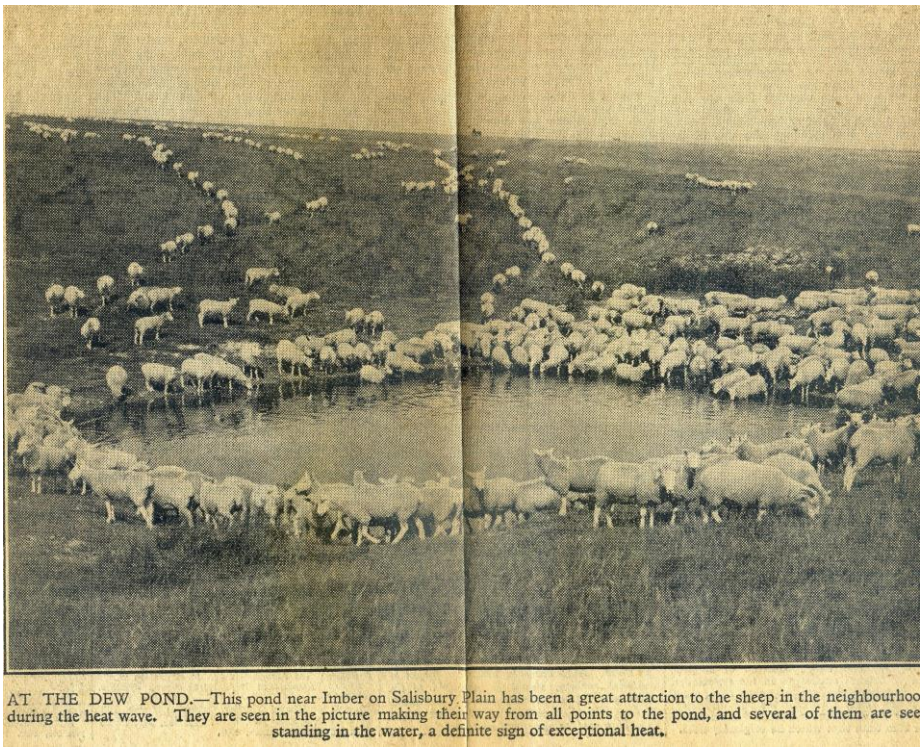
Dorothy Treasure

More on Sheephouses (no 58, Jan 1995)

In the last newsletter the possible sheephouse of about 1800 with low eaves … was mentioned. Dorothy Treasure has pointed out that a field shelter at West Kennett looking like an implement shed is another possible candidate. Field names (eg Sheephouse Leaze at Marston), farm names (eg Sheephouse Farm, East Knoyle) and estate surveys (eg in the 1631-2 Pembroke estate survey) suggest they were once a common building type in the county and it should be possible to identify some definite surviving examples.

In 1391, 105 feet of ridge tiles were sent to Tisbury from Bradford-on-Avon for a Shaftesbury Abbey new sheephouse there. In 1741 Jeffery Whitaker of Bratton mentioned in his diary that he and two others 'new boarded the sheephouse'.

Pam Slocombe



AT THE DEW POND.—This pond near Imber on Salisbury Plain has been a great attraction to the sheep in the neighbourhoo during the heat wave. They are seen in the picture making their way from all points to the pond, and several of them are see standing in the water, a definite sign of exceptional heat.

Today in 2020, thinking about sheep in Wiltshire, Pam noticed an interesting photo.

It was in a cutting which was enclosed in a copy of 'The Green Roads of England' given by member Nick Maslen for our next Study Day book sale.

19th August 1932 clipping showing sheep at a dew pond during a heat wave

The cutting is dated August 19th 1932 and shows a dew pond near Imber with vast numbers of sheep coming to drink and cool off. They follow their paths single file. It shows how the extensive grazing of the open plain was used mainly for sheep.

There are examples from 16th and 17th century wills of farmers in the valleys around the Plain owning sheep, being looked after at Imber, Tilshead, Knook and other places. By 1932, all of the Imber farmers had sold their land to the War Office in return for tenancies, the beginning of the end for the village. Rex Sawyer describes dewpond making there in his book, 'Little Imber on the Down'.

Sheep were so important in Wiltshire but leave little trace in farmsteads apart from shepherds' huts and the occasional rare survival of a sheephouse in the fields. The following photos taken whilst recording Chitterne Manor some years ago show a shepherd's hut to the right of the cart shed, a wheel from the hut showing it was made by Reeves Ironworks at Bratton and an interior shot showing the boarded inside of the hut had fold-down furniture, just like a modern caravan.

