



IHBC South West Region covering: Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Scilly Isles, Somerset & Wiltshire

SW Bulletin No. 30 - October 2015

Notice of IHBC South West Region Annual General Meeting: Gloucester, 13 November 2015

Bookings will shortly open for this year's AGM which will be held in the Civic Suite at the Gloucester City Council offices in The Docks regeneration area of the city (North Warehouse, Gloucester GL1 2EQ; <http://www.gloucester.gov.uk/pages/contact-us.aspx> for map and contact details).

Further details will be communicated via your branch representatives over the next couple of weeks but we can confirm a most intriguing (and secure) venue for the afternoon training sessions, namely the former HM Prison Gloucester (located at The Quay just across from the council offices). Thanks go to Charlotte Bowles-Lewis for organising the event.

HM Prison Gloucester opened as a county gaol in 1782 and was substantially enlarged and rebuilt over the period 1810 - 1855. Most of the buildings are listed at Grade II, with the central cell block listed Grade II* on account of its highly-accomplished architectural style and historic interest.

City and Country acquired the former prison in 2014 and they have ambitious plans to redevelop the historic buildings as part of a mixed use scheme. Representatives of the group will be our hosts for the afternoon, providing an overview of the current plans for the site and guided tours of specific buildings. Examples and case studies of comparable projects by City and Country can be found at:

<http://www.cityandcountry.co.uk>

Editorial

And so the Green Deal has quietly slipped away into the mists of obscurity or has it? The Government's recent announcement that it is to cease funding of its much heralded household energy efficiency programme will no doubt come as a shock to some but it is probably a relief to those practitioners struggling with the vagaries of traditional buildings. The Green Deal promised much and undoubtedly helped many owner/ occupiers reduce their energy bills. However, it was not sufficiently well thought out in its application to older housing stock of pre-1919 vintage, which is predominantly of solid load bearing masonry construction and often lacking any effective damp proof control measures.

The number of older properties where modern damp proofing solutions including chemical tanking, core injection and timber stud dry-lining systems have been installed as part of energy-saving programmes is unknown. What can be deducted, though, is that the problems these 'solutions' were intended to mitigate have not slipped away - they will continue to manifest themselves as progressive deterioration unseen (at least for a while) behind a screen of modernity! The Government must be prepared to help those owner/ occupiers who have been persuaded to install such inappropriate measures. It should also pay more attention to professional bodies such as the IHBC, and RICS who highlighted the potential risks about The Green Deal.

Malcolm James



General view of the former HM Prison Gloucester buildings with the neo-classical frontage of the central block added by Thomas Fuljames in 1844 at top-right © Charlotte Bowles-Lewis



Highcliffe Castle near Christchurch, Dorset was the venue for a detailed assessment of this fascinating Grade I listed heritage asset led by James Webb of Forum Heritage Services

Conservation of Traditional Thatch might sound a bit dry as a subject but if, like me, you find the world of thatch full of confusion, intrigue and counter-argument, then you would not have been disappointed by the breadth of knowledge in the specialist talks organised by Alison Henry (Historic England) and Greg Venn.

Alison Henry started the proceedings with an overview of the day's aims and key training objectives. A firm advocate and enthusiast of thatch, Alison summarised the characteristics of the main thatching materials (i.e. long straw, reed straw and water reed), emphasising the regional origins/ availability and historical uses.

Long straw and *reed straw* both originate from the same wheat crop. Traditionally, the long straw was hand flailed to remove the wheat grain but is now commonly threshed using a 'drum post' machine. The long lengths of straw visible on the finished roof give it a distinctive 'shaggy' appearance. Reed straw on the other hand is produced by careful flailing or 'pitching' after which it is hand combed (processes significantly quicker than the ground-level preparation necessary for a long straw roof). This *Devon* or '*combed wheat reed*' tends to be a stiffer material, meaning that it can be dressed in-situ on the roof (unlike long straw) and results in a clean, close-cropped thatched covering with crisper lines at the eaves and verges.

Water reed is a wetland plant grown in special beds and can reach a height of up to 2.5 metres. The Norfolk Broads provide the main supply of English material but this is being supplanted by cheaper imports from Europe, namely Turkey. The finished roof exhibits a very uniform profile, with the butt ends of the reed bristling outwards to give sharp (i.e. water shedding) edges to all planes. Sedge was often used as the ridge capping for traditional Norfolk reed roofs.

Thatch was the most widespread form of roof covering in Britain until the 17th century; and remained so in some rural areas for much longer until alternative roofing materials became more widely available. Historic thatched roofs are effectively the sole surviving examples of medieval crops! This was the botanical/archaeological view put forward by John Letts in his most absorbing talk titled *What is Historic Thatch?*

Fragments of organic matter and detail within the roof invariably give clues to not only the crops being used at the time, but also the past agricultural methods and the social activities of the day. The fixing methods found within the build-up layers of thatch would also vary over time, thus giving additional evidence to the age and dating of the different layers. For example, tarped twine bindings could be perhaps late 16th or early 17th century, whereas twisted blackberry stems would definitely be much older. Modern farming methods with the emphasis on high-yield and disease resistant crops probably account for the demise of many of the old wheat varieties once prevalent. John concluded by describing the practices employed at his own farm and his efforts to conserve historic threshing equipment.

