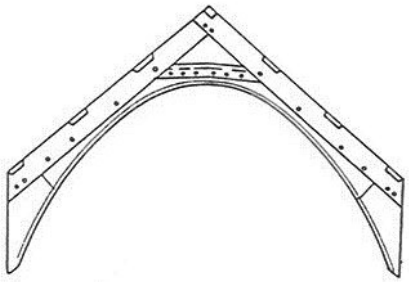
The Landmark Trust

THE PARISH HOUSE

History Album



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Written by Clayre Percy, 1998

Re-presented with additions in 2025

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BASIC DETAILS

Built: c.1500

Architect: Unknown

Bought: 1992 from the Parochial Church Council

Restored: 1992-95

Architect: Peter Bird of Caroe & Martin

Builders: The Landmark Trust's own staff, principally Leonard Hardy & Andrew Coward

Quantity Surveyors: Bare, Leaning & Bare

Furnished & let: September 1995

Listed: Grade II

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The Parish House

Summary

The Parish House is a late-medieval church house, a specific building type that developed at this period. Between about 1450 and 1540, it is thought just about every parish in southern England had its church house. The church house was the equivalent of today's village hall, built by the community on land given to it by the church authorities, often just to the west or south of the church. It was well-built in the local vernacular style, and a source of parish pride. Church house generally had unusually large rooms on ground and first floors, often with a separate, external stair to reach the first floor, and a bread oven for communal baking.
The purpose of the church house was to allow the congregation to raise money for the upkeep of the parish church and its contents, as was their duty, by holding 'church ales.' These 'ales' were village parties, provisioned by the communal brewing of beer and baking of bread, for which everyone paid an admission charge that was then put towards the church or community needs. A plentiful spread was also a source of parish pride, and the worthies of neighbouring villages might also be invited. Until the mid-15th century, such ales were held in the nave of the church itself, but the church authorities began to frown on such raucous frivolities in a holy place.

Ales were regularly held on church festivals (such as Whitsun ales) or they could be held for specific purposes, such as poor men's ales. Sometimes individual groups or guilds might host the ales, such as maidens' ales to raise money for the tapers to go in the Lady Chapel, or shepherds' ales, and so on. The church house might also double as a lodging house for official visitors, or to host a troupe of touring actors, or to store the mummers' or morris dancers' costumes. It lay at the heart of Pre-Reformation village life.

However, after the Reformation in the 1530s and 40s, this aspect of village life was soon suppressed and became redundant. Church authorities now frowned on the idea of raising church funds with any kind of junketing, wherever it was held. Churches became plainer places, candles were no longer lit in front of the images of saints to hasten prayers' passage to heaven. New ways were sought to raise money for the church upkeep – and the villagers sought different ways to party. 'Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?' declaims rollicking Sir Toby Belch to the puritanical Malvolio in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night – a direct reference to the tensions of parish life in the late 16th century as church ales fell out of custom. Church houses became instead schools, priest's houses, inns or private houses, their origins often vanishing from historical view.

Such was almost the fate of the Parish House. On the outside it is now disguised as an ordinary cottage in a row, but inside there is a great medieval fireplace and a splendid medieval roof, and it is one of the very few church houses still in use as a parish meeting place. In May 1989 the Landmark Trust received a letter

from the Rev. B.H.Adams, Vicar of Butleigh, a neighbouring parish run together with Baltonsborough, asking for help. The verger who had lived in eh building for many years had died and the church could not afford the repairs the house needed and would have to sell. Would the Landmark Trust be prepared to buy the house, and let the parish keep using the ground floor meeting room? Landmark was interested in such an historic little building and realised how important it was that its original use should continue. Landmark bought the freehold, in days when our founder's backing still enabled such purchases. By great good luck the next-door cottage, Church View, came up for sale at the same time and we bought that too. About a third of the original church room, which was the main room on the first floor, extended into it and during the restoration that part was taken back into the Parish House. When it was repaired Church View was re-sold with covenants.

Restoration

When we took over the building the first priority was to regain the experience of entering the original church room, so the later 17th-century ceiling was removed. The dormer windows remained, blocked up, and the fine medieval roof was revealed. The trusses were intact but they needed re-pinning and repair, done by Leonard Hardy, who over many years has worked on many Landmark buildings, especially in the West Country. The first floor of Parish House was extended into Church View, so that all the trusses except for the one that was pulled down when the old church house became two cottages, are now again part of the Parish House.

On the ground floor the party wall remained where it was before, and this became the new parish meeting room. The partitions and passages which had accumulated during its life as a cottage were removed except for one original 17th-century wooden screen on the first floor, found within later plaster-work. It was repaired and now divides the sitting room from the main bedroom. The staircase was removed and re-built in a straight and simple form in the north wing. The first floor in the north wing was uncomfortably low so the level of the first floor was slightly altered. A new front door for the Landmark part of the house was inserted. On either side of the door in the kitchen is a limestone shelf that was probably used for maturing cheeses. The house was re-roofed, re-using all the old 'double Roman' tiles that were sound; the window-frames were mostly rotten and had to be renewed. New oak floors were laid in the first floor rooms. The wirescape that festooned the front of the house was removed, the wires run underground instead, and the house was re-wired.

It is a source of considerable satisfaction to all concerned that, thanks to Landmark's intervention, the ground floor still fulfils at least part of its original purpose in parish life by providing meeting facilities for the parish. This precious example of an almost vanished building type also survives as an essential element in this quintessential English grouping around an ancient parish church.

Introduction

The Parish House is one of the few medieval Church Houses to survive and one of the very few indeed still in use as a parish meeting place. On the outside it is now disguised as an ordinary cottage in a row, but inside there is a great medieval fireplace and a splendid medieval roof.

In May 1989 the Landmark Trust received a letter from the Rev. B.H.Adams, Vicar of Butleigh, a neighbouring parish run together with Baltonsborough, asking for help. He said that the Baltonsborough Church House had for a long time been occupied by a verger, but he had died and the house needed so much spent on it that the church could not afford it and would have to sell. What worried him was that the ground floor room was used as a Church Room and he would like to keep it. Would the Landmark Trust be prepared to buy the house, and let the parish keep the ground floor room?

The Landmark Trust was interested in such an historic little building and realised how important it was that its original use should continue. The arrangement was agreed and the Landmark Trust bought the freehold.

By great good luck the next-door cottage, Church View, came up for sale at the same time and the Landmark Trust bought that too. About a third of the original Church Room, which was the main room on the first floor, extended into it and during the restoration that part was taken back into the Parish House. When it was repaired Church View was re-sold with covenants.

Work started in 1993 with the Landmark Trust's own craftsmen repairing the roof. It was furnished and ready for visitors in September 1995.

Church Houses

Another name for the Parish House would be the church house. Church houses (sometimes also called parish or guild houses) sprang up between about 1450 and 1540, in that period immediately before the English Reformation when the social influence and affluence of the parish church was at its height. They took a very characteristic form, and it is now generally accepted that there would have been a church house in most parishes across southern and central England, if not also further north. They played an integral role in the broad sweep of religious and political changes experienced in the Tudor and Stuart periods. Yet as a building type, church houses had been almost forgotten until relatively recent decades, and many still linger unrecognised.

Throughout the later Middle Ages, parishioners were responsible for the maintenance of the nave of the parish church, and for this it was necessary to raise money. This was primarily done through 'church ales', communal fundraising feasts to which the whole parish contributed. Before church houses were introduced, these ales were often held in the nave of the church itself (no pews yet), important and bonding communal occasions in the only building in the parish large enough to hold everyone. As the 15th century wore on, however, church authorities became increasingly opposed to such secular activities being held in the church. Church houses sprang up as an alternative community venue, generally after the completion of any major rebuilding work on the church itself. Most were purpose-built near the church, on manorial wasteland land or on a footprint given by a priest from his glebe, or by a monastery donating land to the secular parish. Most tended to be built to the west, or south west of the church.

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

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

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

Church houses are by their very nature vernacular buildings and all vernacular styles are represented. However, as a building typology, they share various typical characteristics across regions, which the Parish House shares. They were generally well constructed and unusually large for an otherwise fairly straightforward vernacular building. Some were built with a degree of embellishment, as parishes vied with each other to provide the best and most hospitable facilities. They have unexpectedly large rooms, two storeys and large fireplaces and chimneys for brewing and baking, at a period when all of these were still far from typical of the average villager's dwelling.