Cart shed at Chitterne, with shepherd's hut just visible on the right

Shepherd's Hut boarded interior with fold-down furniture

Wheel made by Reeves Ironworks, Bratton

Window catch at a farmhouse in Bulford (no 111, Mar 2008)

This elaborate design looks post-Arts & Crafts, and the material appears to be mild steel.

If anyone can shed light or has a comment, please feel free to e-mail the office.

An exuberant example of a window catch in Bulford (Photo: Jocelyn Sage)

- Reader's feedback (no 112, Jun 2008)

Avis Lloyd has made an interesting comment about the elaborate window catch from a farmhouse in Bulford, which appeared in the last newsletter. She writes: 'This window catch is stylistically Arts and Crafts. It mirrors work carried out by Archibold Knox, particularly a piece he did in 1905, and the designer William Benson (circa 1900). Archibold Knox, in particular, was influenced by Celtic art.

Whilst the Bulford window catch is less sinuous than the work of both of these artists, this can be attributed to the difference in materials. Neither of these artists, as far as I am aware, produced window furniture, and both produced high value pieces; nevertheless, the parallels are there. There are clear Celtic overtones incorporated into the Bulford catch.'

Seeing is believing – Falsehood in architecture: a conference held at the Weald and Downland Museum, 5 October 2011 (no 126, Jan 2012)

This one-day conference was attended by over 80 delegates from a range of backgrounds – architects, conservation officers, craftsmen and those just interested in buildings like myself. James Ayres opened the conference as a day of exploration of the fact that buildings and their features are not always what they seem and that the use of such approaches apply to construction as well as to the finishing trades.

Neil Burton spoke on the topic of mathematical tiles: developed in the 18th century, these are also known as feather-edge tiles or brick tiles. These tiles are attached to building facades on battens applied to a stone or timber structure to give the impression of bricks. So why were they used? Neil expressed the view that he felt that they were not used to escape the Brick Tax (which applied from 1784 to 1850). Rather, they were used to provide cladding over unfashionable or failing structures, they were waterproof and they were lightweight, making them ideal for overhanging structures such as jetties.

Primarily used in Kent and Sussex, there are examples in Wiltshire: indeed, they are used on the Guildhall in Salisbury and Figure 1 shows them on the upper (slightly overhanging) storeys of 'Game' – a shop in Oatmeal Row, Salisbury. Note the contrast between the hung tiles on the right of the picture with the mathematical tiles on the left.

They often have a slight convexity on the face which distinguishes them from the flat faces of normal bricks. The earliest dated usage is 1716 at Nunwell House on the Isle of Wight, although the primary usage was between the 1770s and the 1830s. There was a resurgence in their use in the 1980s when they were used to clad pre-fabricated public buildings.

Figure 1: Mathematical tiles (on left gable)
'Game' shop, Salisbury (this elevation faces Minster Street) (Photo: Dorothy Treasure)

The next topic of Tuck Pointing was introduced by Gerard Lynch as a highly-skilled and refined method of pointing, seen in England from the late 17th century onwards, used to simulate gauged brickwork. There are several phases to the construction which Gerard demonstrated during the lunch break. The mortar bed is the same colour as the bricks it separates and then the ribbon of mortar used to create the tuck pointing is normally in white, between 3mm and 6mm wide. However, in the late Victorian period, black ribbons were introduced in recognition of the death of Prince Albert and were used on the Royal

Albert Hall. The earliest example is dated to 1692 at No.30 The Green in Richmond: a Wiltshire example is shown in Figure 2 from 39 Long Street in Devizes.

