The Landmark Trust

THE OLD HALL, CROSCOMBE

History Album

Written by Charlotte Haslam, 1990

Re-presented 2022

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KEY FACTS

Manor house built:	**c.1412-20**
Patron:	**Sir William Palton**
Converted to Baptist Chapel:	**before 1723**
Bought by Landmark:	**1975**
Architect:	**John Schofield with Artist Constructor Ltd**
Builder:	**Artist Constructor Ltd**
Foreman:	**David Hobbs**
Work completed:	**1976**
Underfloor heating replaced:	**2013-14**

Contents

Old Hall, south elevation in 1974 before Landmark's restoration and (below) in 2014 after a second major refurbishment, by now having been enjoyed for 40 years for Landmark holidays.

SUMMARY

THE OLD HALL, CROSCOMBE, SOMERSET

The Old Hall is all that survives of the ancient manor house of Croscombe, abandoned by its owners by the 16th century, and adapted to serve as a Baptist chapel in about 1720. If it had survived in its original form to this day, added to no doubt but not substantially altered, it would have been one of Somerset's finest medieval houses, comparable with Clevedon or Coker Court. Even as it stands now, with the elaborate timber structure of its roof, its large traceried windows, and the array of doors leading off the former screens passage, it ranks as a hall of great importance, and certainly of great beauty.

There is no trace of the early medieval house, belonging to the Cotele family. But in the late 14th century the last Cotele left his property to a cousin, Robert Palton. Robert died in 1400 and was succeeded by his brother William, then aged twenty-one. It was William who rebuilt the manor house in about 1420, at the same time that he and other Croscombe families were restoring the parish church. The Palton coat of arms appears in both buildings, and on the tower of St. Cuthbert's, Wells.

William had no children, and on his death in 1449 his property passed to his second wife, Anne, who was a member of the Courtenay family, of Powderham in Devon. She soon married again, this time to another Devonian, a Densell of Weare Gifford. The manor of Croscombe was to remain as an outlying property of Devon landowners until c.1730. Anne's daughter by her second marriage, Elizabeth Densell, married Martin Fortescue of Filleigh, North Devon, and her Somerset property passed to that family. The Fortescues continued as absentee landlords for the following two centuries, but in the first half of the 18th century Hugh Fortescue, Earl Clinton, sold the greater part of his land there, mostly to existing tenants.

It is unlikely that the Fortescues made any use of the Croscombe manor house. They may have visited it occasionally, leaving it in the mean time in the charge of a steward. From surviving manorial accounts it seems that even by 1450 it was already partly let to tenants. Inevitably it decayed, and a wing at the eastern end (now lost) was rebuilt, on a smaller scale. The western end became a separate cottage. The hall itself survived, however, and was in use as a chapel by 1723; this possibly before the date at which, according to the Somerset historian Phelps, it was bought "by a respectable inhabitant of the place and converted into a chapel for the use of a congregation of Baptists". A memorial table to him, or more probably his son, is still in the hall.

The Baptists made several minor alterations to the chapel and to the cottage throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, all carefully noted down in the Church Books. In 1824 a tank was installed for baptisms, saving a cold plunge in the River Sheppey; new pews and a rostrum were fitted in 1866, a new ceiling in 1882, and repairs to the roof, the windows, and "colouring" were regularly carried out. For the most part the Old Hall could not have had better occupants, nursing the building into the present century. By 1973 the congregation had shrunk to only four or five, and the building was in danger of collapse at the eastern end. The cottage had been empty since 1947. It was in the nick of time that the Old Hall was discovered by the architect John Schofield, who shored up the gable himself, and persuaded the Baptists to sell. It was bought the Landmark Trust in 1975.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION OF THE OLD HALL

Landmarkers enter first today into the current kitchen. Originally, the main entrance would have led into the screens passage of the main hall. Today we enter the hall from the south, although originally the main entrance was through the grander doorway on the north, with the second doorway directly opposite, in the standard medieval pattern. Between these entrance doorways and the main body of the hall there stood a timber screen on a moulded stone base, two sections of which survive loose in the building. On the other side of the passage, in the end wall of the hall, are doors leading to the western wing. From the first door a stair led up to a chamber on the first floor. The other two doors led into service rooms off the hall, probably a buttery and a pantry.

For the moment, however, you are in the hall, and over your head is the sumptuous oak roof, divided into four bays, with five arch-braced trusses. Their smooth curves are echoed in the three tiers of windbraces on the side slopes, and by the unusual and elegant pear-shape formed by the struts in the apex, above the collar beam. Light floods in through three tall windows with carved stone heads, but in the south wall, at the High End, instead of a fourth window is a large blocked arch. This was not in fact another window, but the entrance to an oriel chamber. Today we think of an oriel as projecting from an upper floor, but in medieval times the term was applied to any small addition, and chiefly to a bay at the High End of a hall which could serve as a small private chamber for the lord. Sometimes this chamber also provided access into the main rooms beyond the hall, and this was the case at Croscombe. In the garden wall outside there is still the doorway that led from the oriel chamber into what was once a cross-wing; and in the outer face of the east wall can be seen the fireplace that heated the solar or upper room in this wing.

How was the hall itself heated? The answer seems to be by a fireplace in the end wall, on the dais. In about 1600 the solar wing was demolished and a new addition built in its place, with a new fireplace. The hall fireplace was dismantled and turned round to face the other way, and some fragments of moulded stone used to provide the lintel. This later fireplace is still there on the outside wall. The stove that heats the hall now is Gurney's Patent, and came from Romsey Abbey in 1976.

Light for the hall at night was provided by torches, and a remarkable survival is the bracket that held these, in the south wall. This bracket also helps us historically, since it bears the arms of the Palton family: Robert's with those of his wife Elizabeth Botreaux, and William's with those of his first wife, heiress to the Wellington family – thus providing evidence that William was the builder, after his marriage in about 1410.

From the hall you pass into the room that is now the kitchen. This was once divided, and both rooms were unheated; the existing fireplace is 19th century. The window over the sink is medieval, as are the ceiling joists, except for one section where it can be seen that new timber has been inserted, where the stairs to the upper floor were. Beyond the kitchen you are in a 19th century addition, into which a bathroom and staircase were fitted in 1976. At the top of the staircase, however, is a medieval doorway leading back into the chamber above the kitchen. This doorway connected, apparently via a staircase turret, with a wing which is thought to have extended southwards, to form one side of a courtyard on the site of the present garden. This wing may have contained the kitchens. The chamber itself has a medieval fireplace and window, but the blocked windows looking into the hall are much later, dating from the time when the manor house was in decline, and divided into several dwellings.

THE REPAIR OF THE OLD HALL

When the Landmark Trust took on the Old Hall in 1975 it was in an exceedingly shaky structural condition. Prompt action by John Schofield had prevented the collapse of the east gable, but a great deal more work was needed to stabilise the building. Surveys had already been carried out, and the medieval detail of the building discovered. Work was able to begin immediately, therefore, under the supervision of John Schofield and carried out by his firm, Artist Constructor's, own team of builders.

The tie beams of the Victorian ceiling had served one useful purpose, in that they were holding the north and south walls of the building together. The large windows set in thin, unbuttressed walls are one of the chief delights of the hall, but combined with the great weight of the roof are disastrous on practical grounds, because the walls were being forced outwards. Stainless steel rods have been fitted instead, doing the same job without obstructing the view of the roof. The roof itself was stripped and, only where absolutely necessary, the timber frame repaired. Elm boards, and insulation, were laid on this and the tiles replaced. Two new chimneys were built at the same time.

The repair of the east gable was inevitably more drastic. The top nine feet had to be dismantled entirely. A concrete ring beam was then cast running round the gable, extending some feet along the side walls, with legs descending further down into the end wall. The west gable had to be partly rebuilt as well, and most of the pointing raked out and renewed, although any that was sound was retained. Finally the walls were given several coats of limewash, coloured with yellow ochre.

The sills of the hall windows had been raised by the Baptists, and were now put back at their correct level. The two external doorways were unblocked and repaired. A doorway in the south-east corner was then blocked. The stonework in the base of the oriel arch was so disturbed, that only the upper part could be left visible internally. A small blocked window in the south wall of the west chamber was reinstated. The later windows in the western end were renewed, as was the glazing throughout the building, although old glass was re-used where possible.

Inside the hall, now restored to its true proportions by the removal of the ceiling, the service doors at the west end were unblocked and repaired, after the removal of the baptistry tank, which stood in front of them. The third door was left blocked, but with its surround visible. The Victorian suspended floor was removed (some of the boards were re-used in the bedrooms) but an attempt to recreate a lime-ash floor failed. Quarry tiles were laid instead, at the medieval level. The doors and the window shutters are, of course, new. As much old plaster was retained as possible, with missing areas made up in lime plaster to match. The walls are limewashed, again coloured with a little ochre for warmth.

In the kitchen the only alteration, apart from the provision of new fittings, was to remove a staircase from the north-west corner. The position of the medieval stair was left clear by laying the joists differently. It was decided to leave the floor at its 19th century level, rather than lower it to the level of the hall. The outside door, which occupies the position of a medieval window, was repaired. The arrangement of the rooms in the lean-to, including the stair, dates from 1975. The west chamber fireplace needed minor repairs, and a partition was removed. The Old Hall was furnished in 1976; all furniture is simple and solid, and the curtains were specially designed and printed for this building.

The sitting room at the Old Hall, in the former great hall, with the Gurney stove at the far end.

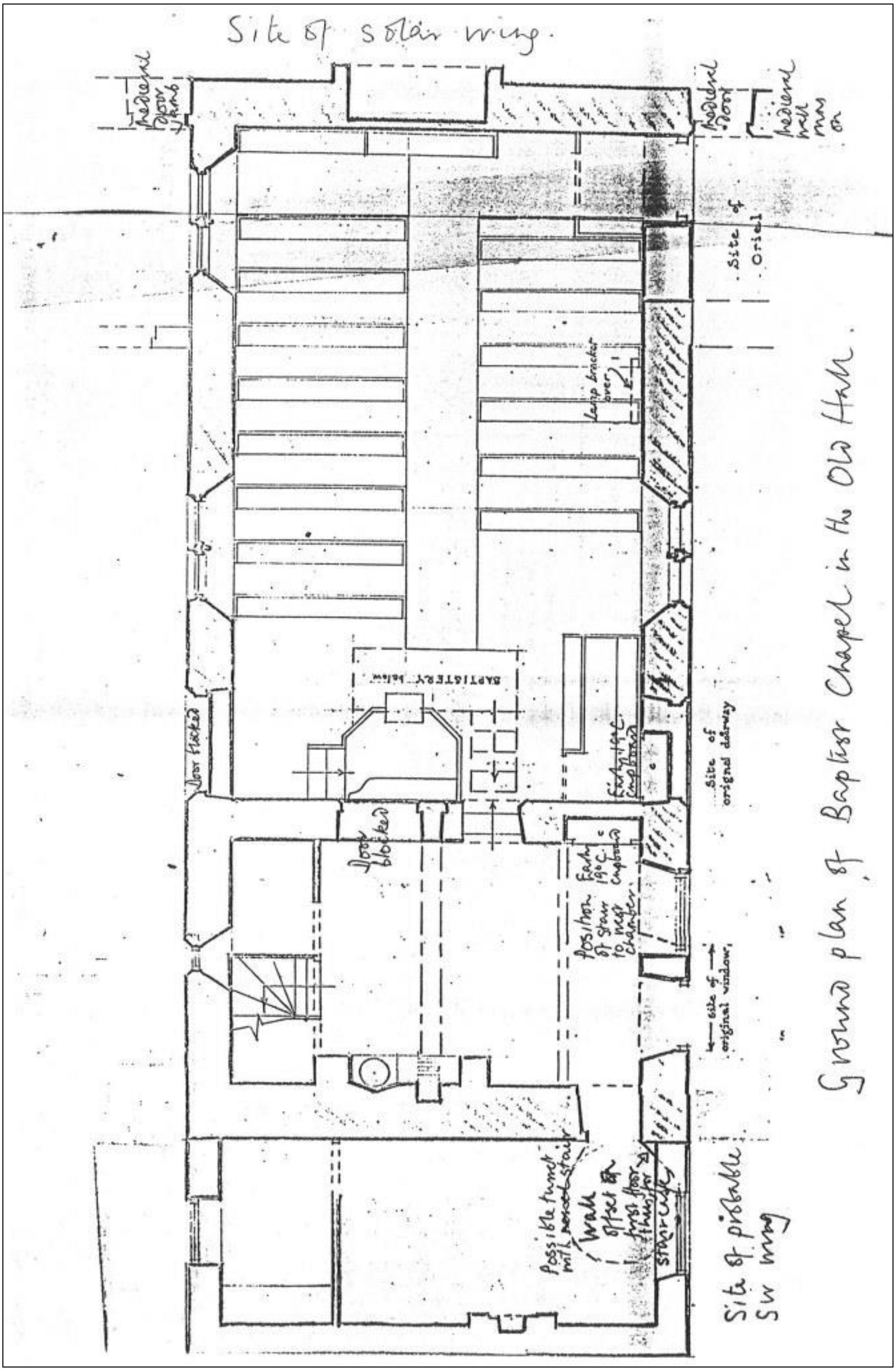
THE OLD HALL

DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

The Old Hall is the central, and only surviving, section of a manor house built by Sir William Palton in the earlier part of the 15th century, probably just before 1420. Judging by the quality of what is left, and had the original building undergone a gentle process of alteration and addition rather than abandonment and amputation, it would undoubtedly have ranked among the handful of great medieval West Country houses.

Even as it stands the Old Hall gives a strong impression of sophistication, and must have been the work of someone with a strong architectural imagination. In date the building still belongs to the period of transition between the Decorated Gothic of the previous century, and the Perpendicular. In cathedrals and palaces the Perpendicular style had been well established for several decades, but in domestic buildings, in more remote areas, it took longer for earlier fashions to be given up. Motifs characteristic of the Decorated style in fact remained popular well into the 15th century. The Old Hall demonstrates the coincidence of the two styles particularly well. Following older fashions is the clearly defined pattern of the window tracery, and above all the flowing and sumptuous forms of the roof; while looking forward to the new is the apparent desire for light and a feeling of insubstantiality. The walls of the hall are unencumbered with weighty buttresses, and the area of the windows within them is large; these same large windows have wide internal splays to let in as much daylight as possible.