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

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

Itchingfield, Sussex

South Tawton, Devon

Hurst, Berkshire

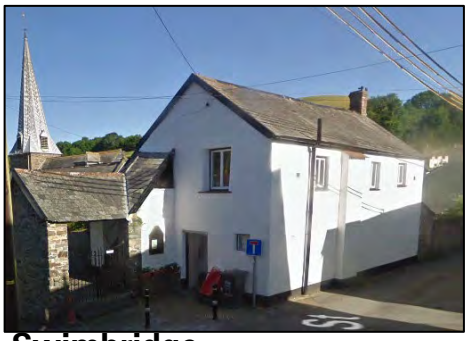
Bray, Berkshire

Crowcombe, Somerset

Islington, Devon

Some other church houses in Devon, often much altered.

Widecombe-in-the Moor, Devon



Swimbridge

Chagford, Devon

Drewsteignton

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

Marwood (and Lych-gate)

Silverton

West Anstey

Shaugh Prior: from street

Walkhampton

Throwleigh

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

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

Church accounts give glimpses of what went on. At Yatton in Somerset there are entries between 1446 and 1555 for minstrels, food and drink, for ales that wer always held on Whitsunday and sometimes on other feast days. In 1527 there is an entry for 'Il dosyn and a halfe drynkyng bowls and a dosyn trenchers and a ladylel.' At Croscombe, also in Somerset 'the wives dancing' raised 6s for the church. At Elverton in Derbyshire every husband and wife payed 2d and every cottager ld to come to the ale and all the profits went to the church. At Tintinhull in Somerset there was even a resident cook. In some parishes the parish clerk's salary was paid for by special clerk's ales.

Such events were substantial money earners. At Morebath on the edge of Exmoor, the Young Men's Guild's 'grooming ale', convened to raise money to keep tapers burning before the patronal image of St George and on the rood screen, would bring in £1 or even £2 – a considerable sum given an

annual parish income of only £7-8. Most parishes had such guilds in support of the accoutrements for a particular saint; occasionally a saint had their own 'guild house'. Church ales also provided a focus for secular folk traditions. Often, the costumes for May Games or Robin Hood plays were stored in the church house – at Bray, in Berkshire, we find five garters with bells and four morris coats, a costume for Maid Marion, a pair of breeches and a doublet for the fool. In Morebath, fees paid to the church by travelling players may well have gone for hire of the church house. At Dartington also in Devon, there is even reference in 1566 to a 'tenyse courte' at the church house.

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

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

Top: Priest's House, Holcombe Rogus another church house in Landmark's care, although a ceiling was inserted there at an early date. Methwold Old Vicarage is another possible Landmark example.

Below: The church house in Crowcombe, Somerset.

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

Church ales too had generally survived thus far, though by now were the only means of raising money for church maintenance, after the abolition of other sources of parish income for the church such as the local resources known as 'stores' - there was no need for them now that images and candles were outlawed.

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

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

only a Holcombe priest had left such a detailed account of the Priest's House.

The Elizabethan Poor Laws marked a further shift from the voluntary and sociable raising of funds through the church ales to an emphasis on the compulsory levies that we would recognise today. By the early 17th century, contravention of the ban on church ales risked being reported to the Star Chamber, a killjoy approach already satirised by the puritanical Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* ('Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' bellows Sir Toby Belch at Malvolio when the latter disturbs his night time carousing). The gathering puritan campaign against popular disorder and abuse of the Sabbath into the 17th century is well known. James I countermanded this process with his Book of Sports in 1617, and the reissuing of the Book by Archbishop Laud and Charles I in would actively exacerbate the tensions that led to civil war. Church houses lay at the heart of these struggles for the soul of England's parishes.

As church ales died out, and with the demise of the parish church as a communal institution and (some historians would say) its rise instead as a tool to control the behaviour of the masses, people had to gather elsewhere. Alehouses multiplied, with concomitantly greater potential for disorderly behaviour or secular conviviality, depending on your stance.
Many church houses became inns themselves. Others remained in parish ownership and, as an extension of their original purpose in a different sense, became poorhouses or tenements. Others became schools. Rooms often continued to be used for parish meetings, though of a more serious kind than the ales. At another Landmark church house, the Parish House at Baltonsborough in Somerset, the ground floor is still used by the parish as a meeting room, the building's maintenance funded by the Landmark apartment above. Many church houses continued to serve as such

community resources while partially available for other uses, rented out as tenements to house a curate, or sexton or parish clerk.

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

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

What can you see?

The Baltonsborough church house was built around 1500. Like many others, it was converted into two cottages in the late 17th century. Additions were made at both ends, new ceilings and partitions were inserted, with dormer windows to light an attic floor, but the old roof and first floor beams were left alone. The steps and door to the first floor, once at its western end, are really all that is missing.

Looking at it from the church yard, the original building ended just beyond the door into Church View. Its roof was thatched. The windows on the first and second floors were probably in much the same places as they are now, with timber mullions. There was a door between the two windows at the eastern end. Possibly the present door into the church room is a later one.

In the ground floor room, the great fireplace or smoke bay can be seen, fully opened up and with its lintel spanning the entire width of the room. The chimney itself is divided by a withe into two separate flues. There were once two windows at the back, opposite those at the front. These were blocked when the wing was added. The room was originally longer than it is now, running on beyond the present breeze block wall to a partition set a few feet beyond.

Evidence for this partition can be seen by going into Church View, which is also the way to the first floor. In the room on the right is a beam which, although defaced, as mortices in it for an oak plank and muntin partition.

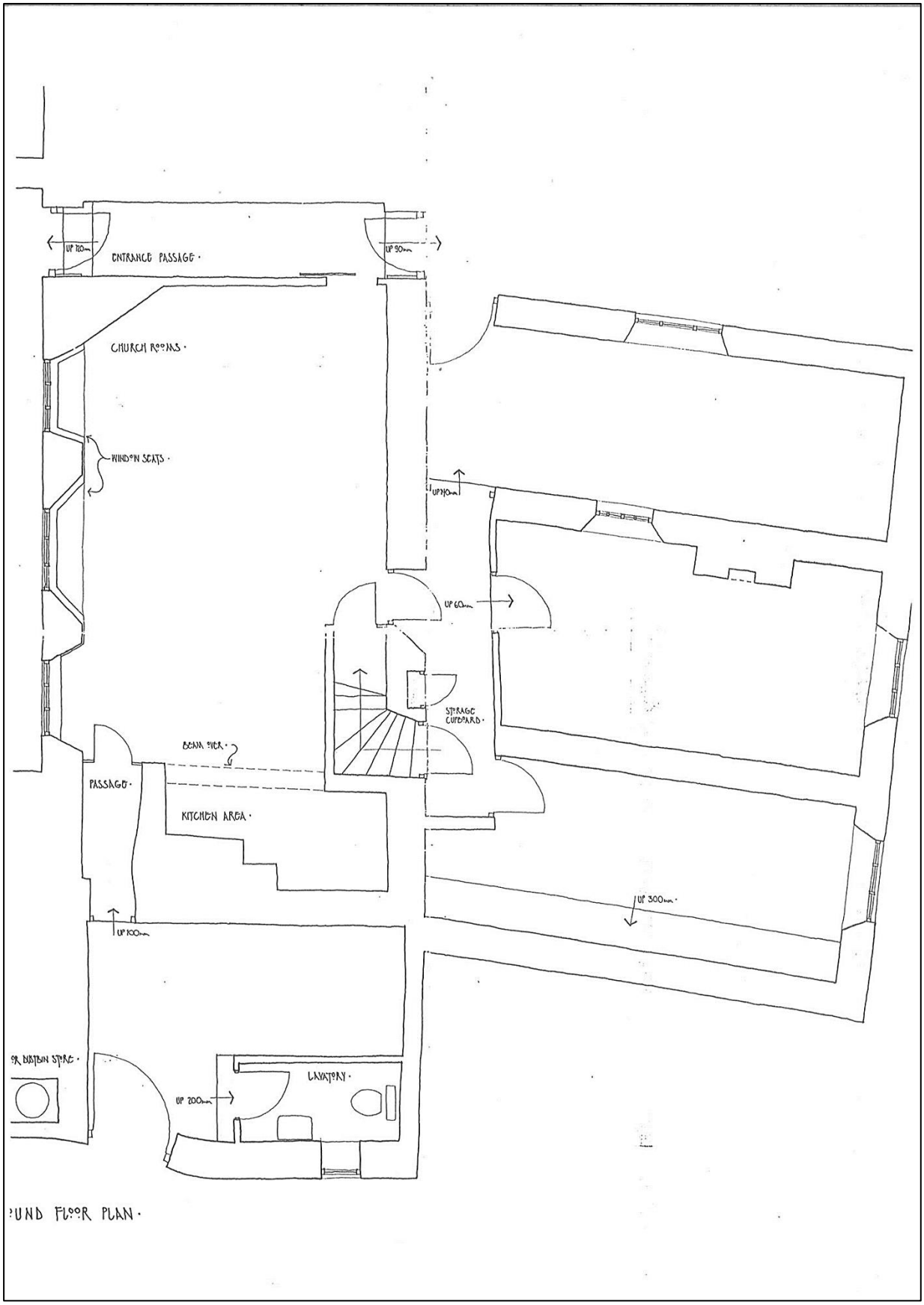
On the first floor, the fine roof, divided by trusses into six bays, can be seen again, after the removal of later ceilings and partitions. The trusses are of the type called arch-braced. On the slope of the roof, windbraces also form arches. Towards the further end of what was once a single long room (where it is not safe to walk), a plank and muntin screen can be seen, fitted into the lower part of

an open truss. This is a later insertion, probably dating from when the church house was converted into cottages. Since it did not originally have any doors in it, it must have been moved from somewhere else, perhaps the ground floor of this very building.