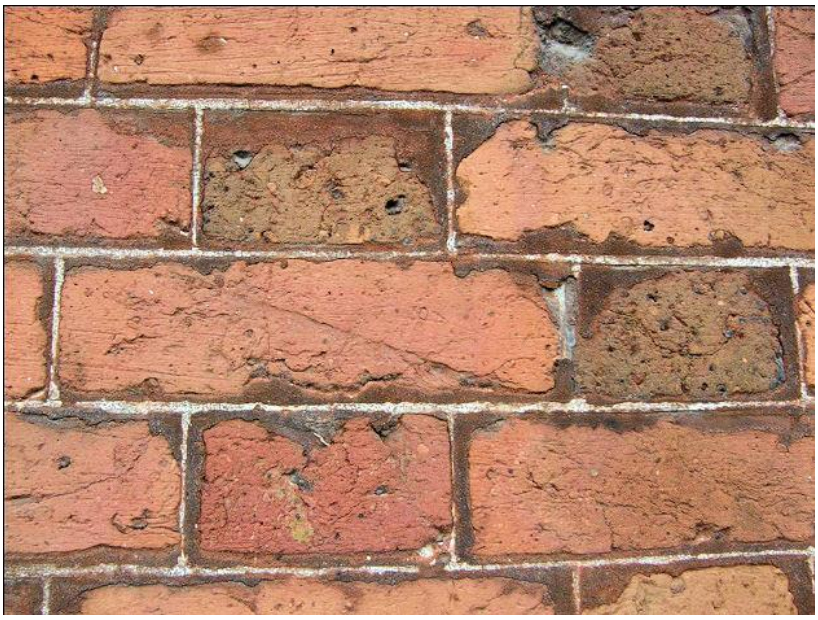


Figure 2: Close-up of tuck pointing at 39 Long Street, Devizes

(Photo: Alyson Curtis)

Following on, Jeff Orton gave an entertaining presentation on the falsehoods which can be achieved using plaster or stucco – the latter simply being the Italian word for plaster and not for a particular finish on stone. He explained how plaster can be grained to look like oak beams and also how walls can be painted to look like ashlar. Although Jeff no longer works in the trade as a result of a bad fall from a scaffold, he is committed to a better understanding of plastering skills through lectures such as this one and his son has taken up the craft.

Ian Bristow then gave a talk entitled "Trompe l'oeil – illusion, allusion, delusion". Marbling and bronzing are the main techniques of trompe l'oeil: however, shingled roofs are sometimes painted red to give the illusion of tiles, whilst corrugated iron is painted grey in New Zealand to give the illusion of slate. Ian referred to the use of painting to imitate marble in the hall at Ludgershall Castle, dated to 1246. 5

Other approaches to trompe d'oeil include the use of dummy doors to provide a symmetrical decorative arrangement, approaches to great houses by tortuous routes rather than straight drives and the hiding of estate cottages to improve the view from the big house. He summarised the technique in the following rhyming couplet:

"Praise the chisel, but use the brush,
Painting's better and looks more plush"

After lunch, James Strike spoke about the hidden structure. In answering the question how does structure contribute to falsehoods in architecture, he gave a range of examples, including:

- The Parthenon – a stone structure which uses metal cramps that are hidden from view and not intended to be seen;
- Iron rods were inserted into stone columns in Winchester Cathedral in 1827 by Nash;
- Tower Bridge, London was built between 1886 and 1894 as an iron framework clad in Cornish granite.

Both the Ritz Hotel in London (built 1906) and The Rookery in Chicago (built around 1900) are clad-frame buildings – the framing may have reduced costs or shortened construction time, but the frame makes no contribution to the appearance. The Rookery is clad with stone, brick and terracotta over an iron frame: whilst the frame is not visible, it is suggested in its rectilinear form. He finished by stating that our understanding of illusion, depends on what we have experienced before.

Alwin Townsley then spoke about the imitation of woods and marbles, using the two techniques of graining and marbling. He said that it was easier to imitate marble with paint, than to imitate timber: in particular, oak is the most difficult timber to replicate. Graining evolved during the 1700s, as a result of a shortage of good quality woods, with Thomas Kershaw being the best-known English grainer.

Bringing the day to a close, Treve Rosoman from English Heritage spoke about Mrs Eleanor Coade and her amazing stone. This manufactured stone is actually a ceramic, comprised of 5-10% flint, 5-10% quartz, 10% soda lime glass, 10% grog (re-used stone) and 60-70% ball clay from Devon or Dorset. From a factory located on the South bank of the Thames on King's Stairs just to the East of the present London Eye, she produced examples such as the Lion on Westminster Bridge in London, the River God at Ham House (a National Trust property near Richmond) and the Egyptian House in Penzance. Other uses include fireplaces, fonts and church monuments. Coade stone is robust, with a low shrinkage rate in manufacture, but can crack if water enters into it.

All in all, an informative and thought-provoking day – don't assume that what is in front of your eyes is necessarily what you think it is!

Alan Wadsworth

Recording Day at Sherston (no 116, May 2009)

The recent Recording Day at Pinkney Court, Sherston brought to our attention some very interesting farm buildings. The barn of about 1700 had a doveloft over the porch.

c.1700 barn with doveloft at Sherston

Between the barn and house was a building with a granary on the first floor, and an end wall on the ground floor housing ten large plaster-lined nest-holes, about four feet up, with three alcoves at ground level below. This, I think, is an example of a poultry house with provision for hens above, and geese or ducks below. Several other examples have been recorded in North Wiltshire, but they are rare.