What did the medieval house look like? While we can't, of course, describe it in detail, a surprising amount can be worked out from the structure itself, and by comparison with contemporary buildings; the general plan and arrangement of medieval houses varied very little from well-established and well-tried formulas. Whether any parts survived from an earlier building we don't know. There may well have been surviving outbuildings, even a whole wing; but the impression gained from the building, and from the information found by archaeologists, is that the hall was part of an entirely new house. This helps greatly with its interpretation, since we have only to work out what has been taken away, rather than find evidence of different building dates within it.
To start at the beginning, with the exterior, the original entrance to the building was from the North, where the doorway has a more richly moulded surround, and a hood mould.


Site of solar wing.
Ground plan of Baptist Chapel in the Old Hall.
Site of probable SW wing
BAPTISTERY
Door blocked
Lamp bracket over
Site of oriel
Site of original doorway
site of original window
Staircase

There does not appear ever to have been a porch. The ground has built up on this side to such an extent that it is hard to visualise it ever having been otherwise, but there may once have been a courtyard on this side of the building, perhaps entered from the lane by a gatehouse. The high wall that runs along the lane above is said to have enclosed such a courtyard.

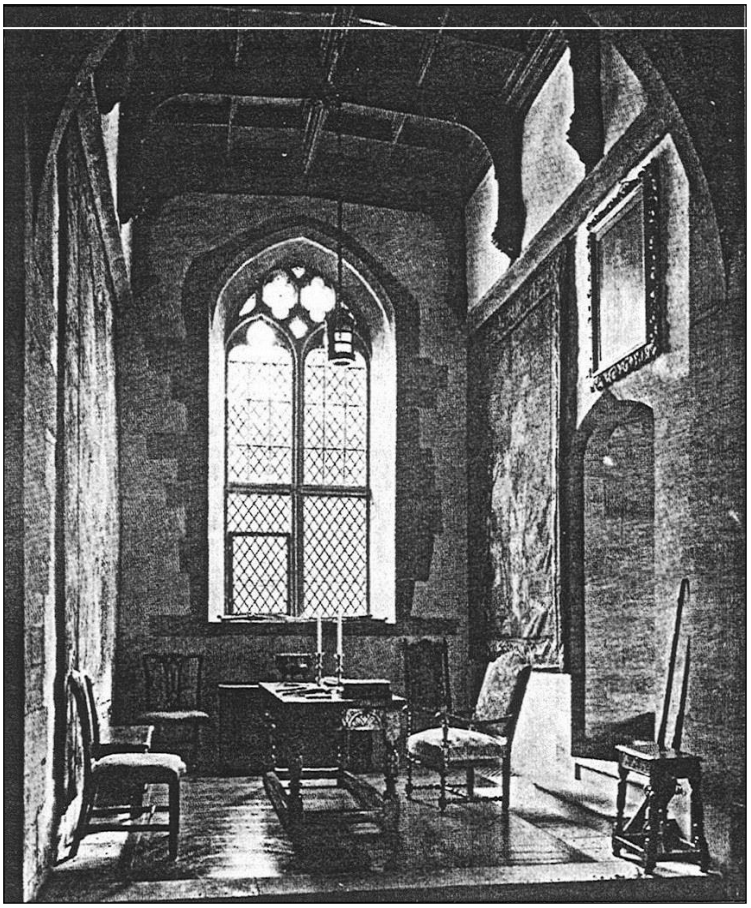
At the east end of the hall was another range of building, a cross-wing to the hall itself. On the ground floor this would probably have contained a parlour directly behind the hall; and other rooms, perhaps for storage of the lord's more valuable property. On the first floor was the solar or main upper chamber, together with lesser chambers and closets - one of which would almost certainly have contained a garderobe or privy. The solar was heated by the large fireplace that can be seen in the end wall. The parlour did not have a fireplace on this wall, however; that visible in the end wall now belongs to a later phase of the Old Hall's history. It may have been heated by braziers, or by a fireplace in the outer wall.

The wing seems to have projected some 37 feet to the South of the hall; a change of build that might mark its end can just be made out in the garden wall in that position now. How far to the North it extended is impossible to say. Perhaps no more than a few feet, but certainly further than the doorway of which one jamb can be seen on the north-east corner.

A doorway that led into the wing at the south-east corner also survives, but what happened in the angle between wing and hall is here rather more complicated. In the south wall of the hall at its eastern end, instead of a fourth window, there is a large blocked arch. This can be made out on the exterior, but appears much more clearly inside. It did in fact extend to ground level, but due to later alteration and disturbance the lower part is no longer so clearly visible.

This was not, as might be imagined at first glance, another window, but was the entrance archway to an oriel chamber. The term oriel is used today for a window projecting from an upper floor. This restricted use of the word did not apply during the Middle Ages. An oriel could be almost any small addition or extrusion, running through one or more storeys and containing one or several rooms. Sometimes an oriel could be simply a shelter at the top of an external staircase; at others it appears to have been a permanent and solid structure.

Ashleworth Court, Glos. Hall with oriel projection and solar wing; before 1463. The oriel and solar wing at Croscombe was probably very similar to this house in Gloucestershire. The window tracery is also very like that of Old Hall.



Looking into the mid-15th century oriel at East Coker Court

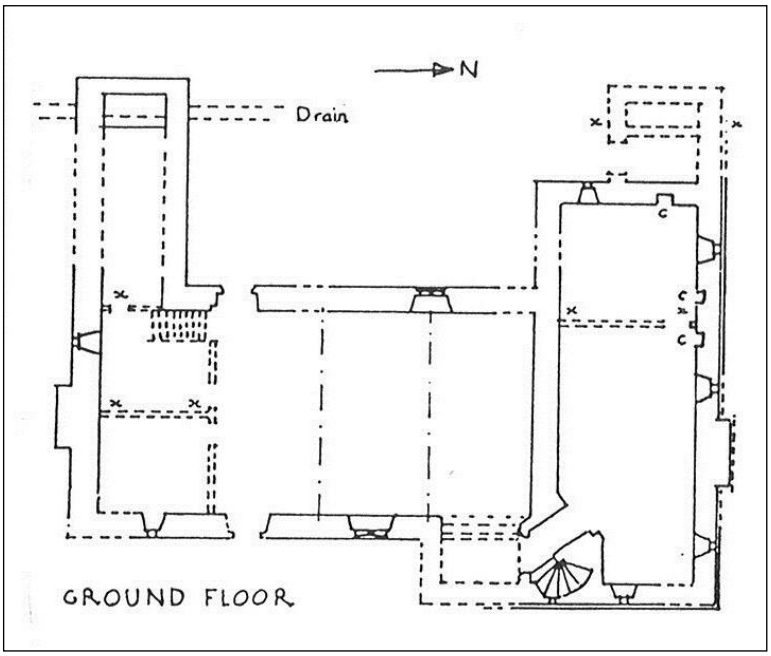
The derivation and application of the term 'oriel' has occupied architectural historians from the great J.H. Parker in the 19th century onwards. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it derives from Anglo-Norman *oriell* and Late Latin *oriolum*, both meaning "gallery" or "porch", perhaps from Classical Latin *aulaeum* ("curtain"). During the 14th century, the term seemed to settle upon meaning a small room or bay off the ceremonial High End of the hall, which could serve as a private space for the lord as well as lighting the high table. Its window was typically elevated above ground level.

To begin with, in most cases, this had solid walls and windows of ordinary size, but as time went on the windows grew, until stone was replaced by glass, and the oriel became what we would call a bay window. It could still be large enough to accommodate the lord and his family seated at a table; that at Lytes Cary even has its own fireplace. Many elaborate and beautiful examples of such windows survive from the late 15th and early 16th centuries. The oriel as a projection was a development of this idea, but attached to an upper room.

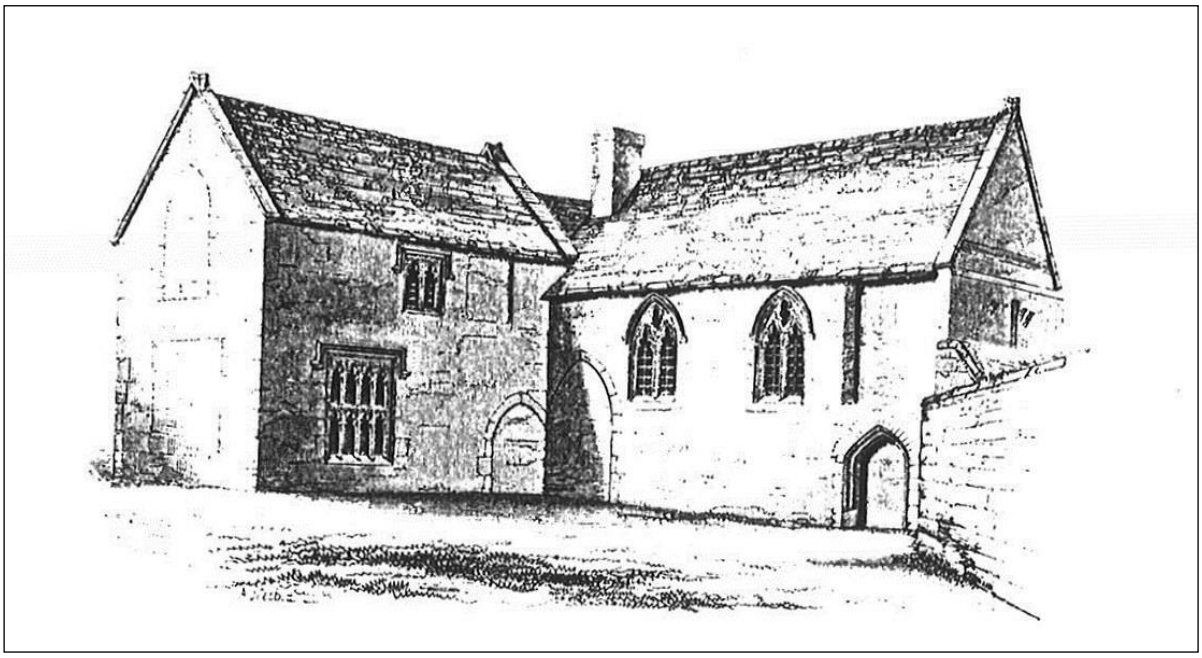
Even the earlier oriel chamber was often, though not invariably, entered from the hall through a large archway, elaborately moulded as befitted its important position near the high table. Light entering the oriel thus benefitted the hall as well. Examples in Somerset are those at Clevedon Court (c.1320) and Tickenham Court (c.1400). And that at Croscombe was clearly another.

Another characteristic shared by the oriel chamber at Croscombe and others of its date lay in providing access to the rooms beyond the hall, in the cross-wing. The door in the wall at the south-east corner was an internal one, leading from the oriel into the parlour; and from the way the wall is angled at this point to give more room, it is likely that it also served a spiral stair running up to the solar.

Still outside the building, but moving to its western end, it is likely that the solar wing was balanced here by another wing, or range of buildings, enclosing a courtyard on the site of the present garden. This may have contained more storerooms, or lodgings; most probably the kitchen, which was often detached or partly detached from the main rooms, because of the risk of fire, but never too far from the service rooms.



Aston Eyre Manor House. The door and staircase from the oriel into the solar wing was probably arranged like this.



Arches of the vanished oriel chamber at Tickenham Court, Somerset, c. 1400 (Engraving from Parker 1859)

The reason for suspecting such a wing is that there was no door from outside into the room that is now the kitchen, because the present door occupies the position of a medieval window, one splay of which it shares. Access to it must therefore have been in the west elevation, through the doors into the 19th-century lean-to. The ground floor door has lost its surround, but that on the first floor is clearly that of an internal door, leading into an adjoining room.

However there is also evidence that the hall range did not extend any further at full width. On the north wall at the junction of hall range and lean-to is a straight joint, on the hall side evidently the quoin of a return wall. In the south wall there is no such straight joint, although the stonework has been disturbed and rebuilt. Exploration of this wall in 1975 revealed details which pointed to the existence of a staircase in this position, probably in its own turret.

Such a staircase was not necessary just to reach the west chamber, which had its own entrance from the hall. It must therefore have provided internal access to another range of building to its south. Standing in the angle of the two ranges, it acted as the connection between them.

It has been suggested that the door on the upper floor led not to a stair but to a garderobe closet or privy, which it would be quite usual to find in this position, off a principal chamber. On the other hand, it would be distinctly unusual to find the garderobe draining into the well, and this it seems lies roughly underneath the present staircase, where it has been seen within living memory, although since covered over. The presence of the well in this position bears out the suggestion that the south-west range contained the kitchen.

Other details to notice on the outside of the building are a fragment of the first floor window in the north wall of the west chamber, blocked and replaced by a later opening; and below this, at ground level, the stones of a retaining arch. This appears to mark the position of a conduit or drain which ran under the building.

The interior of the Old Hall is much more straight-forward, particularly once the original ground plan and layout of the manor house is understood. Entered from the North, as in

the Middle Ages, or from the South, as now, you are standing in what was once the screens passage, with a second door directly opposite. This was an arrangement fundamental to the medieval hall-house plan, that survived for many centuries afterwards.
Besides giving flexibility of movement through the building, the screens passage had the supremely practical advantage of containing draughts in a single area, which could then be screened off from those places where people wanted to keep warm. In the 15th century, when you entered the hall, you would have found just such a screen standing between you and the main body of the room - whence the name screens passage. The screen was of timber, standing on a moulded stone base or plinth. Two sections of this, with post holes and slot for timber panels, were found on the site in 1975, and are now in the hall.

The screen would not have extended the full height of the hall - there was no need for it to do so. It would probably have been seven or eight foot high, perhaps with an elaborately carved cornice or cresting along its top, and decorated door lintels. There might have been just one door, but more likely that there were two, balancing the doors in the wall beyond.