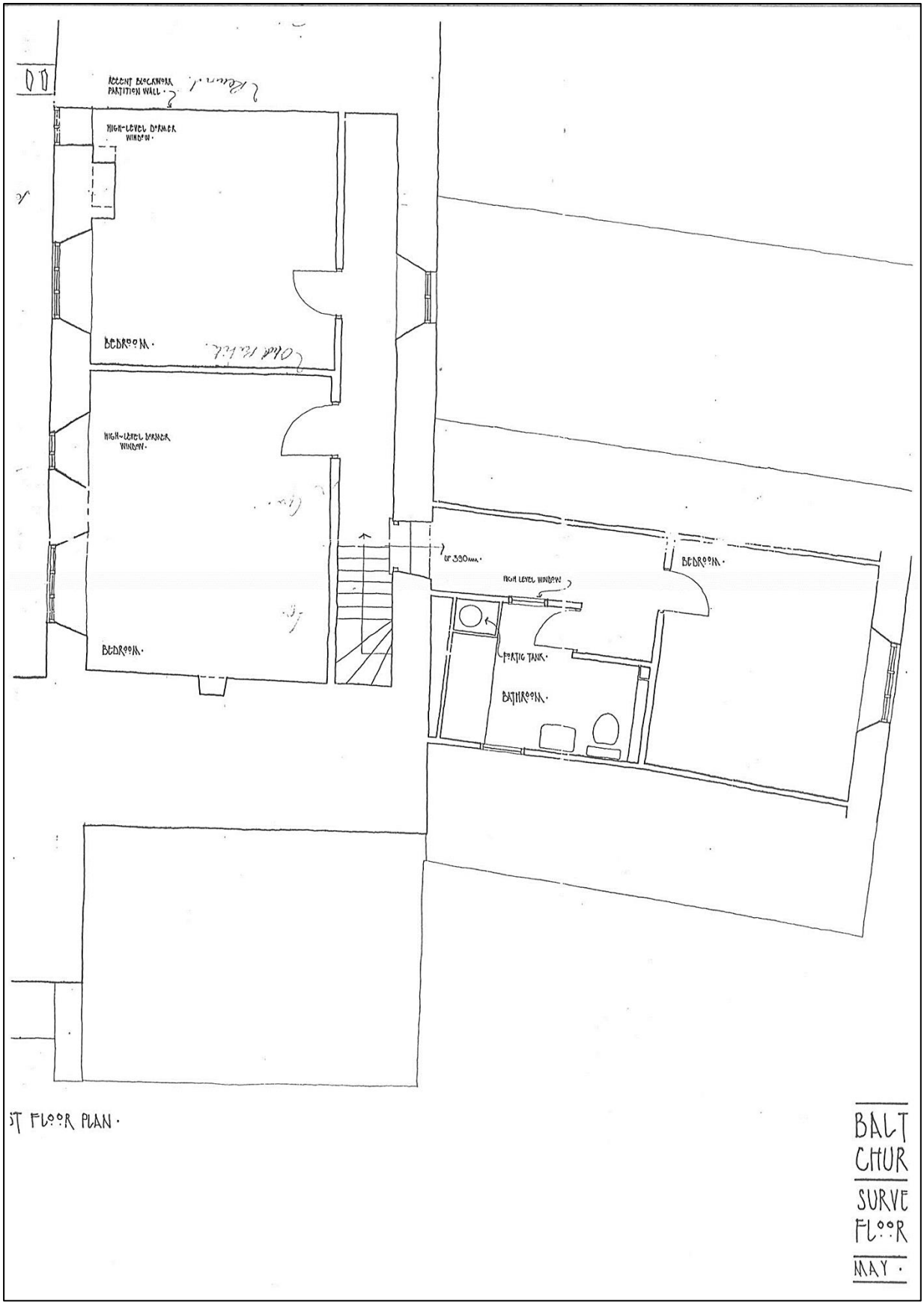
In the1990s, the Vicar of Baltonsborough approached the Landmark Trust with an interesting suggestion. The parish was the owner of a rare and important historic building, a Church House, overlooking the churchyard. Was there a way in which the two could work together to ensure a sympathetic future for this building? What Church House really needed was long term use which would enable the parish to maintain its long connection with building, but remove the burden of its upkeep. If it was sold as a house, as had happened already with one end, the parishioners would no longer have the use of the room on the ground floor. The scheme now proposed for Landmark to take on the whole building, and to let the accommodation on the first floor and in the wing at the back for holidays. The room on the ground floor, with improved catering facilities would then be let back to the parish.

The Church House was transferred to Landmark in 1992. At the same time, the cottage at the western end of the building, Church View (until then Dem Bones), came on the market. Since one of the most important features of the building is the fine medieval roof, and part of this roof was in the cottage, Landmark decided to buy this as well. One room on the first floor would then be returned to the Church House proper. The opportunity would also be taken to make the outside of the cottage match that of its neighbour, after which it would be sold. Meanwhile it provided a way of reaching the first floor.

Work started on the repair and conversion in the summer of 1992 by two of Landmark's own craftsmen, Leonard Hardy and Andrew Coward. The architect was Peter Bird of Caroe and Partners of Wells. The renovated church room was opened by the Bishop of Bath and Wells in May 1995.



Before plans – Ground floor



Before plans – First floor

The Building

Originally, the Baltonsborough Parish House was a long, plain, barn-like building, free standing and probably thatched. At its west end it had an outside stair leading up to the Church Room on the first floor. There was no second floor and there were no dormer windows. The walls would have been as they are now, coursed limestone locally known as lias, 27-28' thick. The windows were probably mullions with leaded lights, like the north window in the first floor bedroom and were in the same positions as they are now. The chimney at the east end would have been stone.

Much inside the building is unchanged since 1500. The ground floor room, now the parish room, but then the kitchen floor, had the same oak beams in the ceiling, and at the east end its most important feature, a wide fireplace or 'smoke bay' with a massive wooden lintel reaching from wall to wall, the whole width of the room, is still there. The room was slightly longer than it is now running a few feet into the cottage next door where there are mortices for a partition which would have been made of oak planks and there was another small room beyond.

The original Church Room on the first floor still has its medieval roof. The trusses are arch-braced and wind-braces make arches on the slope of the roof. The purlins are chamfered and stopped at the trusses. The trusses rest on the wall-plates - there are no wooden uprights in the walls. The Tudor churchwardens were economical in their building works: no timber is heavier than it needs to be and the result is airy and light.

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In the 17th century the Parish House was closed down and the building converted into two cottages. The outside stairs and the west gable with one truss were removed; about a third of the old Church House went into the new cottage, now Church View, and the west end of the new cottage was extended On the north side of the building the join between the Parish House and the 17th-century extension can be seen quite clearly. It was probably then that the north wing was added. The small west window in the Landmark kitchen points to its being built in the 17th century and refaced in the 18th when the mullion windows in the main building were converted.

Also at that time an attic floor was inserted with the dormer windows and gables that you see now. With the demolition of the outside stairs a new staircase was needed and was built at the east end, next to the great smoke bay. Either then or later a fireplace was built across the south east corner of the ground floor room. On the first floor a third of the Church Room became bedrooms in Church View. What remained in the Parish House became bedrooms too divided by an oak partition.

At a later date a lean-to was added at the east, smoke-bay end of the present Parish Room, with access through the smoke bay. Another lean-to (now demolished) was added to the west side of the north wing.

Clerk's Cottage, the small cottage attached to the north east corner of the Parish House was probably built in the 17th century too: it has an early window which looks north over the lean-tos, while its other windows were no doubt altered at the same time as the rest.

In the 19th century the chimneys were rebuilt in brick, because the lias, which is a weak stone, had probably disintegrated.