Poultry house - there was probably a wooden shelf in the slot below the nest-holes, reached from a sloping ladder

Duck or goose nest beneath poultry

Dog kennel with alcove above

Probable lofted stable in the centre

Another building in the yard was probably a lofted stable, but as it had been converted to accommodation, the interior was not available. Underneath stone steps to the loft (probably an added feature) was a dog kennel with an alcove above, perhaps for keeping items relating to the dog (collar and lead, bowl?).

Pam Slocombe

Visit to Bursledon Brickworks – (no 124, May 2011)

You may think bricks are dull, but not so, as on 19th May we had a cracking visit to Bursledon Brickworks.

A demonstration of brick-making by hand (Photo: Joe Whitworth)

The brickworks are situated near Fareham in Hampshire, and as they are no longer working (ceased production in the mid 70's), they are run as an industrial museum by a Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust. They are really an archive and repository for all forms of clay works, bricks, tiles, chimney pots etc as well as plasterwork, paint, distemper.

The former works are sufficiently complete so one can see the process of production, which at one time was driven by steam. There is a collection of equipment relating to the production of clay products including tramways, portable machinery, moulds etc. The large collection of bricks, tiles and the range of chimney pots is staggering. In addition, there are related displays covering such things as the use of different types of bricks, timberwork, lead, windows - and so it goes on. All of what we saw was completely relevant to Wiltshire and indeed some exhibits came from the county.

The staff were exceptionally helpful and hospitable and, with a huge lunch included for the price of the visit, this was an excellent day, so it was disappointing that numbers were not better. If you get a chance to visit Bursledon do so.

Nigel Walker

STOP PRESS – Very early date at Wilsford (no 87, Mar 2002)

Dan Miles, who often appears on TV programmes such as Time Team and The House Detectives, has just successfully dendro-dated the cruck house 18 Wilsford in the Pewsey Valley. The central open truss has been successfully dated to the Winter of 1309/10. This is a remarkable early date.

By comparison with similar carpentry, for example the Great Barn at Barton Farm, Bradford-on-Avon, I had suggested a mid-14th century date. Some members were able to visit the house during a field day at Marden and Woodborough.

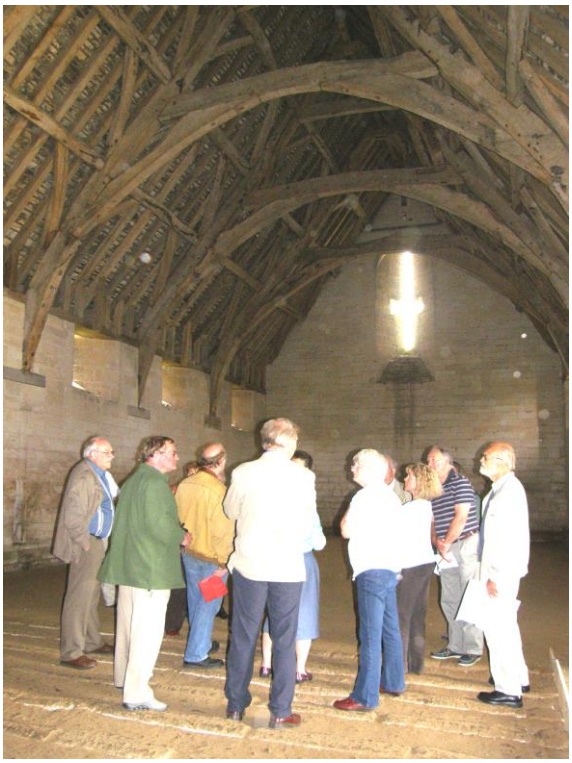
Pam Slocombe

AGM at Barton Farm, Bradford-on-Avon, 25 June (no 125, Sep 2011)

We had fine weather for this event, which was held at the West Barn in the original farmstead. Twenty of us enjoyed tea and cake after the business meeting, which saw a lively debate between the Committee and members about future directions for WBR.

Inside the West Barn during the business meeting

We were then shown around the fascinating Barton Farmhouse and its former outbuildings, which have origins in the 14th century as a grange of Shaftesbury Abbey. Highlights were the 'chapel' roof, and a previously hidden timber 2-light window of the C14, though there were many fascinating features, such as a possible fire mantle beam, plank and muntin panelling and a boarded stair that would have looked more at home on a ship! Thanks go to Margaret Dobson and Pam Slocombe for arranging this treat.