For the moment however, you are in the hall, both in 1420 and today the heart and centre of the house. And at once your eyes are drawn upwards to the roof. The architect John Schofield, who discovered the Old Hall in a ruinous condition in 1973, and oversaw its repair for Landmark, wrote of it thus:

> The roof is the outstanding feature of this room. The five arched brace trusses divide its length into bays, setting the interval for door, window and oriel openings below, and so underlying a growing impression of one unifying train of thought running through the whole design, which style, motif and visual emphasis strongly suggest. Originality of design shows in the queen posts of each truss, shaped to surround an avocado pearstone-shaped hole, and in the syncopated rhythm of windbraces in three tiers along the slopes.

Within the confines of a rigid structural framework it is astonishing to reflect what variety of pattern and form was achieved by medieval carpenters. There are few roofs, either in churches or the halls of manor houses, that are exactly alike, although the component parts are so standardised as to be easily recognisable, and have long been classified.

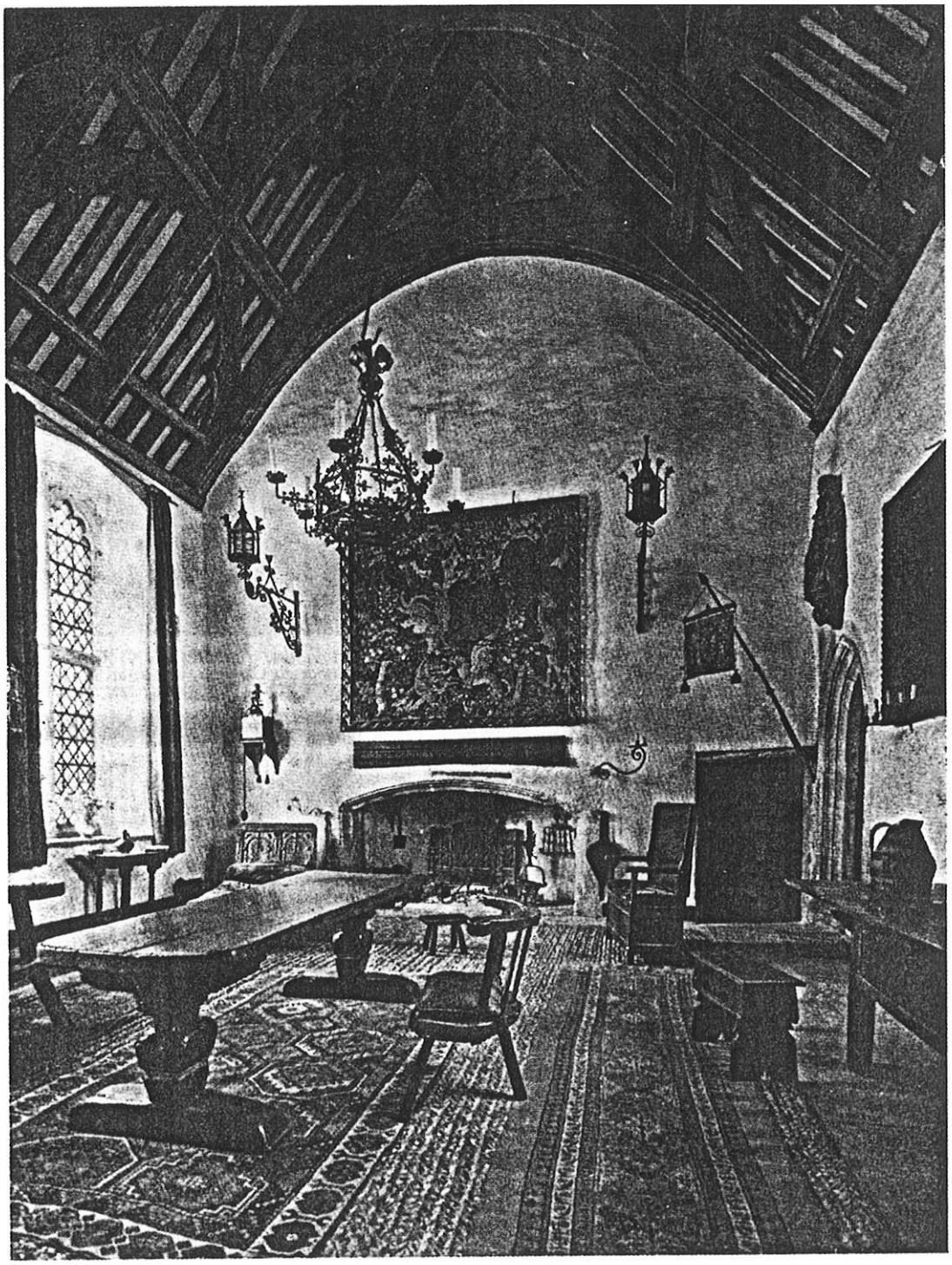


Plate XI. The Great Hall.
Woodlands Manor, Mere, first half of the 15th century; hall with upper end fireplace.

The natural colouring of the oak, protected behind a ceiling for many years and never stained, gives the room a feeling of warmth. Heat of a more substantial nature was required to prevent the hall's occupants from freezing, however. The likelihood is that this was provided by a fireplace in the east wall of the hall, at the high or dais end - the lord thus hogging most of it. Similar high end fireplaces survive at West Coker Manor in Somerset, and at Woodlands Manor, Mere, just in Wiltshire.

The flue for this fireplace still exists. It seems that when alterations were made to the cross-wing in the 17th century, and most of it demolished, it was simply turned round to face the other way, and some moulded stones from around the site cobbled together to form the fireplace surround that is now in the outside wall. The hood over this was presumably intended to give some stability to the wall.

During the day the hall would have been lighter than it is today, because of the windows in the oriel chamber. After dark it was lit by candles, and a remarkable survival here is the bracket in the south wall that acted as a sconce for four of these. Two other, slightly earlier, sconces survive in Somerset at the Treasurer's House, Martock and Tickenham Court.

From some fragments found in 1975 it seems that the hall was floored with lime-ash, an early form of cement which was often used for this purpose. Its hard surface would no doubt have been softened by a good layer of rushes, interspersed with sweet-smelling herbs. And at the high end it seems there really was a dais, because the stump where its stonework has been cut away can be seen in the north-east corner.

What went on after you had passed through the oriel arch and so into the cross-wing, we no longer know. But the rooms at the west end of the hall, being part of the same range, have survived. This end of the hall is called the low end, because usually beyond it were rooms with utilitarian functions. Opening out of the hall itself there was generally a buttery and a pantry, one for the serving of drink, the other for food. Each had its own entrance, and the serving men attached to these departments would enter the hall in separate processions to serve the main meal in the middle of the day.

The third door in the end wall, next to the outer door, opened onto a little staircase running up into the west chamber, above the two service rooms. The position of this stair, and its trimmer, can be seen in the ceiling of the present kitchen, where the joists have been set differently; and as was observed by the Dorset archaeologist Laurence Keen (see Logbook) the door opened outwards into the screens passage. It is surprising that the same kitchen ceiling, which is entirely medieval, does not provide evidence for the position of the partition between the two service rooms. The answer may be that there was never a full-height partition here.

The northern of the two rooms still has its medieval window, but the south window, as already described, has been replaced by a door. The fireplace, as it is now, is 19th-century, but may replace a 16th or 17th century one. The door that now leads into the lean-to is certainly in the same position as a medieval one, and also led to a staircase, although a much smaller one.

The chamber upstairs, still with its medieval fireplace, and with the reinstated medieval window in its south wall, gives us some idea of what the rooms in the solar wing were like. (The two blocked windows are a much later insertion, dating from the time when the hall was in decline, and multiple occupation). It is a fine room, and must have been the apartment of an important member of the household. This could have been the Steward or Bailiff, the only person of any status who would have resided permanently at the Old Hall. There were practical advantages in his being at this end of the hall, because the cross-wing could then be kept in readiness for the visits of the lord himself, Sir William Palton, about whom we must now learn more.

Owners & Builders

There is no positive documentary evidence as to the builder of the Old Hall, but we think that it was Sir William Palton for two quite simple reasons. The first of these is style. The design of the roof, details of mouldings, of window tracery, all indicate a date not before 1400, but not much later than 1430. The second is the very good one that we know William Palton inherited his family's estates from his elder brother Robert, who died young in 1400 or soon after; and that he continued to own them until his own death in 1450. For the whole of the period in which the Hall might have been built, therefore, William Palton was the owner. As will be shown, it may be possible to narrow the likely period of building down further to a very few years in the second decade of the century.

The manor of Croscombe had existed from before the Norman Conquest, when it formed part of the estates of Glastonbury Abbey. The Abbey continued to own the land as ultimate overlords, granting it at one time to the Malets (in the 12th century Croscombe was part of the manor of Shepton Mallet), and then the Poyntzes, and later to the St Maurs, who became Dukes of Somerset. These great magnates granted it in turn to lesser magnates, and by the middle of the 13th century the manor and advowson (the right to present a clergyman to the living, and to receive an income from the tithes) had passed to the Cotele family, who also owned land at Camerton, a few miles away near Radstock.

In 1326 the manor of Croscombe was settled (probably in her childhood) on Joan, wife of John de Palton, and probably a sister of Sir Ellis Cotele. The Paltons came from Paulton, also near Radstock, which they owned along with other manors in Somerset, and in Hampshire and Wiltshire. That they were an influential family is confirmed by the fact that John de Palton was Sheriff of Somerset and Dorset 1352-4.

Whether there was already a manor house at Croscombe is unclear. Archaeologists working in 1975 found some evidence of occupation of the site in the 13th century, but none of any specific buildings. This was assumed to be because the levelling of the site for the existing building had obliterated all traces of its predecessors. It is likely that there was a house of some sort attached to the manor, but perhaps a rather humble one.

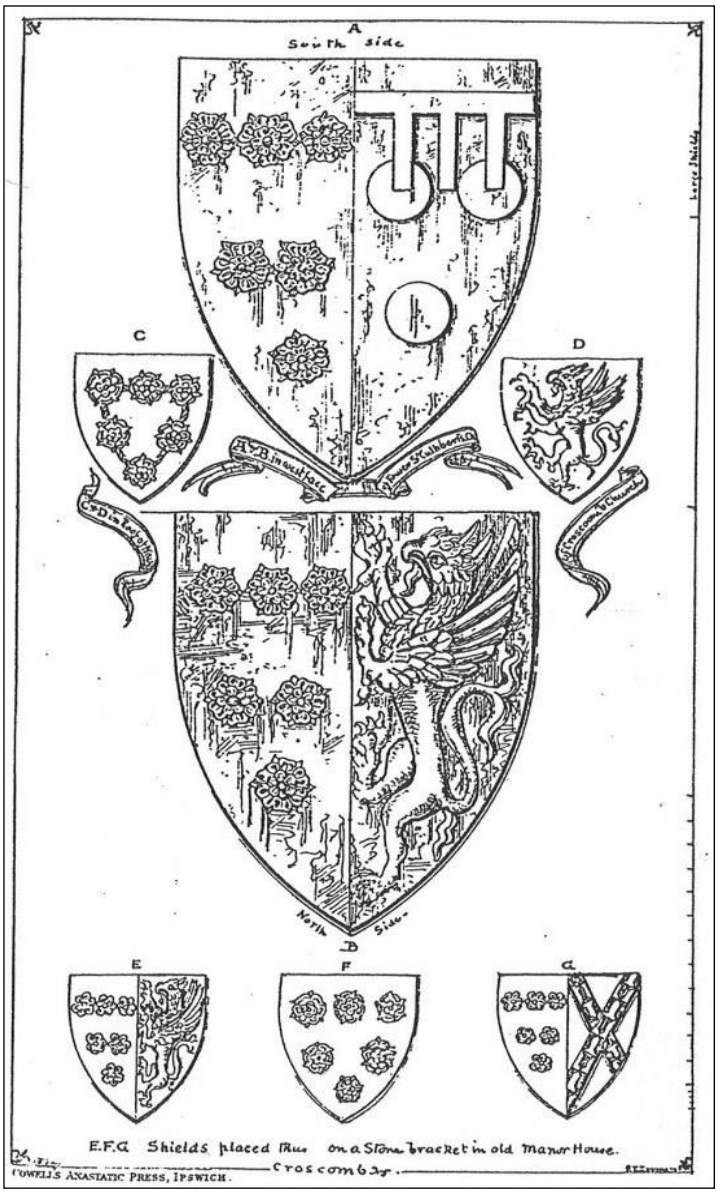
John and Joan Palton had a son, Robert, who with his wife Elizabeth appears on a grant of 1371. He was dead by 1391, when Elizabeth is described as his widow. They had three sons: Robert, William and John. John Palton, the youngest brother, appears in a Royal licence of 1413, as heir of his brother William, and is never heard of again. Robert as the eldest inherited the Palton estates, and in 1399 other estates of his (probable) great-grandfather, Ellis Cotele. A wealthy marriage was arranged for him, with Elizabeth Botreaux. She was probably the daughter of William de Botreaux of North Cadbury, a deed of whose, giving freedom to one of his villeins, was witnessed by Robert de Palton (Senior) in 1379. The Botreaux family were also extensive landowners in the West Country, and Elizabeth no doubt had some part of these settled on her.

According to the Rev John Collinson, the 18th-century historian of Somerset, Robert died soon afterwards in 1400. It is possible that he lived a little longer than this, however, since the Patent Rolls record the king's instructions to hand over some of his estates to his brother William two years later, and such instructions usually followed soon after a death where there was no dispute over the ownership.

Which leaves us with William. He was only 21 in 1400, and had come into a substantial inheritance, combining both the Palton and the Cotele estates. Out of this he would, of course, have had to support his younger brother and his widowed sister-in -law (some lands were settled on her in dower), but this would still have left him with a considerable income. No doubt he had some interest, too, in the cloth trade that flourished in Croscombe at this time. Certainly in 1437 he was to obtain Royal confirmation of the annual three day fair granted to Croscombe by Edward 111, with a weekly market. Such fairs were profitable to lord and tenants alike.