The Landmark Trust's Repairs

When the Landmark Trust took over the building the first priority was to regain the experience of entering the original Church Room. To achieve this, the 17th-century ceiling was removed. The dormer windows remained, blocked up, but the attic went and the fine medieval roof could be enjoyed once more. The trusses were intact but they needed re-pinning and repair and Leonard Hardy, who has worked on several Landmark buildings in the West Country, put a lot of work into them. They and the wall plates were cut about especially where the dormers were inserted and in those areas, as you can see, there is new work and a new wall plate on the south side.

The Landmark Trust by this time had bought Church View and it was possible to extend the first floor of Parish House into it, taking down the wall between the two and rebuilding it further west, so that all the trusses except for the one that was pulled down when the old Church House became two cottages, are now in the Parish house. On the ground floor the party wall remained where it was before. The partitions and passages which had accumulated during its life as a cottage were removed except for one original 17th-century wooden screen on the first floor, found within later plaster-work. It was repaired and now divides the sitting room from the main bedroom.

Steel tie-rods were inserted in several places where the walls showed signs of leaning outwards.

No access was now needed between the new ground floor Parish Room and the Landmark part of the building, so the staircase was removed and re-built in a straight and simple form in the north wing. At the top of the old staircase there had been three different levels, now there is one. The door between the new Parish Room and the north wing lean-to was blocked up.

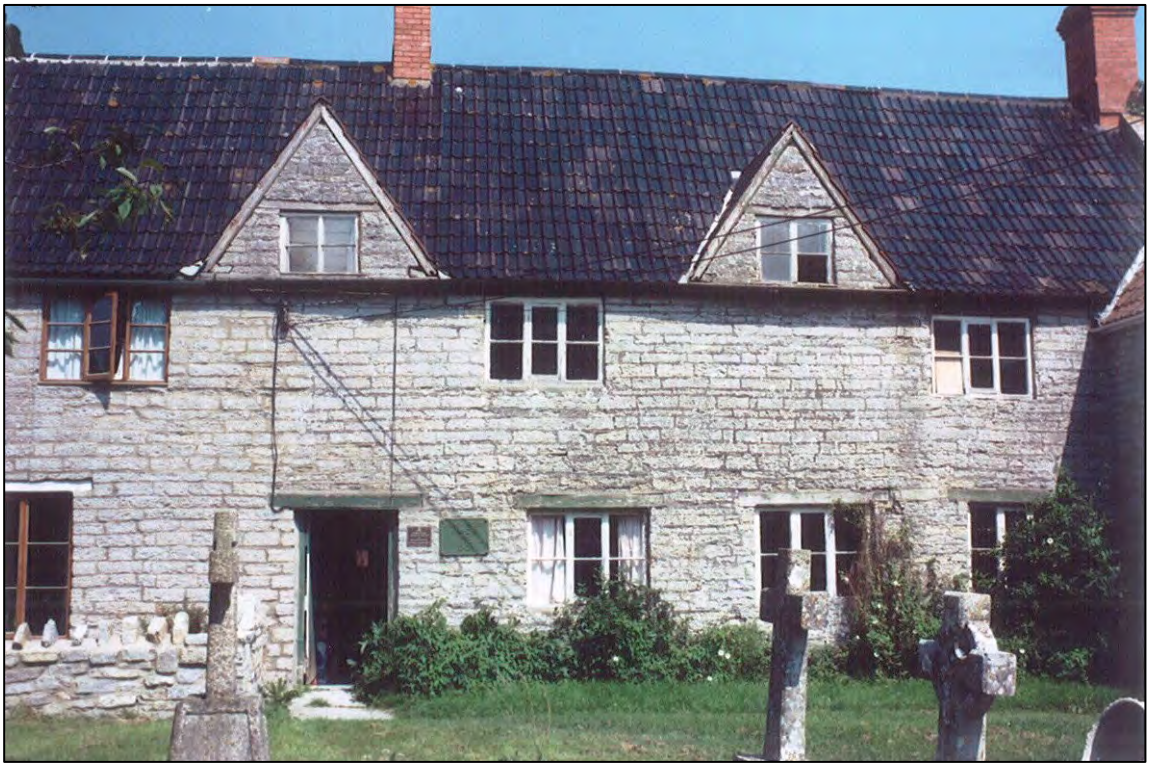
The first floor in the north wing was uncomfortably low so the level of the first floor was slightly altered. A new front door for the Landmark part of the house was inserted. On either side of the door in the kitchen is a limestone shelf that was probably used for maturing cheeses.

Fairly extensive general repairs were needed: the house was re-roofed, using all the old 'double Roman' tiles that were sound; the window-frames were rotten and had to be renewed. One window, in the north side of the main bedroom was given a mullion window, like those that were there originally, the others are like the 18th-century windows that replaced the mullions, but they have leaded lights. New oak floors were laid in the first floor rooms, and the house was re-wired. The wirescape that festooned the front of the house was removed and the wires run underground.

A plaque by the front door saying the house was built circa 1539 by Richard Whiting last abbot of Glastonbury Abbey was removed as inaccurate. The Parish House was almost certainly built before 1539 and was not built by any abbot, but by the parishioners of Baltonsborough.

Much thought was given as to how the rooms should be used. At one time the kitchen was going to be next door to the sitting room, with both bedrooms in the wing but in the end a ground floor kitchen with direct access to a sheltered sitting out area seemed obviously right.

Outside, a carpark was made and Church View was given a garden separate from the Parish House. On the south front the low stone wall was removed and a path of stone flags laid.



The wirescape was removed and placed underground.

The central chimney, the low wall and the red tiled porch were all removed.

The windows on the ground and first floors were rotten and had to be replaced.

The attic windows were repaired and then boarded up.

The NW corner - now the sitting area outside the kitchen door.

The roof of the lean-to was removed.

The original wall and window were repaired. On the right the Church View garden is staked out.

The roof was restored to its pre lean-to shape and the coping replaced.

The East end. The back of Clerks Cottage and the old lean-tos.

The lean-tos were demolished. Note the blocked up early window.

The new lean-tos and on the far right the opening for the new front door is begun.

The door from the parish room into the old lean-to was blocked up

The opening for the front door.

Len Hardy trying out the new door frame.

The fireplace in the SW corner of the present parish room was removed.

**Andy Coward at work on a window in the parish room.
The blocked up door to the north wing is behind.**

The sitting room looking west.

Looking east before the partition went in. The fire surround was removed.

Looking east. Missing braces were restored, rotten and mutilated feet of the principal rafters were repaired and there were extensive repairs to the wall plates

The 17th-century screen on the floor being repaired.

The repaired screen in its new position.

The roof of the north wing needed repairs.

Looking towards the old Church Room from the north wing before the stairs were removed.

The old west facing window in the kitchen previously hidden by the lean-to.

One of the blocked up dormers. The wall plate, damaged when the attic floor was put in, has been replaced.

Baltonsborough

The Parish House is in a part of England that has a particularly interesting early history.

In 1136 William of Malmesbury wrote a history of Glastonbury and in it he tells us that in 770, at the same time as Cuthred, King of the West Saxons, was endowing Glastonbury, a pious lady and benefactress, called Lulla, gave the Abbey 10 hides at Baltonsborough 'With all its fields, meadows and broad pastures, together with the whole of its alder grove and all the marsh to the west and north of Butleighl. William of Malmesbury describes how the Abbey boundary beginning at the southern end of Street Bridge, extended 'towards the east on the southern side of the marsh as far as the southern end of the bridge at Baltonsborough; thence in a northern direction from the home of the bearded Wulfgar, who was controller of the bridge at the time when St Dunstan was Abbot, and above the causeway ... through the middle of the marsh to the house of Norman near the mill at Baltonsborough, thence up along the path to the lane which comes from that church, 1 which sounds as though Baltonsborough had a Saxon church, although the present church, St.Dunstan's is 15th-century perpendicular, built at about the same time as the Parish House, and Pevsner mentions no earlier part.

St. Dunstan was said to have been born at Baltonsborough in the 10th century and to have diverted the river Ure so that there was more water for the mill there.

Baltonsborough continued in possession of the abbot paying him a yearly tithe of 8s, until the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII. Until then there was a fair in Baltonsborough on St.Dunstan's day. After the dissolution, in which Glastonbury suffered more severely than most other religious houses, Baltonsborough was given by Edward VI to the Duke of

Somerset. On the Duke's attainder it reverted to the crown and was given to John Ryther Esq. He was followed by Sir William St.Loe. In 1791 John Codrington owned the manor.

A survey roll, probably Elizabethan, describes two woods pertaining unto the manor, called Southwoode and Northwoode contayning 800 acres well set with oakes both old and young, which have always been used to be sold to the tenants, worth to be sold £400, wherein there may be a yearly wood sale made of 63s 6d.'No doubt it was from these woods that the oak for the roof of the Parish House came.