Members visiting the Great Barn (dendro-dated 1334-67)
Remains of a cruck blade from the restored West Barn dendro-dated 1290-1325

Members' Contributions – Painted beams & zig zags (no 141, Sep 2015)

Andrew Minting at Wiltshire Council's south hub sent these fascinating photographs of painted ceiling joists at 59 St Ann Street, Salisbury.

He writes:

"I thought you'd be interested – and wondered if you've seen similar in Salisbury or elsewhere?

The beams are at the ground floor in 59 St Ann St, for which no internal inspection appears to have been carried out at the time of listing grade II."

Painted ceiling joists in Salisbury

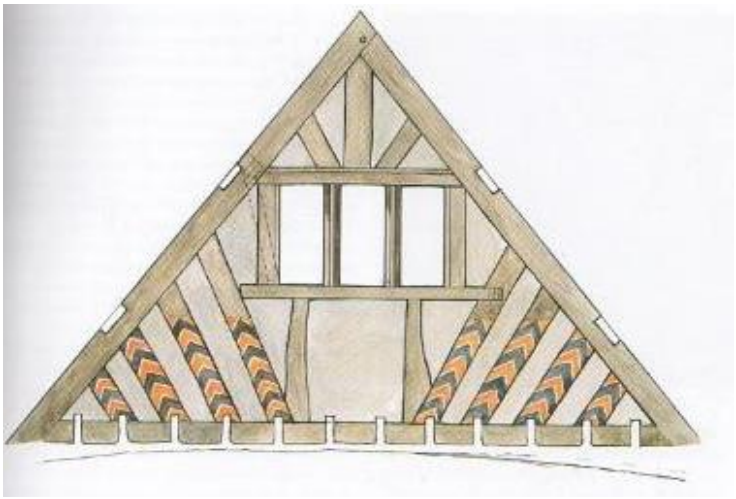
(Photos: Andrew Minting)

James Ayres, our President, drew attention to a painted timber from a house in Bishopric, Horsham, West Sussex, dated to the late 16th century. He notes that in this case, before the house was floored over, the powerful zigzag design would have been viewed from a distance in the shadows of the roof timbers.

Andrea Kirkham, who appealed for information on 'plain schemes' in an earlier issue, commented that the zigzag motif was a very useful type of running ornament.

Painted beam in West Sussex, late C16
Image from 'Domestic Interiors', James Ayres, Yale University Press 2003

Andrea knows of four examples from the Welsh Marches. She added that the running wave with demi-flowers on the sides of the joists is a variant of the zigzag type. This also crops up over a long period and can be found in some medieval wall-paintings as well as in later secular contexts.

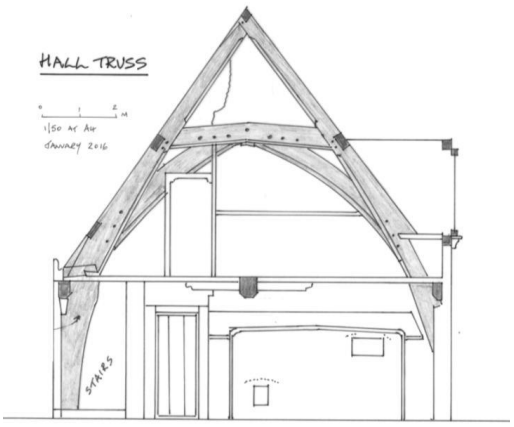


Church Farm from J Ayres and J Steane, Traditional Buildings in the Oxford Region c. 1300-1840, pp. 94-5

If anyone knows of similarly-painted joists and beams that compare, do please let Andrew know via the WBR office.

New discoveries (no 142, Jan 2016)

Wiltshire Buildings Record is starting the year on a very busy note. We are receiving many more commissions to look at historic buildings than ever before, and we are flat out capturing spectacular details which will be preserved in our archive for posterity and future study. Below is a drawing of a possible 14th century cruck truss by member Peter Filtness at a recent recording day in Bishops Cannings, and a possible candidate for our dendrochronology project. The elaborate chamfer stop comes from the mid-16th century crosswing, and was photographed by Paul Jack.



Hall truss at Bishops Cannings, possibly C14 (Drawing: Peter Filtness)

Moulded ceiling beam in the crosswing, mid-C16 (Photo: Paul Jack)

Footnote: The house was included in our dendro project but the crucks turned out to be elm not oak so couldn't be dated.