In 1412 William was to become even more wealthy. In 1405 he had married Elizabeth Wroth, daughter of Sir John Wroth. (A settlement of estates made at the beginning of the year makes no mention of her, but she appears in one six months later). Then, on the death of her brother in 1412, she as his heir suddenly became the owner of five manors in Somerset, seven in Devon, and other properties in Cornwall, Gloucestershire and Middlesex. These were inherited from their mother's family, the Wellingtons, or Willingtons. Her brother's wife, Joyce, had rights over some of this, but later granted these back to Elizabeth and William. Their estates were more than doubled.

Here heraldry comes into the story. The light bracket in the Old Hall has on it three shields bearing coats of arms. That in the centre, with six roses, belongs to the Palton family. That on the left has Palton with Botreaux, presumably in honour of Robert and his wife. While that on the right is Palton with Willington. It is unlikely that Elizabeth, whose maiden name was Wroth, would have used the Willington coat of arms before she had, quite unexpectedly, inherited the Willington estates.



The Palton coat of arms, as they appear, with those of Courtenay and Botreaux, on the tower of St. Cuthbert's (A&B), on the nave roof of Croscombe Church, again accompanied by Botreaux, (C&D); and on the light bracket in the Old Hall. From *Historical Notes on the Church of St. Cuthbert* by Thomas Serel (1875)

The likelihood is, therefore, that William and his wife began the building of a new manor house at Croscombe after they had come into their great new inheritance; and that by the time he went to Parliament to represent Somerset as a knight of the shire in 1422, the work was already complete.

With so much property, and so many other manors, the Paltons would never have lived all the year round at Croscombe. Even if it was the favourite out of all their houses (which it would be pleasing to assume it was), they would have had to spend a good deal of their time visiting the others, and seeing to estate matters there. But every so often they would return to their fine new hall, perhaps to celebrate Christmas or Easter. We can imagine them there, with their household, gathered together in the room that was so well designed for that purpose.

William and Elizabeth had no children, however, and the future of their estates must have been a subject of concern to them both. Elizabeth died in 1440. William retained her property, as was usual, but on his death without children most of it would have to go to her cousins, the Beaumonts. It is not surprising that he remarried, therefore, even though he was over sixty by now. His second wife, Anne, was a member of the Courtenay family of Devon, and a settlement of estates (including Croscombe) made in 1445 upon Sir Philip Courtenay, as a trustee, suggests that they were married in that year.

This marriage too was childless, and when Sir William died in 1450, his estates were divided among several heirs. Elizabeth's estates went to the Beaumonts, the main Palton and Cotele estates went to two female cousins, and the remainder, including Croscombe with its new manor house, went to Anne. So wealthy a widow was not likely to remain unattached for long, and sure enough within a year or two she had married again, this time to another Devonian, Richard Densell of Weare Gifford.

Later History of the Old Hall

After the death of Sir William Palton, Croscombe became, and was to remain, an outlying property on an estate whose centre lay in Devon. This happened at a time when life was becoming more settled. Landowners were beginning to live in one or two larger and more comfortable houses, rather than spend their time travelling between a whole string of minor ones. The management of more distant properties could be left to a bailiff or agent, and it was rare in such a case for a house to be kept in use for the owner.

Links with the manor were not entirely broken. Richard Densell presented new clergymen to the living. Anne honoured the instruction in her first husband's will to found a Guild of St Anne in Croscombe church - a church that Sir William had helped to rebuild, with his arms appearing on one of the bosses, as they do with Anne's on the contemporary tower of St Cuthbert's in Wells. The purpose of the Guild was to provide for four chaplains out of an endowment of land left for that purpose, two of whom were to pray for the souls of Sir William, Anne, and her new husband Richard Densell, in the Palton chapel in the south aisle of the church.

The manor house, so recently built, was to be let go. Even before Sir William's death it seems that parts of it were in separate occupation. Dr R. Dunning of the Victoria County History for Somerset wrote in 1976:

> I have looked at the surviving account rolls of the manor...The earliest, the roll for 1448-9, shows that at least part of the manor house had been let to tenants, though some was still retained for the lord's use. Thus the bailiff accounts for unpaid rents for "the chamber under the lord's chamber", for the "tenement which is in the kitchen" and for a cottage "by the kitchen". The same amounts occur in 1452-3. The chamber under the lord's chamber certainly sounds as if it is part of the manor-house, though I suppose the other two could refer to an earlier and still existing detached kitchen? It was common, in any case, to maximise cash receipts by letting demesne property in the mid-15th century...The transfer of the manor on Sir William's death in 1450 to a Devon family suggests that the manor-house was never again one dwelling, though the lord still retained and repaired a stable there in 1452-3, as much for the convenience of his steward as for his own use.

The chamber under the lord's chamber was probably in the east cross-wing, the lord's chamber being the solar; and the tenement in the kitchen, unless as Dr Dunning suggests in an older outbuilding, was probably in the supposed south-west wing.
Before long the house would have been further subdivided, and more tenements fitted in wherever they could be. In 1975 it was found that the partial blocking of the oriel arch, to make a smaller doorway, had been carried out at an early date, perhaps by 1500. Alterations to the service end of the hall - the new south door, new windows both in the exterior walls and in the wall looking down into the hall - were probably carried out not much later, although subsequently much altered.

In about 1600 the solar cross-wing was replaced by a much smaller extension at the east end of the hall. Its walls were found by members of the Axbridge Archaeological and Local History Society, who under Dr Anne Everton did a limited dig in this area and inside the hall in 1975-6. The closing of the hall fireplace probably occurred at the same time.

Meanwhile the ownership of the manor had passed to the Fortescue family. Richard Densell had an only daughter, Elizabeth, who was married in 1454 to Martin Fortescue of Filleigh, North Devon. Some accounts say that she was in fact his daughter by Anne Palton, but since he only married Anne in 1451 or 2, and Elizabeth Fortescue had her first child in 1460, there must be certain objections to this. Whoever was her mother, she - or at least her husband - inherited the Densell property, including Croscombe. For a time around 1500 the manor seems to have belonged to her children by her second marriage to Sir Richard Pomeroy, but later reverted to the Fortescues, who owned it throughout the 17th and into the 18th century.

Although in 1700 the "other parts of the building" (as they are described by W. Phelps in his *History of Somerset* (1836-9) had long been cottages, it is likely that the hall itself remained unaltered. It is said to have been used for manorial business, such as the collecting of rents, and the dispensing of such justice as still fell within the jurisdiction of the lord of the manor. It was also a useful space for meetings, and as such it eventually, perhaps even before 1700, attracted the members of a congregation of Baptists.

In the 1720s and '30s Hugh Fortescue, who by right of his grandmother had become Lord Clinton in 1721, sold much of his property in Croscombe, mainly to the existing tenants. By

coincidence his grandmother's family, who were also Earls of Lincoln, had been granted the overlordship of the Manor of Croscombe after it had been confiscated by the Crown from the Dukes of Somerset in the 16th century. So Lord Clinton was both overlord and tenant, or feoffee, of the manor, which he then sold. The ancient Palton manor house and the lordship of the manor were thus completely separated.

The Baptists and the Old Hall

Of the Old Hall, W. Phelps has this to say:

> The hall and other parts of the building having been sold at the dismemberment of the manor, it was purchased by a respectable inhabitant of the place, and converted into a chapel for the use of a congregation of Baptists, of which communion the donor was a member, and his remains lie within its walls.

This 'respectable inhabitant' may have been the Joseph George who died in 1770, bequeathed 'the Meeting House and Burial Ground in Croscombe … to Mr John Speed and William Singer my son-in-law to be appropriated to the use it is now applied to forever', and whose memorial is in the north wall of the hall. However, it is more likely that Joseph's father, John George, was the original benefactor, who acquired the Old Hall from Lord Clinton for the Baptists' use (and with it presumably the nominal lordship of the manor). It seems, however, that the hall was in use as a chapel long before this. The Church Books for the 18th and 19th centuries survive, the first entries dated 1723. From 1723-1727 the Baptist congregation was paying rent to the lord of the manor for the building, with the implication is that it had been doing so for some time. Baptist services had already been held in the building for some time previously. A lecture given in 1899 on the History of the Croscombe Baptist Church by the Rev E.H. Brown also records a tradition that the Baptists, who had been active in Croscombe from the early or mid-17th century, had moved from their first building on the other side of the valley well before 1723.

Payments for rent cease in the Church Books after 1727 and soon afterwards payments of rent for the cottage begin. It must have been at this time, therefore that the building as it exists today, the hall and the cottage at its west end, were bought for use by the Baptists probably by John George. In these early accounts, it is also John George who advances sums for the maintenance of the Meeting House, presumably having acquired it with the idea that rent from the cottage would pay for the maintenance and repair of the Meeting House itself.

John George died in 1739 and and his son Joseph's name first occurs in the accounts in 1736. Joseph himself died on the 6th May 1770. When the works were carried out in 2013-14 to renew the underfloor heating system in the hall, a partially collapsed, stone lined and capped east-west vault measuring 2·2m x 0·75m was found near the baptistery tank. It is

likely that this represented the burial 'near or under the table pew' of Joseph George and his first wife Elizabeth, as indicated by the memorial above the northern door.

Joseph George was a stocking maker and 'gentleman', born in 1707 in Croscombe to John and his wife, Rose. Joseph married Elizabeth Cary of Shepton Mallet on 2 October 1735 in two separate ceremonies on the same day: once in Croscombe, and once in Bruton, probably by a Non-conformist minister (Bruton was known to have a strong non-conformist body within the parish). Between 1735 and Elizabeth's death in March 1739/40, two children were born, Elizabeth in 1736 and Mary in 1738. Joseph later married Frances Hillard, of Dinder, on 12 July 1749.

At his death in 1770, Joseph will divided his estates between his three grandchildren, trusting that 'there may be no quarrels amongst them'. He left extensive properties in and around Croscombe besides the Old Hall and its cottage. He made many generous bequests to servants, and left instructions to John Speed, his executor, kinsman and friend, to reimburse himself, and 'take my silver mounted gunn as a small acknowledgement for his trouble, and to keep in remembrance of me.'[1]

There does not appear to have been a resident minister at Croscombe at first. The chapel was probably served by a series of itinerant preachers. The congregation in 1761 consisted of 24 people, but several of these came from some distance away. In 1771 it was only 15. Ten years later the first "settled minister" was appointed, the Revd Samuel Evans, who was to remain there until his death in 1809. The congregation rose and fell; baptisms were always joyfully noted in the church books - on one occasion ten people joined the church at once. Baptisms were carried out in the River Sheppey, and must have been stirring events, accompanied by much singing.

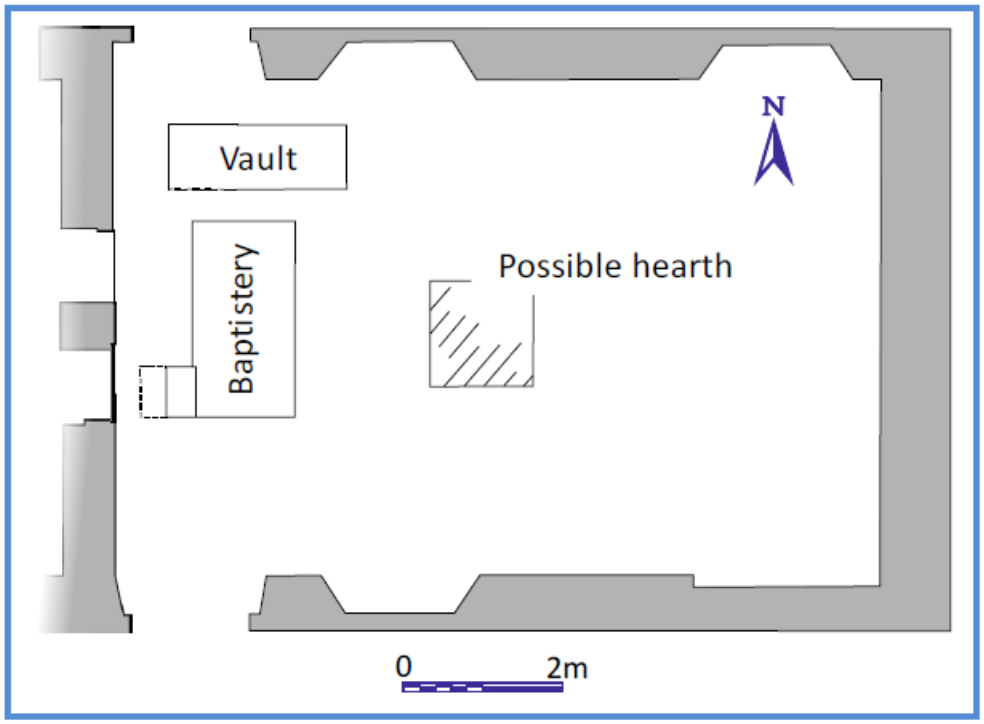
The Nonconformist congregation was undoubtedly very proud of its unlikely building, and maintained it beautifully. It is thanks to them that the most important part of the manor

[1] Thanks to Landmark volunteer Elaine Edge for assembling these and other genealogical details in this album, her interest having been pricked by the chapel's memorials. Sources for Joseph George: Somerset parish records: Will of Joseph George (PRO)..

house has survived, while the rest of it, in separate ownership, vanished. It was altered, of course, to suit new needs, and the accounts record major overhauls and repairs as well as regular maintenance, but nothing that mattered was taken away.

To begin with mentions of a school house imply that the present kitchen was used for this purpose; in the 1760s it had become the vestry, as it was in the 19th century. Mention is made of a stable, but this disappears soon after 1800. In the 1780s the first entries beyond "mending ye roof" or "ye windows", or for new plaster and whitewash occur.

The baptistery tank at the service end of the hall, as identified in the 1970s restoration, was again revealed during works in 2013-14 to replace failed 1970s underfloor heating. Note the two steps down. The tank was lined with blue lias slabs (the scale rule is two metres long). The excavations also exposed the remains of a burial vault where John and Rose George were possibly interred, and traces of a possible central hearth relating to the medieval hall.



In 1782 three masons spent two days there, and 8s 3d was spent on drink for them. They may have been making the new doorway in the south-east corner, inside the oriel arch, and blocking up the medieval cross-passage doors. And in 1789 a stone floor was laid in the Meeting House.