Eli Higgins

The Rev.W.Phelps, who wrote a History of Somersetshire in 1836, has a curious tale of a Baltonsborough farmer, called Eli Higgins. Mr.Higgins's wife had three daughters. Mr.Higgins was so annoyed at this that he said that if his next child was a daughter he would never speak to her. When his wife's confinement approached he repeated his vow. The child was a boy and there was much rejoicing; but when he began to talk he would speak normally to his mother, sisters and any woman but would never utter a word to his father or any man.

On the death of Mr.Higgins, in 1831, when the son was 30, he began to speak quite normally to men as well as women. When Phelps was recording the tale (1836), young Higgins was married and farming in the area.

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Photographs

Colour photographs are by John Bucknall and Caroe & Partners.
Black and white are by Richard Hayman.

Church Houses in Somerset by E. H. D. Williams

CHURCH HOUSES IN SOMERSET

by E. H. D. Williams

Church houses, established in the late Middle Ages, are known to have been a feature of the majority of Somerset parishes. A number of them survive, altered to a greater or lesser extent. They can be identified by their site close to the church, their late-medieval structure and their plan: one long undivided room on the first floor, open to the roof, and with independent access from outside; the ground-floor rooms heated by a large fireplace, or possibly a smoke-bay, usually at the gable end, used for baking and brewing. A number of former church houses have been identified and are discussed below.

Prior to the building of church houses in the mid- to late-fifteenth century the only building in the parish large enough for social occasions was the church, and the only opportunities for social enjoyment by the ordinary people were on church feast days — the Holy Days — the nave being the 'village hall' for these holiday occasions. In volumes 3, 4 and 5 of *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Somerset* (hereinafter *'VCH'*) Dr R. W. Dunning and his co-authors quote references to fifty-three church houses, representing a high proportion of the parishes covered by these volumes. It is likely that most, if not all, parishes had a church house, yet few survive today in any recognisable form, if at all. Near the church will often be found an inn, which may well occupy the site of the church house and in some cases retain parts of its structure. Other church houses became almshouses and/or schools, but many have disappeared without trace or have been extensively rebuilt as private houses.

Church houses were built so that parishioners could have a place of their own, free from the restrictions of church control; by the middle of the fifteenth century the church authorities were becoming opposed to secular activities within the church. Yet parishioners were responsible for the maintenance of the nave, for which it was necessary to raise money. This was the object of the 'church ales', and the church house provided the venue for these as well as for other activities. Their popularity was such that they were sometimes enlarged. They continued in use until the 1630s, after which they were suppressed by the Puritans. They were originally built not only for recreation and raising money for the church but to help the poor. Their use had already started to decline by the early seventeenth century, since other sources of income, such as church rates and poor relief, made some of their activities redundant.

The churchwardens, acting on behalf of the parish, were responsible for building the church houses, which incorporated brewing and baking facilities. Land, usually close to the church, was acquired by gift or at a peppercorn rent, often from the lord of the manor. The buildings were the concern of the churchwardens, not the parish priest.

Many of the church houses remaining, or known to have existed, are in south-west England. Those in Devon have been discussed at great length by G. W. Copeland in the *Transactions of the Devon Association,* volumes 92-99 (1960-67). Two of the surviving examples, at Clayhidon (now an inn) and Holcombe Rogus, are near the Somerset border. Another, at Widecombe in the Moor, is particularly interesting in this context, as it shows evidence of extension. The carpenters' numbers on the roof trusses stop and restart part way along the building, as at Chew Magna (next page). In Dorset too there are documentary references to a number of church houses, with structural elements remaining in buildings at Broadwindsor and Sherborne[1]. In Somerset itself, twenty-one church house buildings have now been identified. A suggested reason for the (apparent) concentration of church houses in the south-west is that, with non-nucleated villages proliferating in the area, there was a special need on the part of the inhabitants of the scattered farms and hamlets for a central place in which to meet and entertain their neighbours. Adjoining parishes were often invited to join in the 'church ales'. It is perhaps relevant to note that, as Dr Dunning has pointed out[2], for reasons not yet understood, Somerset has more surviving churchwardens' accounts of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries than any other comparable area in the country.

The impression, however, that church houses were a localised feature of the south-west has been negated by information from elsewhere. B. L. James, of the South Wales Record Society, has found evidence of church houses standing, ruined, or demolished, in ten parishes in the Vale of Glamorgan, including a good standing example at Llantwit Major[3]. Norfolk is another county where church houses are known to have existed[4].

The great occasions when all parishes held a 'church ale' were Whitsuntide, the church dedication festivals, and patronal feasts. Sometimes 'ales' were held in memory of a donor who had left money for some good cause, or for the benefit of a guild which had aided the church in some way. 'Bride ales' provided a wedding breakfast for poor couples; other 'church ales' raised money for the poor and sick. 'Clerk ales' were held to pay the

clerk's wages, and at any time when extra money was needed. Private 'ales' — the modern 'bring and buys' — were also held from time to time. In some cases church houses were let annually on the understanding that the churchwardens had the use of them whenever required.

Of the twenty-one surviving and recognisable remains of Somerset church houses here recorded, two, at Crowcombe and Chew Magna (Avon), are almost intact. Five are in South Avon, formerly part of historic Somerset.

Crowcombe (fig. 1)

The two-storey building has rubble walls with coped gables. External steps at one gable give access to the upper floor through a stone-framed doorway. On the ground floor are two doorways from the road, both four-centred and moulded. The building is sited immediately opposite the church.

At the gable remote from the entrance is now a small fireplace, quite disproportionate to a large stone stack which capped a smoke bay; the massive wooden lintel beam has been crudely reset on the upper floor, against the side of a roof truss. Originally it spanned the full width of the ground floor, to support the front of the bay in the same manner as at Baltonsborough, Wick St Lawrence, Chew Magna, and Holcombe Rogus (Devon). The truss is about 3½ft from the gable, unlike that at the other end which is set against the gable.

The upper floor is open to the roof, which has eight arch-braced collar-beam trusses, the braces extending just over a foot down the walls. Three rows of trenched purlins are chamfered, with plain run-outs at the junction with the trusses. There are three tiers of windbraces. The flush-tenoned apex carries a ridgepiece in a V notch. Below the lowest purlins are ashlar pieces to the wall top.

After the Restoration the ground floor became accommodation for the poor. The upper floor was a school from 1661 to 1871.

Baltonsborough

The main fabric of the church house remains in a corner of the churchyard. In the seventeenth century it was enlarged by additions at both ends, creating two dwelling houses. Six of the seven roof trusses remain; they are arch-braced and windbraced collar trusses. The purlins and ridgepiece are in-line tenoned, and there is only one tier of windbraces. Otherwise it is similar to Crowcombe. At the east end is a smoke bay, intact though modified in detail.

Chew Magna (fig. 2)

This is a coursed rubble-walled building with a width of 23ft externally and the exceptional length of about 99ft. Although all roof trusses are alike, a difference in carpenters' numbers starting at mid-length suggests that the building was doubled in length soon after its initial building in the late fifteenth century, probably in the first decade of the sixteenth, according to a likely reading of a very weathered datestone in the west gable. This gable, facing the village street beside the entrance to the churchyard, is highly ornate; the door has double reversed ogee moulding and an ogee-shaped dripmould which, like those over the windows, has square carved terminals. Over the window they extend well down the sides. Over the door is a two-light cinquefoil-headed window, and on each side on both floors are two four-centred windows of two lights each; in the apex is a carved figure above a small window. Above the door are the St Loe arms and the datestone.

Access to the upper floor is by external steps on the north, churchyard, side, which have a ground-floor entrance below them. Towards the east end is another early door; other blocked doors on both sides presumably belong to the period when the building served as a poorhouse, or, as at one time, a school. Various small blocked fireplaces and stacks belong to the same period. Windows on both sides and both floors are of various dates.

At the north-eastern corner is an emergency door from a fire-escape stair built within an east gable smoke bay, such as did exist at Crowcombe and does at Baltonsborough and Wick St Lawrence. The smoke bay has a large wooden lintel, its plain chamfer continuing down the stone sides to half-pyramid stops of the late fifteenth century. First-floor ceiling beams, other than those at the west end which have step- and run-out stops to plain chamfers, are replacements of 1969, when various minor changes were made, as subsequently elsewhere during renovation, including the insertion of internal stairs.

The roof trusses at the east end rest on plain wooden corbels, whereas the others do not, as far as can be seen below the inserted ceiling. All trusses have in-line tenoned purlins and a ridgepiece, together with a single tier of windbraces. Where these join the purlins their under face is shaped to form an ogee. The cambered collars have a small roll decoration on the soffit of a central projection to which the arch braces abut. The lower ends of the principals are hidden by ashlar, plastered over. The arch braces of the eastern trusses, which have a 'cut off' appearance, have thin packing strips on the corbels. It is thus possible that the original arch braces, if not also the principals, extended downwards in the walls, as they do at Crowcombe.

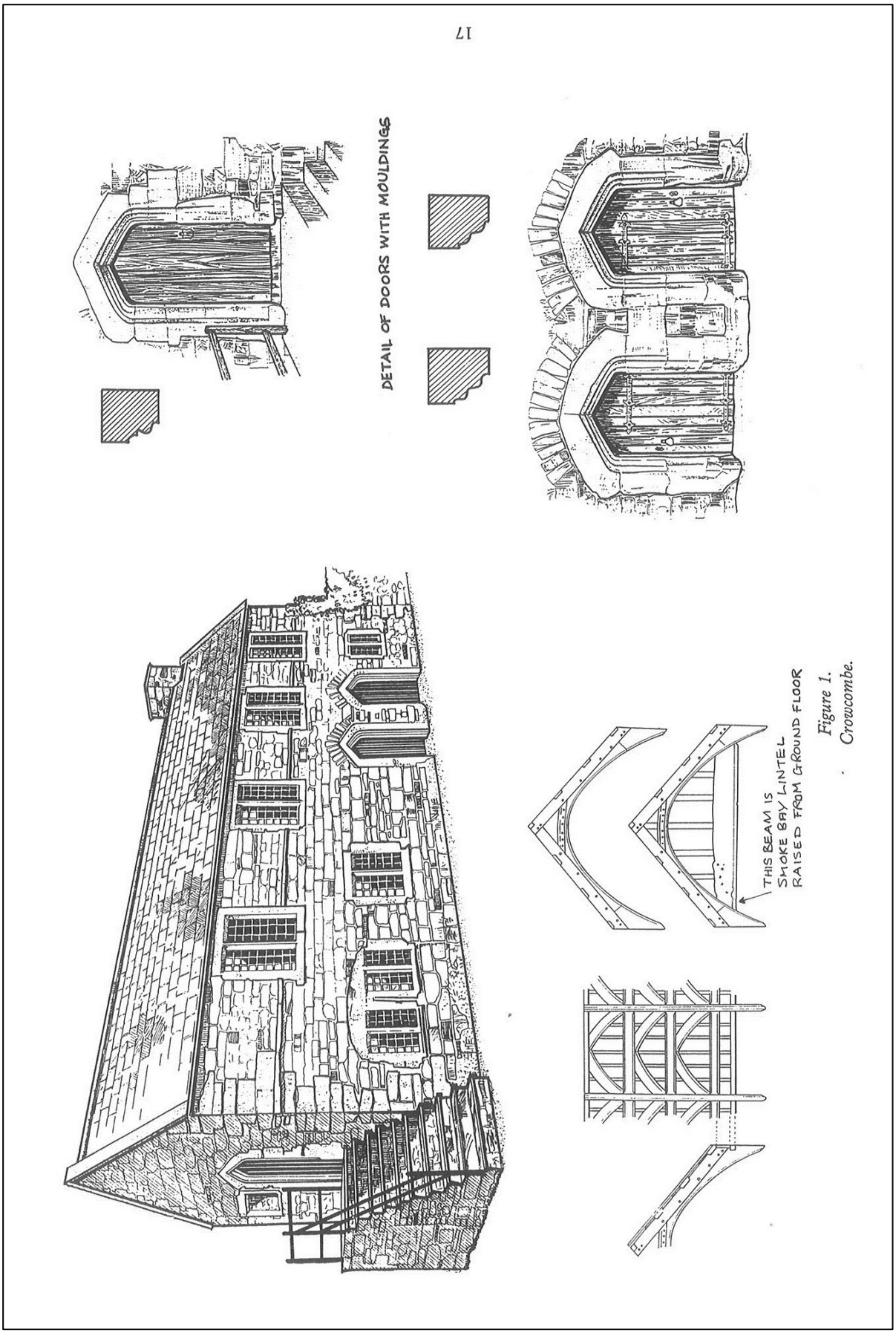

Figure 1.
Crowcombe.

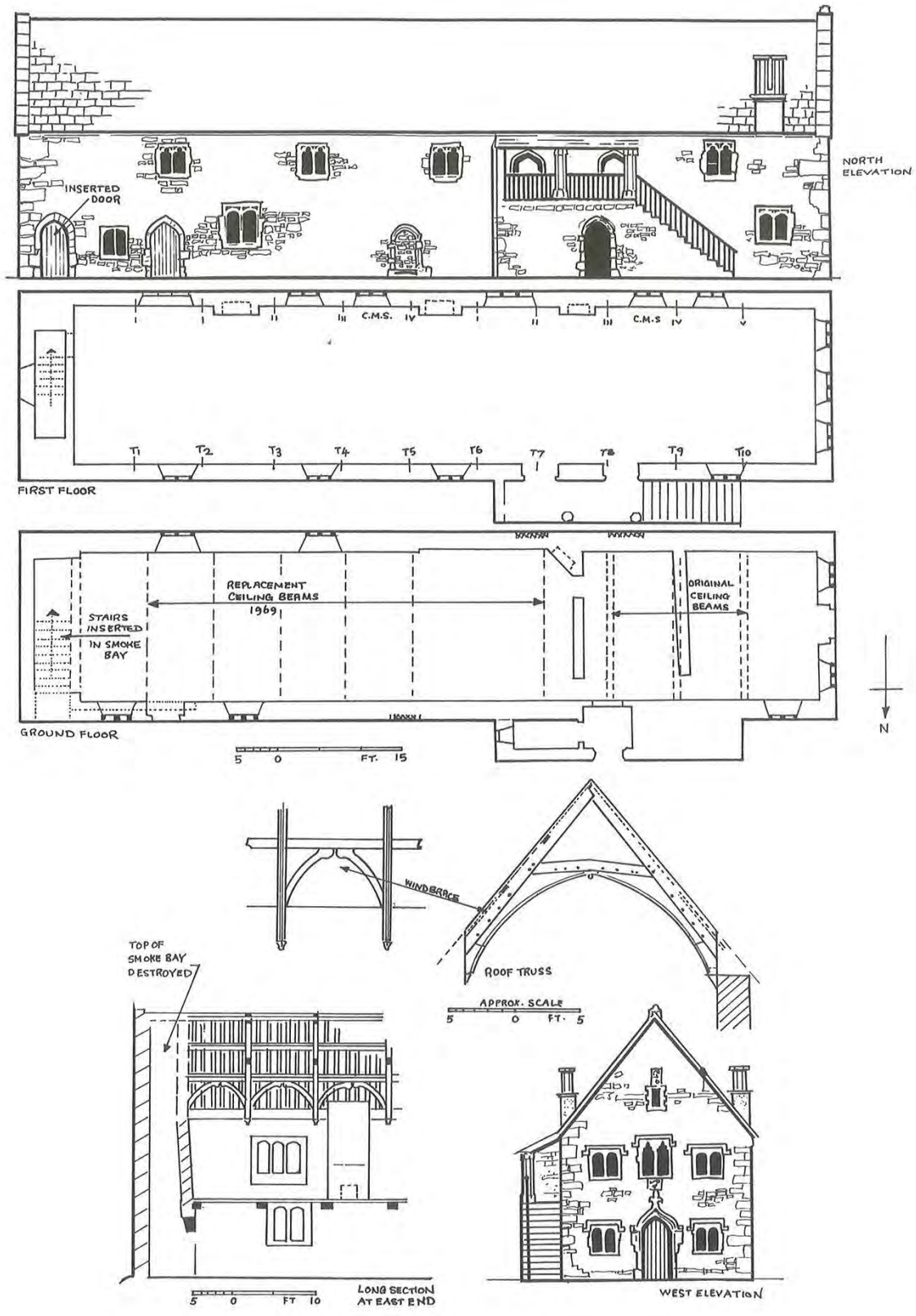

Figure 2.
Chew Magna.