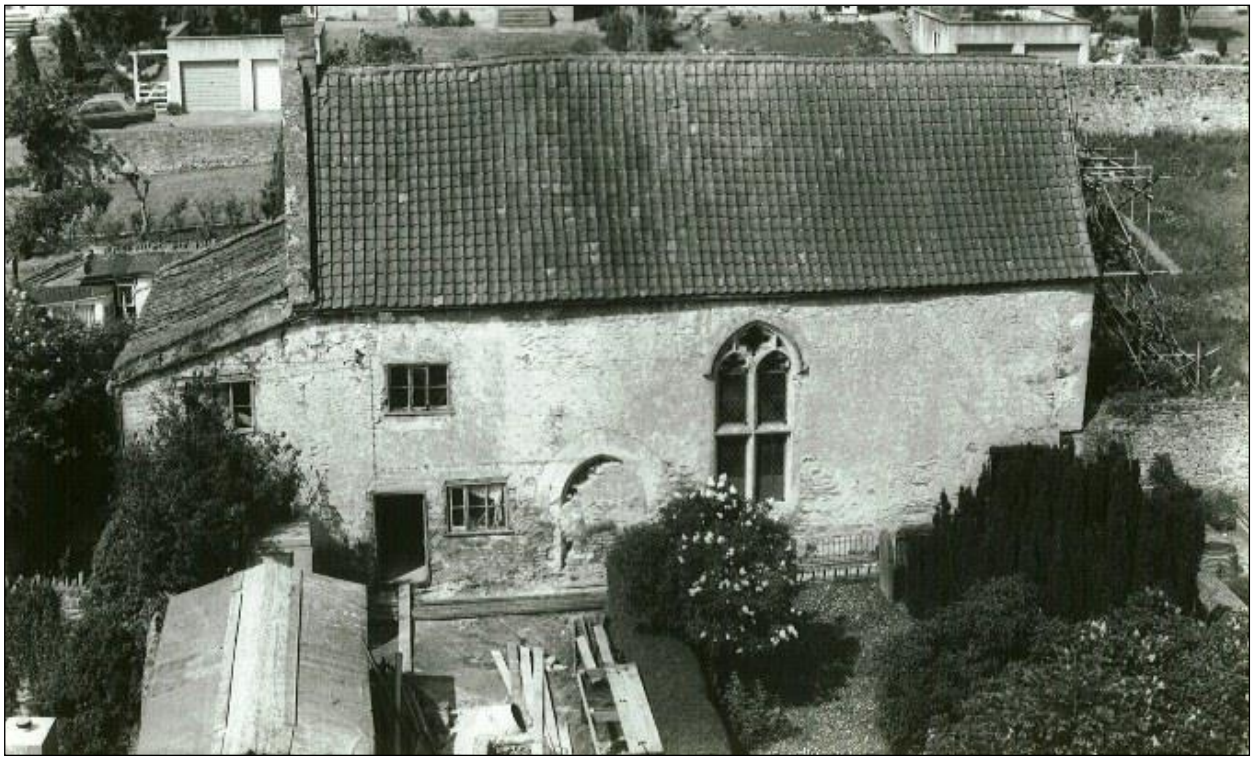
In about 1809, "the Meeting House being very much out of repair there was about £25 Public Money laid out to repair it". However in 1814-15, another £140 was spent on both cottage and meeting house. Perhaps the lean-to was added at this point. There was also a cupboard of about this date in the recess of the south hall door. At some point too, the hall windows had their sills raised. In 1824 an important addition was made - a new Baptistry. This was a tank sunk in the floor at the west end of the hall, reached by steps through the left hand service door. It had to be filled and emptied by hand, so it was hardly convenient, but it saved a cold plunge in the river. In 1834 the house was "rufcast".

At this point another character associated with the Old Hall comes into clearer focus, Baptist minister the Reverend George Pulling. Pulling was born c 1787 in Corsham, and initially earned his living as a baker in Corsham. His obituary in the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette 12 Nov 1863 reveals that he was Pastor of the Baptist church at Croscombe for 17 years, implying that he took up his post in Croscombe in 1846. By the 1861 census, Pulling was resident either next to or within the Baptist Chapel at the Old Hall (the census entry is ambiguous). Pulling apparently married three times, first to Love Harris in 1812 in Lacock, while still a baker in Corsham. The couple had a family; in 1841 two of their children are resident with them, James aged 27 and Mary aged 15. Love Pulling died “after a protracted bodily and mental affliction” in 1842, and by 1851 George was a minister in the Baptist church in Corsham, and in 1844 remarried to Ann Dickman. Ann died in 1857 and the following year George married again, this time to Sarah Thomas, a Croscombe woman 18 years his junior, who survived him by six years. His obituary recorded that ‘His end was peace’.

The Old Hall in 1974, photographed by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments, and John Schofield

In 1882, along with roof repairs, a new ceiling was inserted. It was later noted that this ceiling had hidden the 'oak rafters and open roof of the old baronial hall'. However references to repairs of the ceiling had been made from the 1770s on, and it would be very surprising if the roof had been left open all this time. The answer may be that the earlier ceiling was at a higher level, just below the collar perhaps, and that some of the 'rafters"'could still be seen. By 1882 it could be seen that the walls were beginning to spread, and it was thought advisable to insert a ceiling at the height of the wall-head, with tie-beams.

The church books end in 1911, but no doubt the same pattern of repair and maintenance continued, at least until the Second World War. The same standard was not kept up thereafter. The cottage fell empty in 1947. The congregation dwindled to a handful. They could not afford the sums required for its upkeep, and nor could the Bristol and District Association of Baptist Churches, to which the chapel now belonged. Meanwhile faults inherent in the construction of the building, and arising from its subsequent alteration, were causing severe structural problems which if not dealt with soon were going to lead to its collapse.



Work in progress

The hall before restoration

The blocked doorway at the south end of the hall and the staircase door

Rescue & Repair

It was extremely fortunate that in 1973, before any such collapse had actually occurred, the Old Hall was spotted by the architect John Schofield when he was visiting the church. He immediately set about persuading the congregation to let him shore up the east gable, where old flues and later alterations had weakened the wall to the point where it could no longer stand up. This they agreed to, and when soon afterwards they decided to sell the Old Hall, he bought it. Realising that he would not himself be able to pay for the extensive repairs needed, he approached the Landmark Trust, and sold it on to us in 1975.

When he had first visited it there was little to be seen of the medieval detail, besides the windows and the surround of the north doorway. By 1975, explorations in the plaster, and in the roofspace, had fully confirmed his first impression that here was a building of great importance. Most of the survey work having been carried out in 1974, all that now remained to be done was to agree the proposals for the restoration, to draw up a specification, and to obtain the relevant permissions from the Planning Authorities.

John Schofield's firm, Artist Constructor, were both designers and builders. They were appointed to supervise and carry out the work, under site foreman David Hobbs. Burrough and Hannam, a firm of architects from Bristol who had supervised repairs at Woodspring Priory for Landmark, were also involved in some of the more complex engineering items.

Apart from the east gable, which was now supported, the most serious structural problem lay in the side walls of the hall. These are quite thin, pierced by several large openings, and yet have no buttresses to support them. When there was weight such as that of the roof to be born, this was how medieval builders usually solved the problem. Without them, the walls were gradually being forced apart, until they were some 6" out of true, and large cracks were forming. The Victorian tie-beams of the ceiling had done their work well, and prevented the problem from getting too much worse, but they were no longer adequate for the job, and anyway the ceiling was to be removed. Instead linked stainless steels rods have been inserted, which hold the building together but do not obstruct the view of the roof.

The Baptistry, or baptismal well, at the west end of the hall

The outward movement of the walls had caused problems with the window heads, particularly that in the south wall. The two faces of this were coming apart, and so had to be tied back together. At the same time the sills of all three windows were removed and reset at their proper level. Missing sections of mullion were then made up in new Doulting stone to match the original ones.

The most drastic repairs were still those in the east gable. The top nine feet of this was dismantled entirely, down to the level of the retaining arch over the upper fireplace. A concrete ring beam was then cast, running round the gable, and extending some feet along the side walls. At one point in the end wall it can be seen breaking the surface. To add further strength three prongs or legs ran vertically down from the main ring beam into the lower part of the wall. The lintel of the upper fireplace was then bolted into position. The hood of the lower fireplace was further reinforced.

The infill of the oriel arch was also removed, and rebuilt so that it was more strongly tied into the main walls. The new wall was only half the thickness, to leave the arch recessed on the inside. The door in the lower half was blocked up, and the lower part of the wall partly rebuilt as well.

Another weak area was in the north wall of the west chamber, where a medieval window had been replaced by a later one. There was not enough of the medieval window left to be able to reinstate it with confidence, so the wall was rebuilt, and a new lintel inserted over the existing window. The medieval window in the south wall of this bedroom was largely in tact, however, and so was reinstated. The sill was made up from dressed stone found around the site, and the jambs with tiles.

The west gable also needed to be rebuilt. On all external walls defective pointing was raked out, leaving any that was sound in place. The south and east walls were repointed and then limewashed, where they had previously been roughcast; while the north and east walls were simply pointed.

Meanwhile the roof had been stripped of its tiles, and the repair of the framework begun. This was kept to the absolute minimum, with new oak being inserted where it was structurally necessary - the braces of one truss, and to support the purlins; or where it was important for visual reasons, such as the windbraces, or sections of the cornice at the east end. Some of the common rafters also needed renewel. In some cases spreading joints were strengthened with a metal saddle strap over the top, and new wood below. On top of the rafters elm boards were laid, with insulation and then roofing felt on top of that. The tiles were then relaid, with second-hand ones to make up any missing areas.

The roof structure over the west chamber had been substantially altered, but the slots for the original purlins could still be seen in the principal rafters, and so the new ones were set in the same position. These purlins did not run through in line from those of the hall roof. The lean-to roof was repaired at the same time, and at either end of the main building, new brick chimneys were built.

The screens passage doors had been unblocked, by now, and the stone surrounds repaired where necessary. We decided to leave the door into the kitchen, as a useful back door, rather than reinstate the medieval window that had been there. The door itself was repaired, but both those in the hall doors are, of course, new, as is all the carpentry for the windows in the west wing. The windows were all reglazed, with new lead, but re-using the old glass whenever possible.

Inside, the hall was very nearly back to its 15th century appearance, with the roof re-opened, the windows and the doors of the screens passage reinstated in their proper form, and the oriel arch present in outline. It remained to unblock one service door, and repair the other where a rectangular door-head had cut across it. The third door, where the staircase had once been, we left blocked, but with the wall recessed inside the surround.

The floor was taken back to its medieval level. The idea had been to recreate the lime-ash floor, but the secret of doing this successfully has been lost, and experiments proved unsatisfactory. The present quarry tiles were laid instead.

While this work was going on, we were offered the remarkable Gurney's Patent stove, from Romsey Abbey, where it was no longer needed. So we accepted it, and installed it here, where it has provided much entertainment, and even some heat.

The new service doors are oak, but the shutters of the windows are elm - a wood in plentiful supply when the work was going on due to Dutch Elm disease. As much old plaster was retained as possible, but where it was missing or decayed (and where on the east wall, some visiting archaeologists in an attack of excessive enthusiasm had stripped it all away) new lime-hair plaster was applied. The walls were then limewashed, with some ochre added to give warmth.

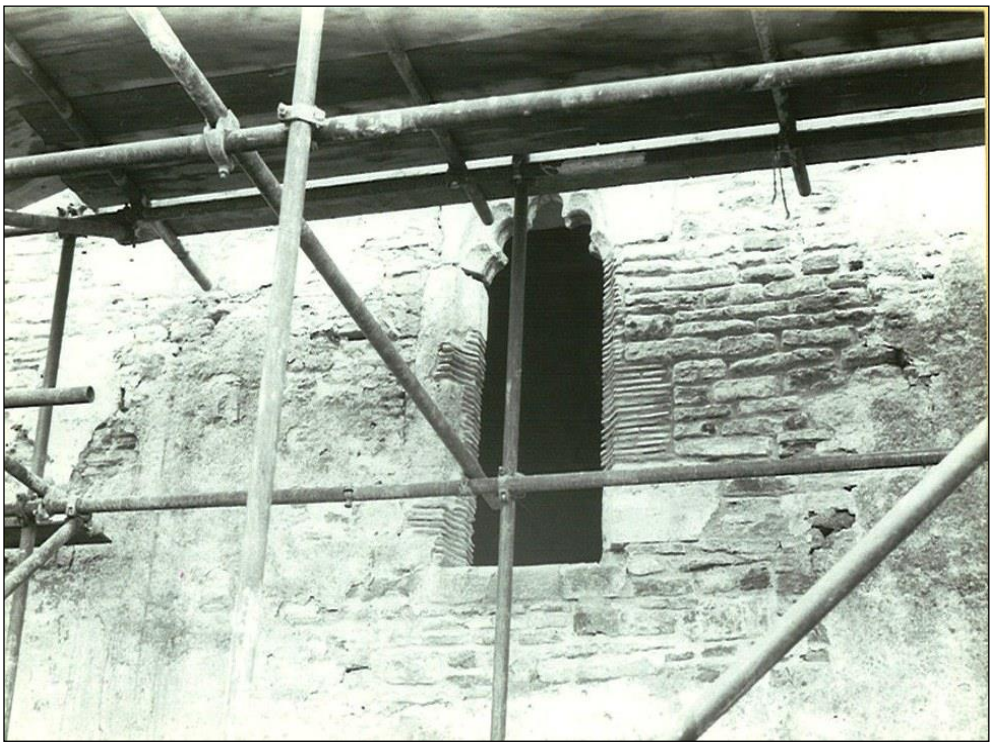
The obvious place to have the kitchen was where the service rooms had been, which had been the kitchen cottage as well. A staircase and a larder were removed from the north end, so that the sink could go under the medieval window. The floor was left at its nineteenth century height, to be on a level with the rooms in the lean-to. The paviours in both are second-hand.

The staircase was put in the lean-to so that it would be in approximately the same position as the medieval stair; and the west chamber could be entered through the medieval door. The head of this needed repair. In the chamber itself, the fireplace was unblocked, and its lintel supported with ties. The two former openings in the end wall of the hall were given new lintels, for strength.