18

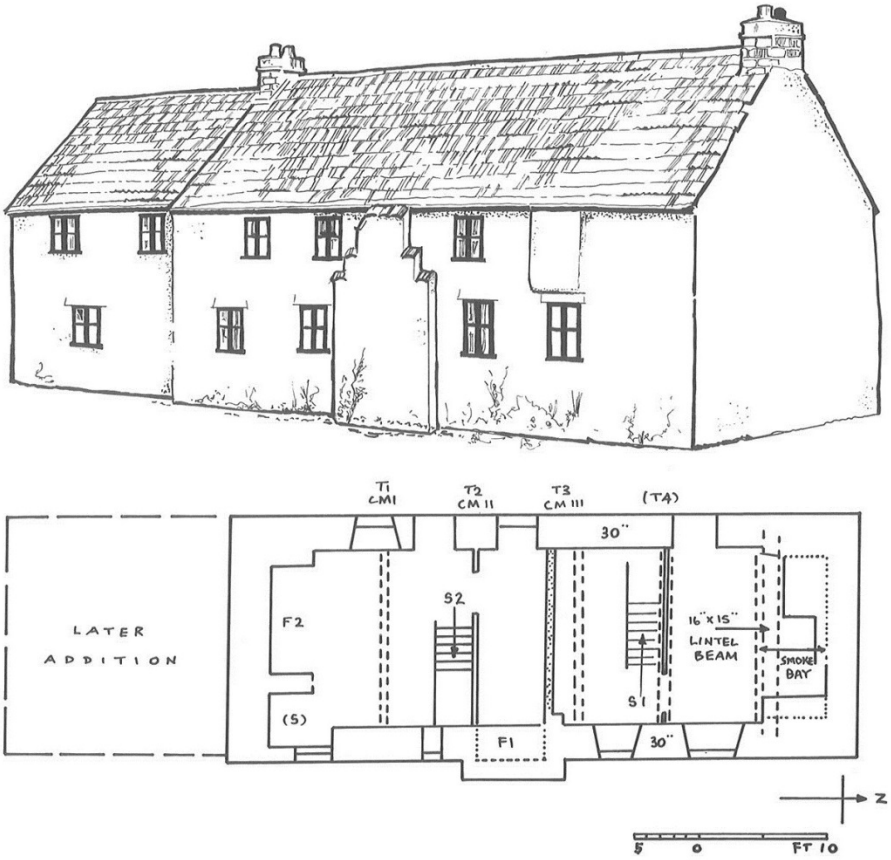

Figure 3.
Wick St Lawrence.

Wick St Lawrence, Banksea Cottages (fig. 3)

A rubble-walled building which is now two cottages, previously three, stands across the village street opposite the church. Documentary evidence shows it to have been the church house which was subsequently converted to almshouses. At mid-length is a lateral fireplace like that at Salisbury House, Shepton Beauchamp (see later), which was added to heat the central poorhouse, and at one gable is another added fireplace. At the other gable there are the substantial remains of a large smoke bay, as at Chew Magna, Crowcombe and Baltonsborough. The modification for almshouses, and subsequent alterations, have destroyed most other original details.

An 1820 map of the manor of Wick St Lawrence shows Banksea Cottages located on the site of the poorhouse, formerly the church house[5]. Two leases among the records of the Municipal Charity Trustees show that in 1729 the Governors of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital leased the church house, then used for the poor of the parish, to James Morse, yeoman, whose lease was transferred to Ambrose Wall, churchwarden, on his death in 1733. In 1762 the property was leased to John Jones, yeoman, churchwarden and overseer of the poor[6].

Stogumber

A two-storey building with rubble walls just over 2ft thick stands immediately west of the church, and is now within the courtyard of the Old Vicarage. It is 49ft long by 20ft wide externally. In its east gable, which is on the churchyard boundary, are signs of missing external steps and a blocked first-floor doorway. At one side, on the ground floor, is a wooden framed doorway with

four-centred head, which leads into one of the two rooms into which the plan is divided. At the west gable there is a smoke bay. The upper floor is one large room open to the roof; this has three flush-tenoned jointed-cruck trusses with tenoned collars and trenched purlins. In other respects the building was much modified when it became a detached bake/brew house and stables for the vicarage. The surviving details, however, indicate a late-medieval origin. The date, together with the building's plan and location, show it undoubtedly to have been a church house of similar plan to Crowcombe and others.

Cannington — Almshouses

Examination and recording were made in 1971 when extensive alterations were already well advanced. It was evident that the seventeenth-century datestone recorded alterations to a medieval building, the main east-west range, a wing to the north being a later addition. The first floor of the former had initially been open to the roof. The datestone stated that the almshouses had been founded under the will of Henry Rogers in 1672. According to the 1826 report of the Charity Commissioners he left the parish £600 which, by Chancery decree dated 1688, was to be devoted to the purchase of land to provide income to maintain the poor, and also to fitting up the church house as a workhouse by the churchwardens and overseers. The appropriation of the church house was agreed by the parish. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the building also housed the parish school.

In 1971 the upper floor was entered by external steps half way along the south (street) side. The original roof was largely intact: seven of the nine arch-braced tenoned jointed-cruck trusses survived, the uprights extending down the walls to ground-floor ceiling beams. The apexes were flush-tenoned and a ridgepiece was set diagonally into them. The tenoned collars had slightly cambered upper surfaces, and there were three rows of windbraced trenched purlins. Fragments of a carved wooden frieze were seen. It bore a striking resemblance to the frieze in the church. Owing to the amount of demolition which had already taken place no other early details could be recorded. All that now remains of the former church house is the walls, the uprights of the crucks and a few ceiling beams.

Pensford — Bridge House

This is now a house of complex plan sited immediately across the river from the churchyard, on a triangular plot between the river and two roads.

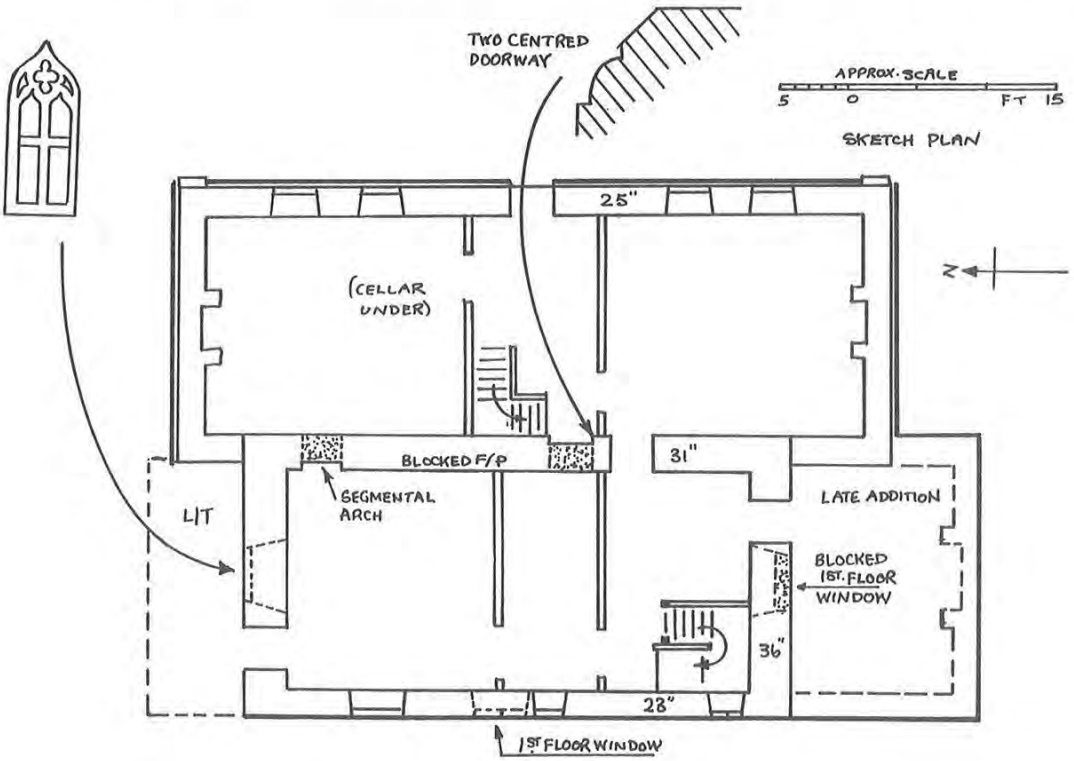

Figure 4.
Stanton Drew.

It is of four different building periods. The earliest, of two low storeys, but possibly single-storeyed originally, has walls up to nearly 3ft thick and can be dated to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Against about one-third of the long wall on the river side of this building there was added in the second half of the seventeenth century a two-storey structure which overlapped the corner at the gable. Its main front was occupied by an ovolo-moulded wooden window frame, later replaced by a shop window. The wall above it is timber-framed above a jetty, a rarity in this area of stone construction. According to manorial records, in 1673 'Daniel Bullock newly erected a house on the bridge called Pensford bridge'[7].

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries two further additions were made on the river side, their outer walls close to, and parallel with, the river.

The original ground-floor room, 18ft by 30ft externally, now divided, has a large fireplace and spiral stairs at one gable. Two ceiling beams have shallow step and run-out stops to wide chamfers; the others are re-used timbers. The roof is a rebuild of a seventeenth-century roof which probably replaced the earlier roof when the extension was added. The thick walls and the chamfered ceiling beams are certainly pre-seventeenth century. There were considerable repairs to the house generally after flooding in 1970.

It is most rare for a single-roomed building of so early a date to have survived in a recognisable form, suggesting that its use was for some special purpose other than domestic. This, and the site near the church, strongly suggest that it was the church house.

Stanton Drew — Church Farm (fig. 4)

Close to the church is a two-storey rubble-walled building of 20ft by 40ft externally. Its walls are over 2ft 6ins thick except where rebuilt. Along its east side a seventeenth-century range has been added, and the whole is now Church Farm. The original building to the west has, on the first floor, a fifteenth-century two-light traceried window in the north gable. Another similar window in the south gable is blocked by a later building. On the ground floor there is a blocked lateral fireplace, and a blocked moulded stone doorway with a two-centred head between the early and later parts of the house. Seventeenth-century and later alterations have destroyed or hidden other early details, but this was obviously the church house. It differs from the majority in having a lateral, not a gable, fireplace, as was probably the case at Salisbury House, Shepton Beauchamp (next page).

Croscombe — Church Hall

Entered from the churchyard is a small rubble-walled building of about 32ft by 17ft externally. It is set deeply into rising ground at the back, where there are no windows or doors. On the south side, facing the church, is a tall window to either side of a central door, all in nineteenth-century 'Gothick' style. This suggests a date for considerable reconstruction of the earlier building. There remains a small, blocked, upper window, but the building has now no upper floor except for a gallery at one end. A tiled roof has probably replaced thatch. At each gable are fireplaces with stone stacks.

Several irregularities in the front wall indicate drastic rebuilding. At each corner are large quoins, and for a distance of 2ft to 3ft the rubble is of equally large coursed stones. At the height of about 8ft each corner is corbelled out 9 inches. The rest of the front wall, flush with the upper end sections, is of small irregular rubble on a low base of large stones. Originally, therefore, there was a jettied timber-framed front on a low stone base.

The, now nineteenth-century, building stands on the site of an earlier building of indeterminable date, but probably of around 1500, parts of which it incorporates. There is documentary evidence of a church house in Croscombe[8] and this is a likely site. The building is shorter than the average for church houses investigated, but its length compares closely with that at Bridge House, Pensford.

Yatton — Lady Florence Stalling Charity Almshouses

This rubble-walled building, 68ft by 23ft externally, stands in the corner of the churchyard. It has quoins at each gable, so was always of this considerable size. At upper-floor level in the west gable is a blocked doorway which would have been entered up steps from the churchyard; in the east gable is an upper (blocked) window. On the north side, parallel with the road, is a blocked stone doorway with four-centred head. Another possible doorway is opposite on the other side of the house. Other external details all belong to the later almshouses, except for some windows on both floors which are set in deeply-splayed early openings. The plan comprises four main rooms and an entrance/stair lobby, divided up by thin plain partitions. Four fireplaces are either blocked completely or have small late grates in them. Some ground-floor ceiling beams have step and run-out stops to plain chamfers.

The roof, so far as it is visible, has been rebuilt, but retains some possible crucks, since the rafters curve into the walls, but details are hidden on the first floor. Above the ceiling the trusses have in-line tenoned purlins, and a ridgepiece in an apex which has a vertical joint. There have been windbraces but apparently no arch braces to the cambered tenoned collars.

The late-medieval origin thus indicated, together with the siting, is clear proof of this having been a church house prior to its conversion to almshouses.

Williton

Along the south side of the churchyard are two adjoining cottages aligned east to west. They are of different periods, the western one being of the seventeenth century. The taller eastern one has a lateral stack and a two-centred plain stone chamfered doorway from the churchyard, which has been converted to a window. Its present entrance is in the east gable.

No opportunity has arisen to examine it internally, but there can be little doubt that this was the church house referred to in *VCH*[9]. According to documentary evidence it was established by 1491; a lease to a tenant in 1630 required that it be available for a month from Whitsuntide to allow the churchwardens to brew and sell ale. It was rebuilt later in the seventeenth century as a poorhouse.

Long Ashton — Angel Inn

According to an account of the building by R. H. Leech of Bristol University based on a survey made in 1978, the inn was originally the church house, built *c.* 1495. By 1741 it was known as the Angel[10].

It is now of two storeys and three rooms in line. The two south rooms have walls 3ft thick and a large fireplace at the north end; beyond there is an added third room with thinner walls. The interior now dates mostly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the four-bay roof over the original building has arch-braced collar-beam trusses with in-line tenoned purlins. A nineteenth-century painting in the Bristol City Art Gallery shows, at first-floor level in the gable remote from the stack, a two-light window with trefoil head, under a dripmould.

Behind the inn is a detached building with 3ft thick walls. At one end is a full-width fireplace. All early details are lost, but it appears to have been a brewhouse.

Stoke sub Hamdon — Fleur de Lis Inn

This has not been examined in detail. Superficially it does not reveal any indication of its origin as the church house, but documentary sources identify it beyond doubt[11]. The inn is in the village, but at a considerable distance from the church, which is remotely sited to the east of the village. This is because the original founders of the church were the owners of East Stoke Manor, and not of what came to be the main manor and settlement. The Priory, which was associated with the later manor, is nearby, but this was in no way associated with the church house.

Muchelney

According to documentary evidence the church house here was sited similarly to that at Stoke sub Hamdon, the church being remote from the village[12]. The site was later occupied by the village school.

Shepton Beauchamp — Salisbury House

This house is sited along the south side of the churchyard, with its western end adjoining the village street, typically the site of a church house. The present plan consists of four in-line rooms orientated east to west. The three rooms to west, with rubble walls 3ft 2ins thick, were originally open to the roof, and were raised to two storeys and re-roofed in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The addition to east, which is straight-jointed to the earlier block, was always of two storeys. It has an eighteenth-century roof. The whole is now thatched at the higher level.

The central room of the earlier three has a large lateral fireplace in a stone stack, with scroll stops on its wooden lintel. The added east room has a large fireplace against the earlier east gable. The truss here has been cut away to accommodate the brick stack. Below this truss are the remains of a medieval truss belonging to the single-storey building.

The core of the house is without doubt the church house in origin, its overall size of about 43ft by 20ft comparing well with other examples. It is, however, somewhat unusual in having a lateral fireplace and in being originally of only one storey. It might be that the lateral fireplace replaces an earlier one, the majority of similar buildings having gable fireplaces.

The owner of Salisbury House in the late eighteenth century was William Salisbury, descended from a family of yeoman farmers living in the village in the seventeenth century. In the mid-nineteenth-century it was owned by Stephen Salisbury and occupied by John Phelps. It was subsequently converted into several cottages, known as Salisbury Cottages[13].

Documents mention a church house at Shepton Beauchamp, held by churchwardens in 1540 and by the parishioners in 1548. The parish still held half of it in 1703. By 1887 the Charity Commissioners held a house divided into six cottages or almshouses. These were demolished in 1935. They stood on the west side of Church Street, about 200 yards from Salisbury House, on the opposite side of the road. It is highly unlikely that they were the successors of the church house, as claimed[14].

Spaxton — Glebe Cottages

M. B. McDermott has described a two-storey house, now divided into two cottages, whose rear wall is on the north-west boundary of the churchyard[15]. Evidence of its church house origin is given in a document of 1687 which includes a description of the churchyard boundary, starting with 'the wall against the church house'[16].

There are a number of instances of buildings which no longer retain structural evidence of a church house origin but undoubtedly occupy the site of a church house. These include the following:

Fitzhead

In the corner of the churchyard is a rubble-walled building, marked on older OS maps as a 'tithe barn'. It had been used as a barn until converted in recent years into a village hall. Its site it typically that of a church house. Successive changes of use have resulted in considerable alterations of structure, but there is little doubt that it originally had a cruck roof. Its proportions are typically those of a church house, and these, together with the cruck evidence and the substantial walls, show it to be of late-medieval origin.

High Ham

Similarly sited in a corner of the churchyard is a rubble-walled building which is now a house. An Elizabethan rector, Adrian Schael, recorded in his diary how, at the end of the sixteenth century, the church house was demolished and rebuilt as a school[17]. It continued in use until a nineteenth-century school was built nearby.

Sampford Brett

A small house on the churchyard boundary retains no structural features of earlier than the late-seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. A church house in this parish became poorhouses in 1699 and subsequently, by the nineteenth century, four dwellings[18].

Chedzoy

As at Sampford Brett, a small house standing beside the entrance to the churchyard from the village street occupies a site typical of that of a church house.

Old Cleeve

A nineteenth-century building at the churchyard entrance probably stands on the site of a church house.

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