Round the back and sides of the building the ground levels have all changed dramatically since the 15th century. In general it would be undesirable to alter this, but close to the walls, both for the sake of drainage, and to see the original wall height restored, the ground was carefully dug back. French drains were laid right round the building. The little enclosed garden and old burial ground were preserved as we found them.

The work on the Old Hall was completed in 1976.

Charlotte Haslam
January 1990

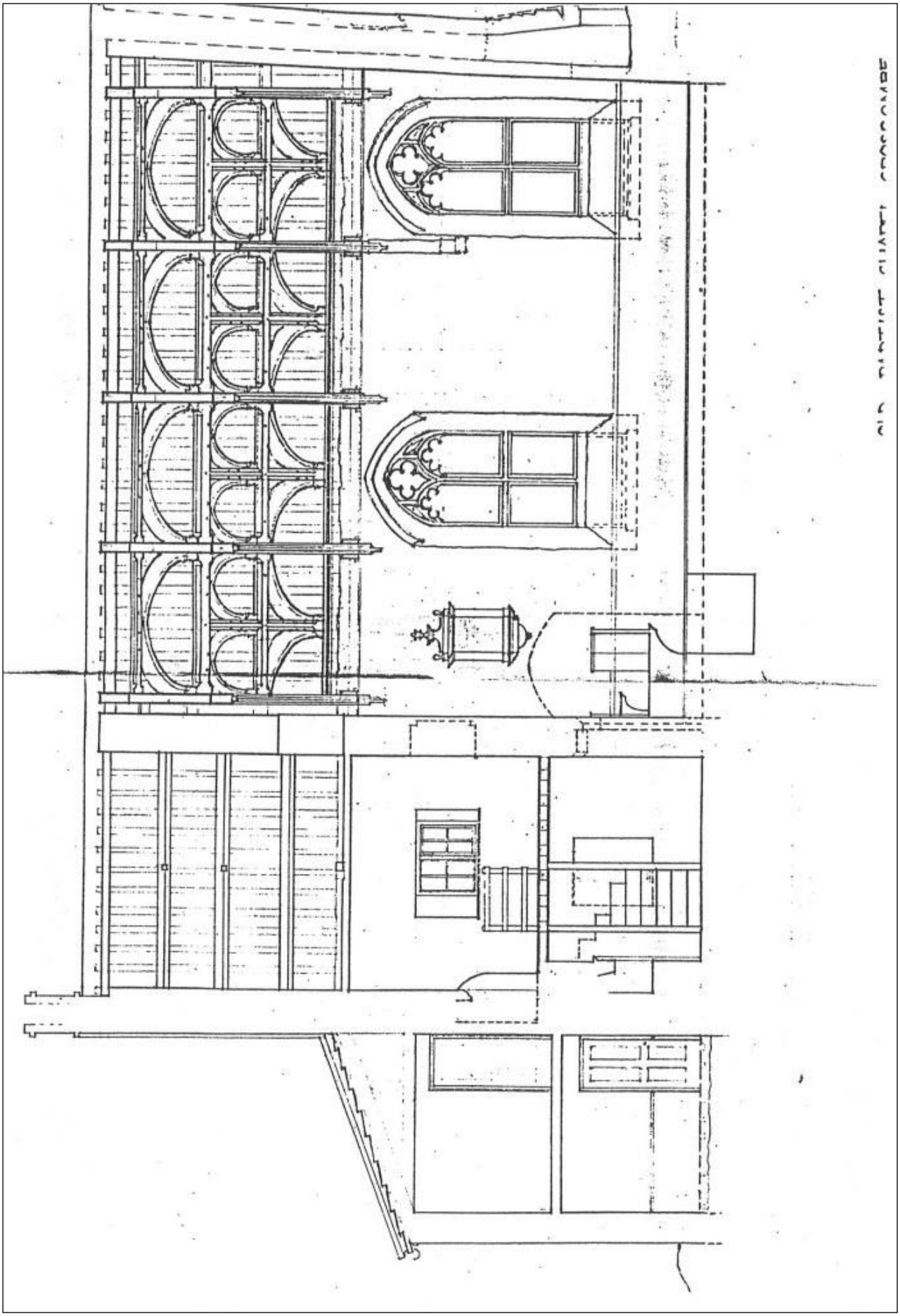


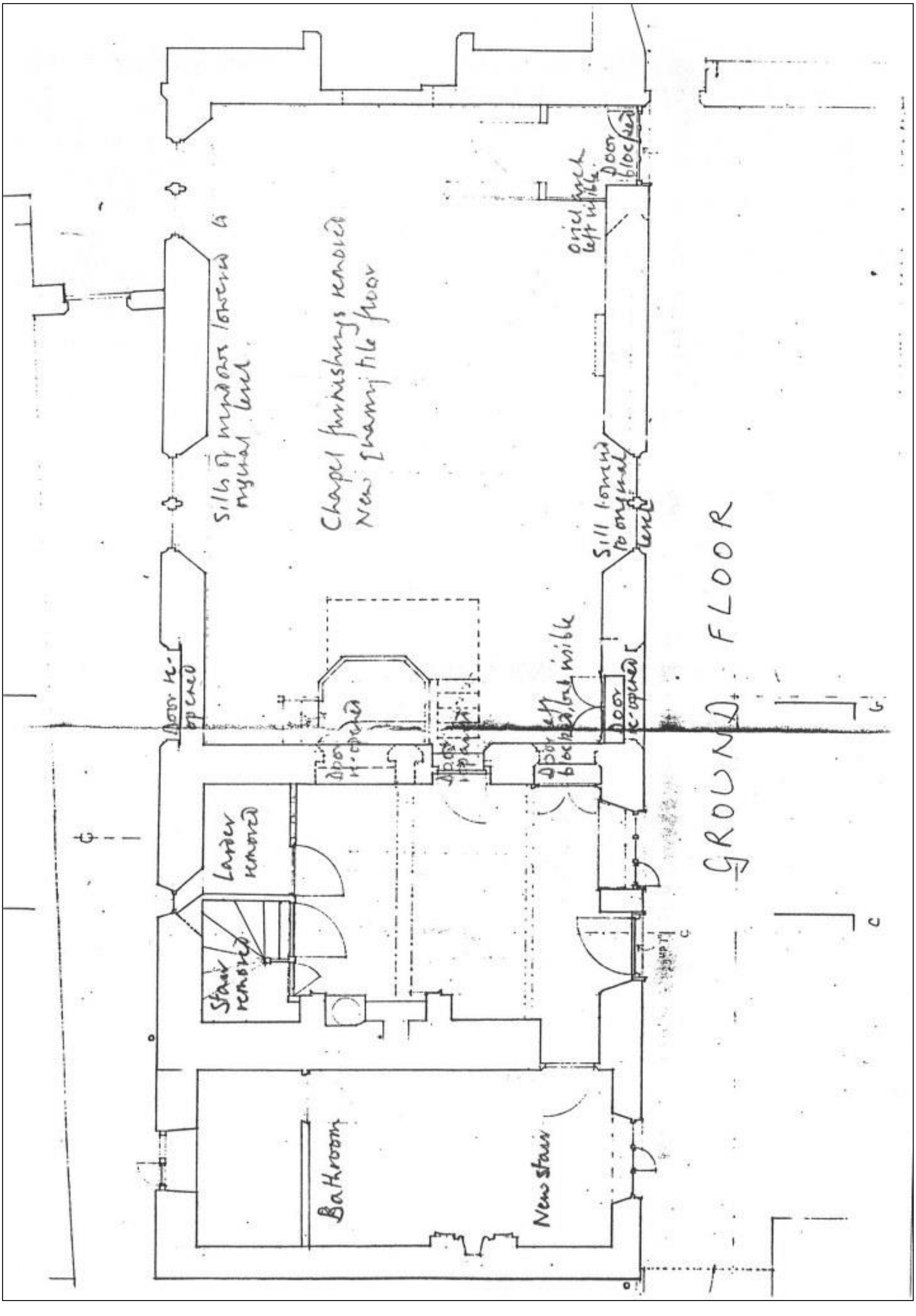
The west chamber window reinstated, and the kitchen before work started.

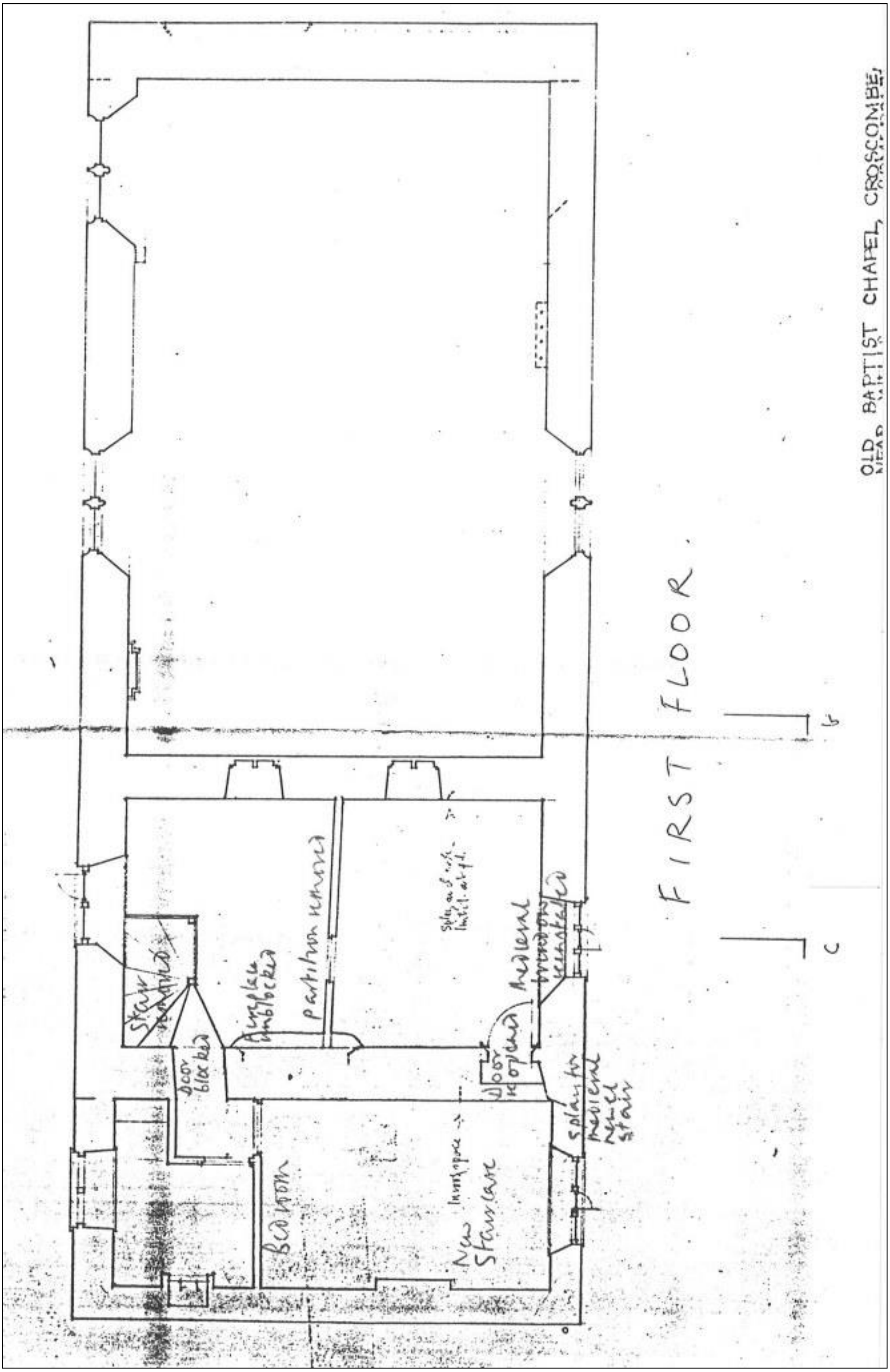
Building Materials

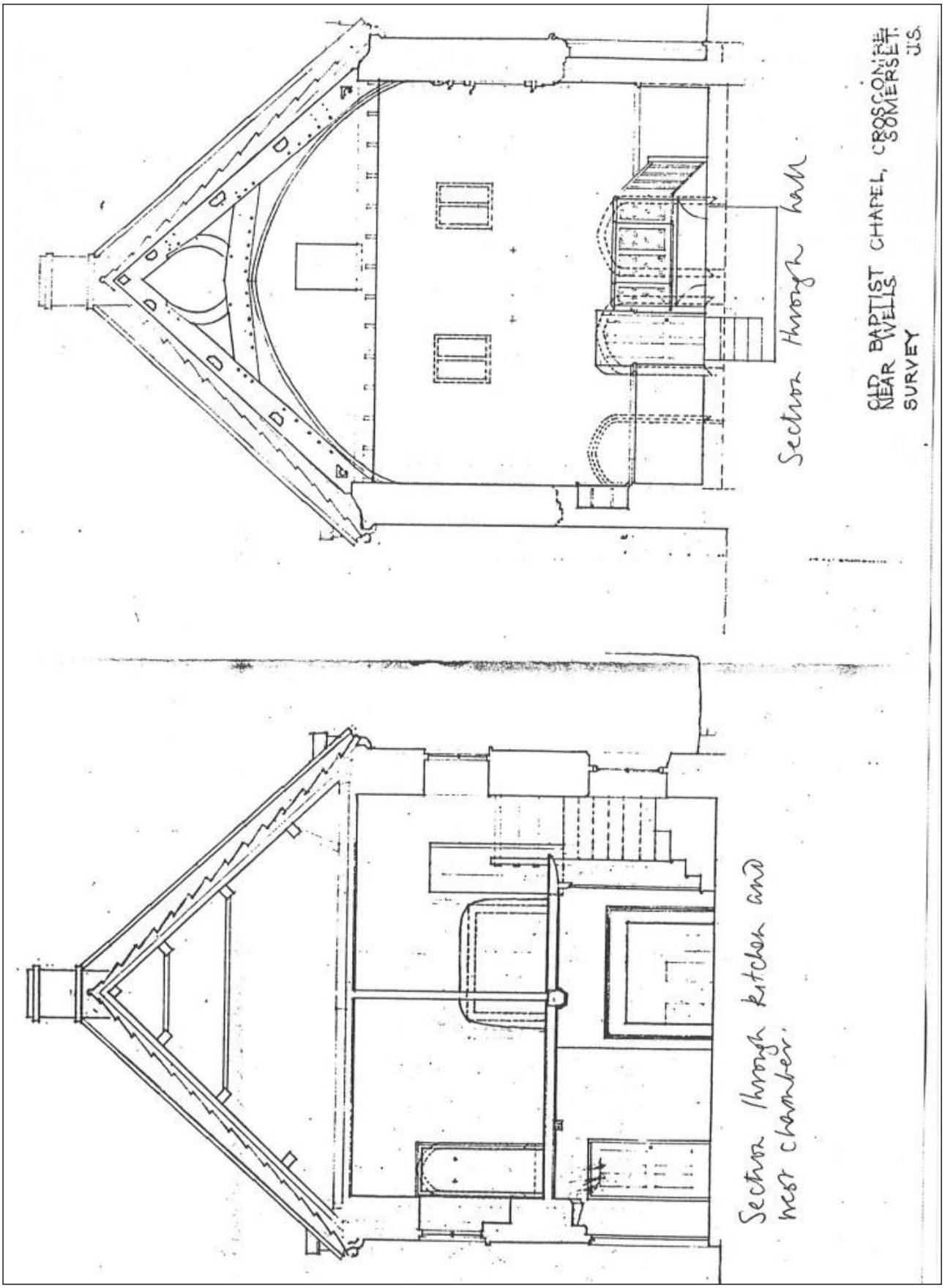
The dressed stone detail of the Old Hall is in Doulting stone, but the walls are of Chilcote, a local stone that was also used for the rebuilding of Croscombe church, c.1420-40, and earlier for Wells Cathedral. To establish where the stone for Croscombe might have come from John Schofield wrote in 1974 to L.S. Colchester, archivist of Wells Cathedral, who replied:

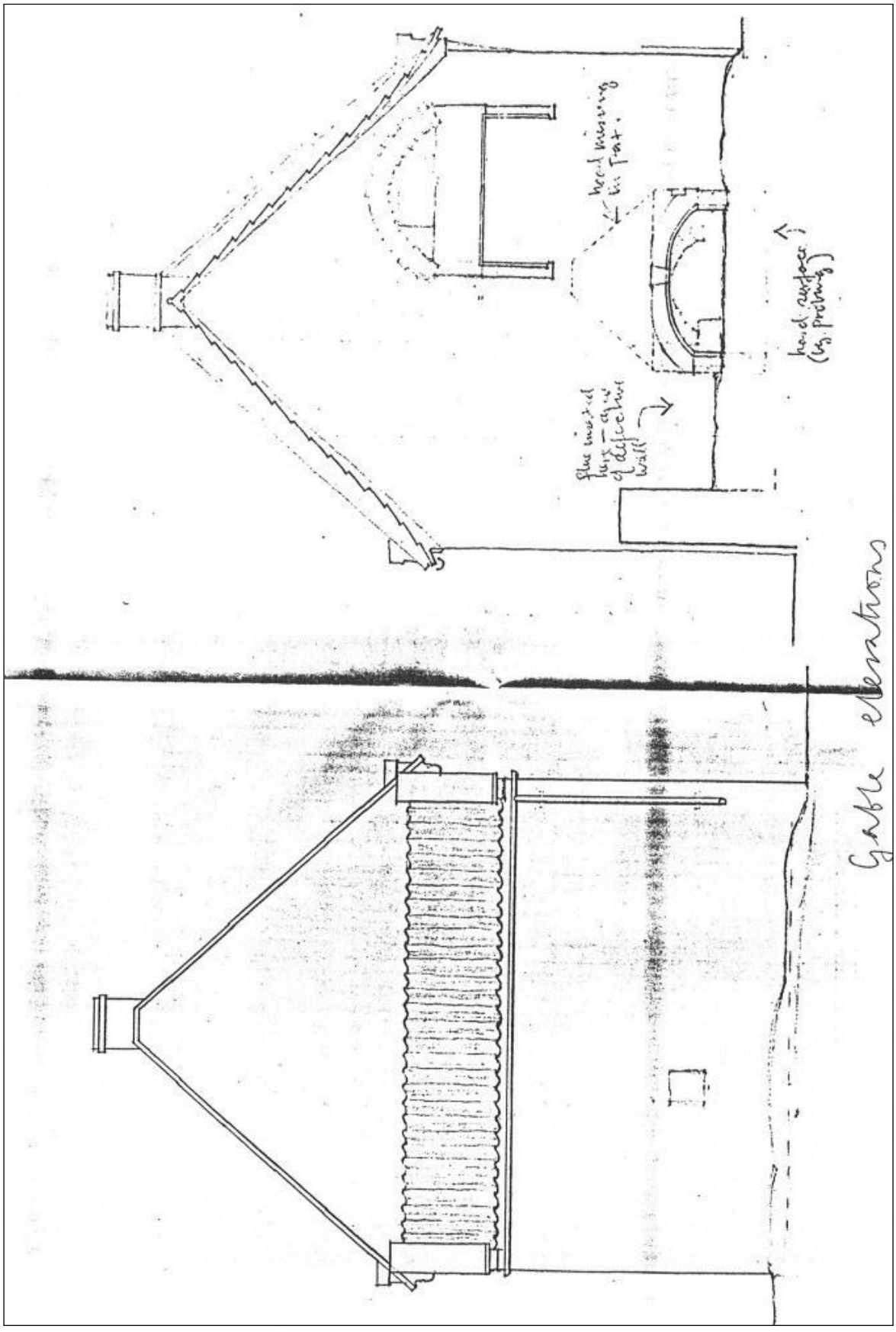
> The nearest and best source of Chilcote Conglomerate alias Bastard Freestone would be the Ham Woods, where where are old quarries of it on both sides of the track going up the valley. I suspect that this is where Croscombe church came from.
>
> When the spire was rebuilt in 1936 the Conglomerate was taken from "Church Quarry" well west of Ham Woods, which has since been filled in so that the field can be used for grazing or agriculture. ....Whether the name of "Church Quarry" is an old one I do not know, but imagine it dates from c.1936.
>
> The narrow belt from which it comes extends westwards to West Horrington, passing through Chilcote which gives it its name. The problem with regard to the Cathedral is that Ham Woods and Croscombe belonged to Glastonbury Abbey, while Dinder westwards belonged to the Cathedral. All the existing quarries are on ex-Glastonbury land (so far as I could discover), but the treatment of "Church Quarry" showed how easily a disused quarry could be filled in.
>
> At the Dissolution of the Monasteries, directly or indirectly the ex-Glastonbury land in Croscombe came to the Lord of Dinder, so that the Somervilles of Dinder now own Ham Woods and most if not all the land surrounding Croscombe, including of course the "Church Qaurry" which old man Somerville had opened specially for the rebuilding of the spire in 1936 from his knowledge of where the conglomerate had come from before, or more probably knowing that this was the nearest easily accessible place where the conglomerate was near the surface, near the lane etc.

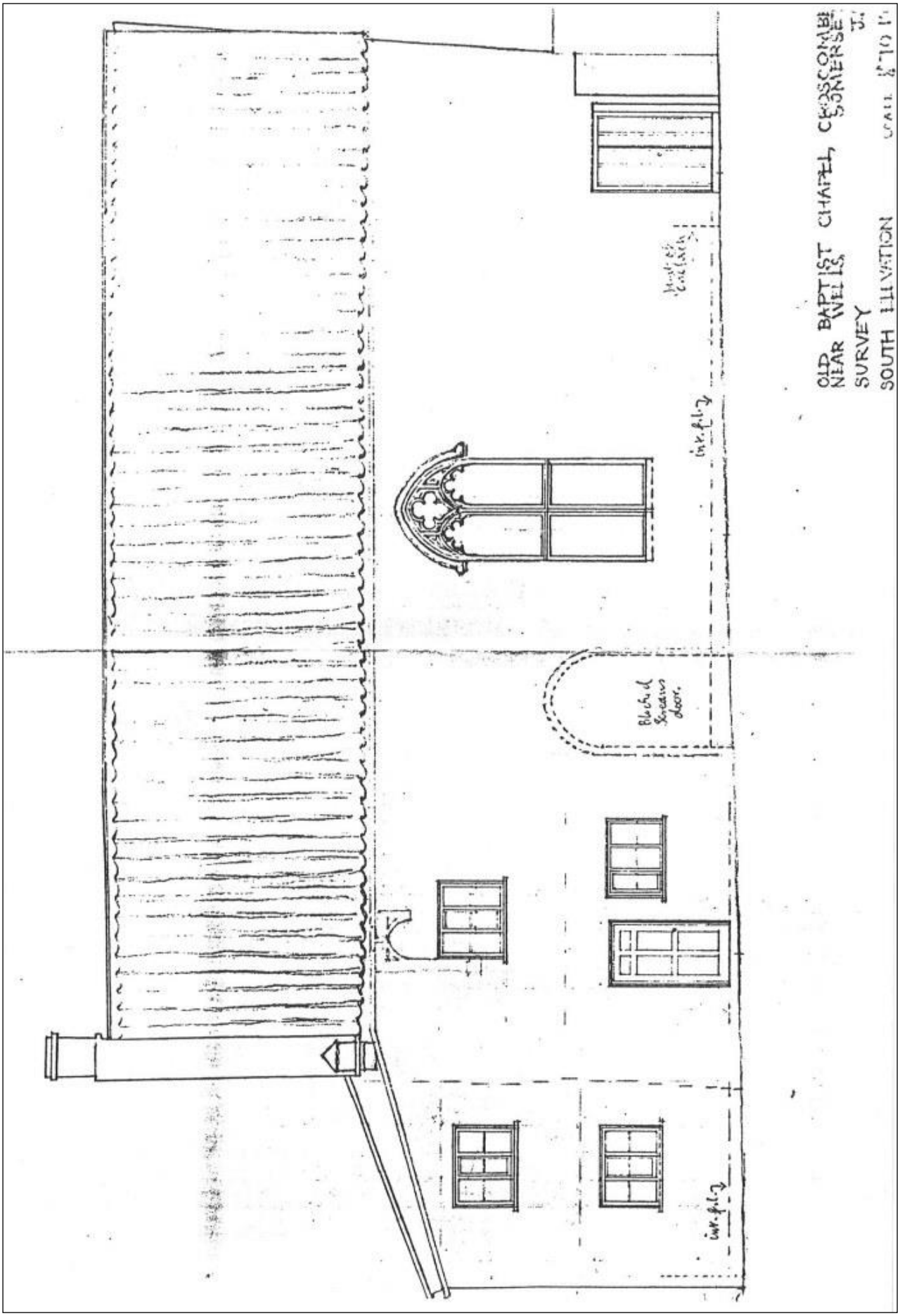


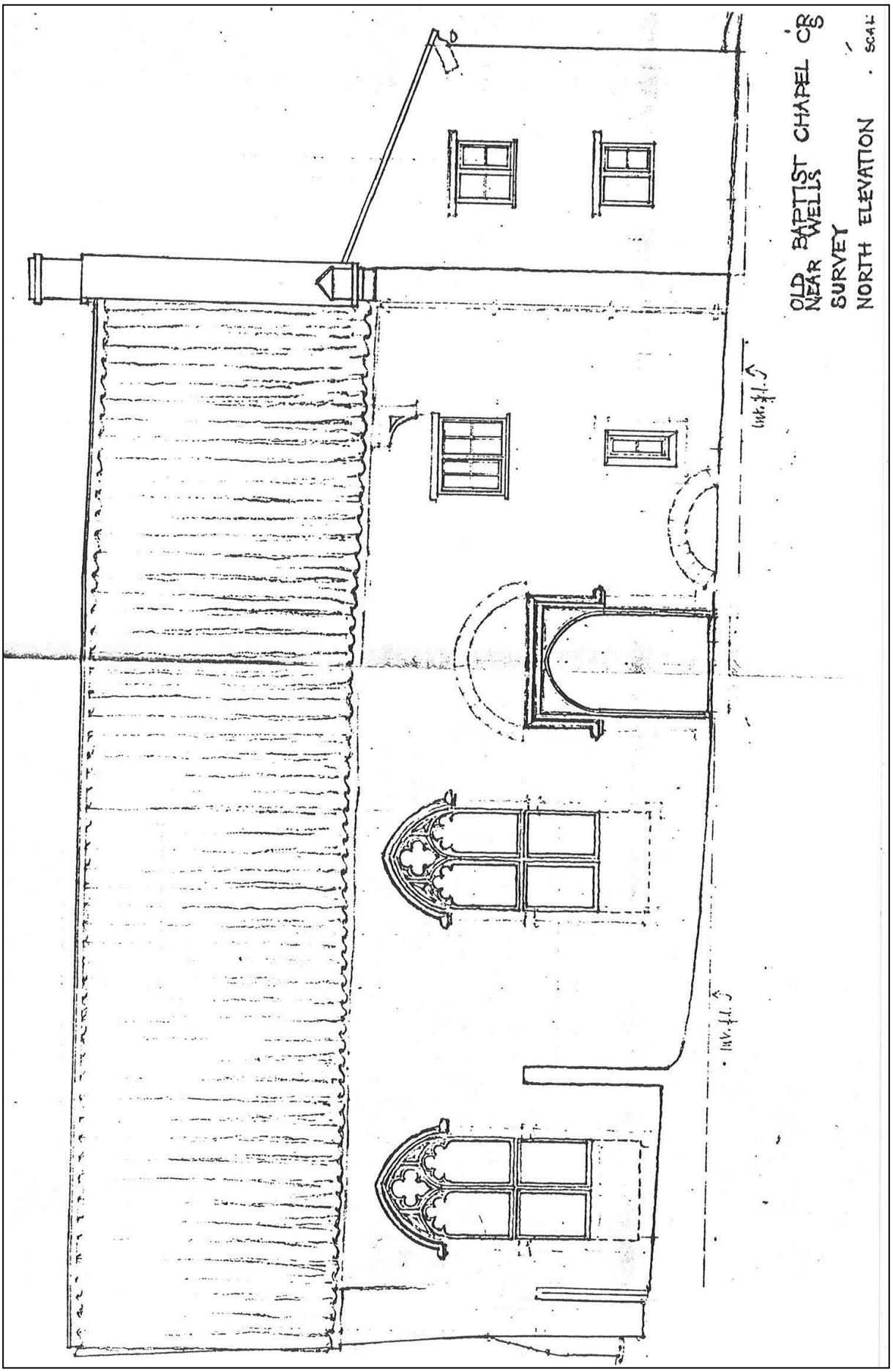

GROUND FLOOR
Bathroom
New stair
Stair removed
Larder removed
Door re-opened
Door blocked


OLD BAPTIST CHAPEL, CROSCOMBE,
FIRST FLOOR
partition removed
Bedroom
New Staircase
door blocked


OLD BAPTIST CHAPEL, CROSCOMBE
NEAR WELLS SOMERSET.
SURVEY
J.S.
Section through hall
Section through kitchen and west chamber.


Gable elevations


OLD BAPTIST CHAPEL CROSCOMBE
NEAR WELLS SOMERSET
SURVEY
SOUTH ELEVATION


OLD BAPTIST CHAPEL CR
NEAR WELLS
SURVEY
NORTH ELEVATION
SCALE

THE OLD HALL – Memorials

Notes provided by Landmarker volunteer Elaine Edge.

FREDERICK GEORGE NASH died 1 June 1946 aged 64
ALICE MAUD NASH died 8 April 1905 aged 24
ERNEST NASH son died 12 May 1905

Frederick Nash worked at a local stone quarry (possibly Windsor Hill) and married Alice Parsons, a silk-weaver from Shepton Mallet in 1901. In 1904 Alice died during, or shortly after, giving birth to their son Ernest. This infant died just a month later. Two years later Frederick married Agnes, Alice's younger sister, and at the time of Frederick's death they were living in Alma Cottage, Croscombe. There is no record of children born to this second marriage, but Agnes's mother lived with the couple in her old age.

Sources: censuses, Bath Chronicle, Freebmd. Ancestry probate index.

MARIANNE SOMERS 7 November 1875 aged 77
JAMES SOMERS 5 Jan 1879 aged 84

Born in 1798 and 1795 respectively, this couple were retired farmers living in Long Street, Croscombe in 1871. Marianne had been born in Buckland, and James in East Cranmore, where he was farming in 1841 at New House Farm with Marianne and four sons. Marianne may be the Mary Ann Barnes who married a James Somers in East Cranmore in 1820. The couple seem to have been reasonably prosperous, James being qualified to vote in 1846 and owning freehold lands in the Pollbook of that year. They appear to have retired to Croscombe, where James still appears as a 'landed proprietor', and in his will as a 'yeoman'.

Sources: Censuses: Ancestry (marriages : probate lists: pollbooks and electoral registers)

JOSEPH BAKER son of John and Hannah Baker of Dinder March 10 1891 aged 82
ELLEN BAKER wife of Joseph Baker died 24 March 1887

Joseph Baker was a skinner/leather worker born in Dinder, who spent most of his life in Croscombe, apart from an interval of a few years in Wells. Ellen was a laundress. At the end of their lives they lived with one of their sons, Henry and his family, in Croscombe.

Sources: Censuses. Ancestry indexes.

JOHN PARKER 22 July 1886 aged 67
REBECCA PARKER 14 August 1887 aged 69

John Parker was born c 1819 in Evercreech, and had married Rebecca Martin in 1840. John was the foreman of a velvet factory in Shepton Mallet, where he had worked his way up from velvet weaver in the 1840s, when he lived in Croscombe with his growing family. Once promoted he relocated to Shepton Mallet where he was still living (and working) as foreman in 1881.

Sources: censuses: Ancestry indexes.

Greater Medieval Houses of Eng & Wales, A Emery Vol III (2006)

NOTES

1 Nothing survives at Kittisford or Almsworthy. Greenham Barton is essentially a single-range rubble-stone house with a commanding porch to the front and a substantial north-west kitchen wing to the rear. At the rear was an enclosed court, with a ruined gateway on its east side. The porch with cinquefoil upper windows, together with the cross-passage doorways, is later fourteenth century though possibly of *c.*1403 when John Bluett's wife came into her father's fortune. A. W. Vivian-Neal, *Proc. Somerset Arch. and N. H. Soc.* 80 (1934) 17–24. The earlier hall was that rarity in south-west England, an aisled structure, of which a single truss survives in the cross passage. The apartment was remodelled in about 1500 when the fireplace and five-light transomed windows were added. The upper-end doors in the same position as those at Cothay open into a single rear chamber with newel (rebuilt in 1920–1), though one of the dais doors probably accessed a lost stair to the upper room. The lower cross wing was rebuilt in the nineteenth century but the almost detached kitchen wing, overlapping one corner of the hall range, is fourteenth century. Cothay shows how such a kitchen unit, with its newel-approached upper floor, could be more closely integrated with the other services of the house by the late fifteenth century. In *c.*1430 John Bluett of Greenham married Maud Cheseldene of Holcombe Rogus. The Bluetts redeveloped Holcombe Court during the early sixteenth century as a courtyard house, with the hall range dominated by a four-storey porch tower. The house was substantially modified during the later sixteenth century and remained the principal residence of the Bluetts until 1856. NMRC, BF 078551; C. Hussey, *Country Life* (September 1933); E. M. Phillips, *Country Life* (January 1915). B. Cherry and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (1989) 487–90.

2 Brakspear's reasonable restoration was replaced by the present plain parapet during the 1970s.

3 The services and offices south-west of the house, remodelled in the 1930s, incorporate seventeenth-century outbuildings.

4 The subjects have been identified by Stephen Rickerby, Courtauld Institute. The dating is by Tipping (1937) 58–60; E. Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England: 1537–1837* (1962) 15, 175.

5 It is believed further wall paintings survive behind this panelling which, like that in the parlour, was painted in the late seventeenth century to resemble walnut.

6 Tipping also noted that evidence of earlier windows was found in the walls of the present hall: (1937) 51.

7 The east gable has an air vent, visible externally.

8 An original opening, like that in the chapel, would have been in stone.

9 E. Duffy, *Voices of Moorbath* (2000) 73–7.

10 As the west entry was initially a window, it is possible that this porch room was an early seventeenth-century addition as at Gurney Manor. If so, the windows were reused and the squint was meaningless except to a recusant.

11 In the 1980s, Robin Bush, Taunton Archivist, found a survey of Richard Bluett's estate of March 1488 describing 'the site there enclosed and ditched around, within which all that messuage and building called the Court Place, pools, orchard and garden which the said Richard caused to be built and constructed with his own wealth'. *Country Life* (August 2002).

12 The stair of 1732 in Sir Francis Cook's wing is said to have been brought from a Somerset house.

13 N. Lloyd, *A History of the English House* (1951 edn) 196. Christopher Hussey waxed even more lyrical in his response to Lt. Col. Cooper's furnishing of the house. Tipping (1937) 56–7 and J. Musson, *The English Manor House* (1999) 77–80.

14 The arms of Richard Bluett and his wife, hitherto preserved in the house, were reset on the gatehouse during the 1926–7 restoration in what was thought to have been their original position. Tipping (1937) 52.

15 N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South and West Somerset* (1958) 133.

T. Garner and A. Stratton, *The Domestic Architecture of England During the Tudor Period* (1929 edn only) 21–2

H. A. Tipping, *English Homes*, Pds 1 and 2, vol. II (1937) 51–68, repeating C. Hussey, *Country Life* (October 1927)

J. Goodall, *Country Life* (July 2004)

CROSCOMBE HALL, Somerset

Sir William Palton's house of *c.*1420 shows that knighthood and a large house were not necessarily synonymous. Positioned immediately north of the fine parish church, the house's survival is the consequence of its long use as a Baptist chapel until 1974 – hence the graveyard in front of the hall.

The house was a 50 foot long range of hall with offices and chamber block at the lower end under a common roof ridge. The addition of an upper block extended the hall range by 15 feet, but this second-phase development has long since been pulled down.

The hall has a plain entry with two-centred head, but the more elaborate opposing north entry indicates that the house was formerly approached from this side, with its hollow-moulded doorway set in a square ogee-moulded frame. Neither entry was porch-protected. The four-bay hall, 32 feet by 20 feet internally, was lit on both sides by two tall transomed windows with twin cinquefoil lights under a quatrefoil head and hood mould. There are now two on the north and one on the south side, for the second one here was subsequently converted into a bay window giving entry to both levels of the upper chamber block. The loss of these structures has left a blocked window. The hall was restored by the Landmark Trust in the 1980s to its original condition, with the rubble-built walls colour-washed and the chapel's 1860 ceiling removed to expose the five arch-braced trusses with ogee-curved struts above the collar and three rows of wind braces. The dais-end fireplace, a relatively early example, was reopened, the walls replastered internally, and

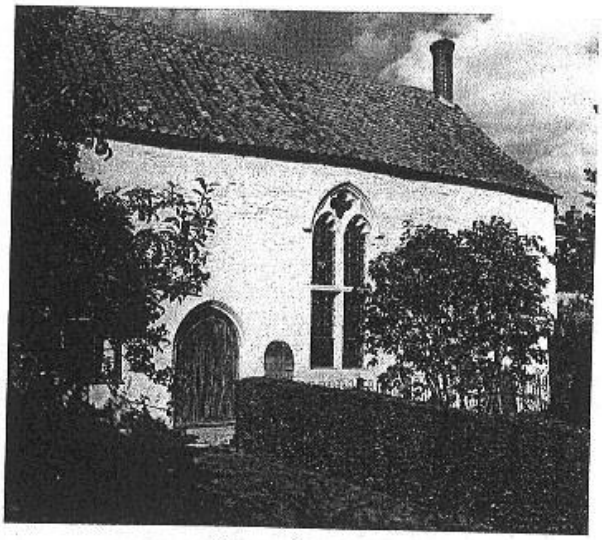


PLATE 227 Croscombe Hall: from the south

the lower window lights shuttered. The embattled stone shelf between the two south windows was cleaned to clarify the arms of Sir William and his wife, flanked by those of Palton with Botreaux and Palton with Wellington.

Sir William died in 1449 without heirs. It was a sixteenth-century successor who added the upper chamber block with ground- and upper-floor fireplaces, approached through the added bay window and lobby as at Fiddleford Manor and similarly pulled down.

Two of the doorways at the lower end of the hall opened into the centrally partitioned services, while the narrower one near the south door accessed the upper chamber. This two-storey unit has been modernised, but the beamed kitchen retains its end-wall hearth while the chamber above retains a cinquefoil light, a fireplace with ogee-moulded jambs and head, and a doorway to a former garderobe.

Croscombe Hall is a late example of a gentry house with chamber at the lower end of the hall. The form of this range has parallels with that fifty years later at Tickenham Court, particularly the layout of the offices and chamber block, as well as the four-bay hall, with a similar stone shelf and bay window to an added residential block.

DARTINGTON HALL, Devon

Like Haddon Hall, Wingfield Manor, and Raglan Castle, Dartington Hall is one of the pivotal houses of late medieval England. And like Wingfield Manor, it was almost entirely constructed in under fifteen years, so that this Devon mansion by the king's half-brother has a rare unity of character and development of national significance. Dartington Hall was the only medieval house subject to a detailed monograph between those of the early twentieth century[1] and books marking the millennium.[2] In view of my detailed analysis in 1970,[3] the following only summarises the present structures before reconsidering significant aspects of this beautifully sited residence.

The manor of Dartington belonged to the Martin family from the early twelfth century to the mid-fourteenth century, and passed to the crown in 1386. Two years later, Richard II granted it to his half-brother John Holand, earl of Huntingdon, who had married John of Gaunt's second daughter. For a time, he was a leading magnate, but he spent much of his later years at Dartington rather than at court, and developed the present mansion until his execution in 1400 for plotting to restore Richard II, following his deposition by Henry IV. The family retained Dartington until the line ended with the death of Henry Holand, duke of Exeter in 1475. Among successive owners and tenants, the most eminent were Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII (1487–1509), and Henry Courtenay, earl of Devon (1525–39). In 1559, the estate was acquired by Sir Arthur Champernowne, and it remained the seat of his descendants until they sold it to Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst in 1925. The medieval buildings, by then much altered or derelict, were restored with meticulous craftsmanship by William Weir between 1926 and 1938[4] and have been held in trust since 1931.

What immediately strikes a visitor to Dartington Hall is the scale of this late fourteenth-century house. It only has to be compared with the earlier and contemporary buildings in the region – Tiverton and Powderham castles, the episcopal palace at Exeter, or Bradley Manor – to appreciate that Dartington is essentially a metropolitan import. This is the grandest medieval house in the west of England, looking very much like an Oxford or Cambridge college in scale, enhanced by the lawns and landscaped grounds and collegiate-like activities that are integral to the continuing function of the Hall. Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst would be quietly content to see it so maintained at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[5]

PLATE 228 Dartington Hall: hall range and kitchen from North Court

DESCRIPTION

Though the Hall is sited on a low rise above the River Dart and can be breathtaking when viewed from the western terraces, the approach is misleading. Any evidence of an outer court has been destroyed by the tarmac road and car park, while the vernacular character of the entrance block and the extended low roof of the barn to its left hardly prepare the visitor for the scale of what is to follow.

The buildings are grouped round an exceptionally spacious courtyard, 265 feet by 164 feet. Beautifully landscaped by Beatrix Farrand in 1932–5, it is the largest house enclosure prior to the sixteenth century and was never spanned by any lost ranges.[6] The hall faces the entrance with its towered porch centred on the gateway, replacing any previous buildings. An inquisition of April 1388 states that 'the buildings and site of the manor and park are somewhat in ruin and decay through lack of repair',[7] suggesting that nothing was done after it had been vacated by the Martin family in 1359 when it was held as one of the many properties of Lord Audley (d.1386). Rebuilding began as soon as Huntingdon had acquired the estate in July 1388, for two months later the dean and chapter of Exeter Cathedral granted him 'slate from the quarry of their manor at Staverton for the roofing of the buildings of the said manor at Dartington'.[8] No further building documentation has been found.