Further talks by thatching consultant Keith Quantrill and John Letts focused on the various challenges faced in keeping a thatched roof 'healthy'; the thatch being viewed as an eco-system which evolves over time. The correct roof pitch is vital in ensuring efficient rainwater run-off; too shallow and moisture will be absorbed at a faster rate than it can be released back to atmosphere. Saturation of the underlying layers frequently results in fungal growth and accelerated decay. The outer or 'pioneer' layer is effectively a sacrificial layer; rich in fungal spores that establish relatively quickly from plants or bird droppings, which then encourage moss growth. Keith noted that some moss can be protective to the roof because it provides cleansing and anti-fungal chemicals into the 'middle layers', thus giving an element of resistance to rot.

Good quality materials and best practice (i.e. employing a master thatcher) were seen as essential pre-requisites to achieving a durable and water-tight roof. The current fashionable trend of 'wholesale re-thatching' was also discussed; the Holnicote Estate in Devon providing a case study where the traditional (and more cost-effective) methods of patch repair have been re-introduced. Historically, roofs were often patched with lower quality materials as a 'stop-gap' measure until the availability of better material from subsequent harvests.

Alison Henry then highlighted the main conservation challenges in retaining the

authenticity and integrity of historic thatching. Specific threats included gradual loss of traditional skills (essential for a long straw roof), lack of training and the pressure on conservation officers to grant consent for re-thatching projects with replacement materials that do not replicate the original. Jack Lewis rounded off the session by illustrating some regional variations on thatching techniques and ridge detailing. It became clear that the widespread use of Turkish water reed risks eroding these traditions; compounded by the fact that this nitrogen-rich material is not always the 'best' for the job in hand!

After a delicious lunch we returned refreshed for some practical thatching demonstrations from Nigel Bunce and some cautionary words from Keith about the realities of dealing with re-thatching projects. First, it is vital to remember that material for thatching is from the previous year's harvest, so the straw is over-wintered. Secondly, existing under-layers of thatch do not need to be stripped out unless there is severe decay; the notion of a 'new roof' is alien to the ethos of conserving traditional thatch!



Nigel Bunce and Keith Quantrill answer questions during the practical demonstrations

Jim Glocking's closing talk on the work of the Fire Protection Association (FPA) gave a sobering view on the very real threat to thatched roofs posed by fire. Fires have a catastrophic effect on historic fabric and lives alike, and the FPA's ongoing research into causation aims to inform future best practice. Findings to date suggest that the risk of fire due to heat conduction through the chimney stack is low. Stack height, flue temperature and fuel type are key considerations in mitigating spark risk.

<http://www.COTAC.org.uk>

*Melanie Latham
Affinity Architects*

**Planning Appeals: Vanilla
Brasserie, 9-10 Cambray Place,
Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
(APP/B1605/F/14/2220863 &
APP/B1605/E/14/2221866)**

Retrospective consent was sought to erect two entrance door canopies to the following an earlier refusal by the local planning authority (Cheltenham Borough Council). The canopies were of the modern 'pram hood/ Dutch blind' style and fitted above the principal entrances on the two adjoining Grade II listed buildings.

Nos. 9 and 10 Cambray Place are fine examples of Cheltenham's Regency architecture dating from the period 1810 to 1830. The statutory list description makes specific reference to their respective front doors with ornate glazed fanlights. The fitting of the canopies effectively masked these important historic elements from view and introduced a modern curved form totally out of character to the design and proportions of the building's classical revival style. Officers considered the visual impact of the canopies to be detrimental to the setting of the other period buildings in Cambray Place and to the overall character of the designated conservation area.



Nos. 9-10 Cambray Place with the two canopies prominent above the entrance doors; note the cluttered and disjointed appearance which is in marked contrast to the clean classical lines of the adjacent period buildings in the terrace

In assessing the impact of the unauthorised works, the Inspector acknowledged that there had previously been "some form of blind above the entrance door to No 10 in around 1945 prior to listing and in 1990. However, the previous blinds were of a completely different type to the canopies now being enforced against". The Inspector noted

that the new blinds were "far from traditional in terms of their design and appearance"; resulting in "jarring and alien shapes in relation to the Regency detailing and proportions of the front elevation of the buildings".

Both appeals were dismissed on the grounds that the canopies were harmful to the special architectural and historical features of the fine period doorways, as well as detrimentally affecting the setting of the whole listed terrace.

Karen Radford Cheltenham Borough Council

**Planning Appeal: Park Cottage,
East Knoyle, Milton, Wiltshire
(APP/Y3940/E/13/2207654)**

The applicants had previously gone to appeal against the decision of Wiltshire decision not to grant listed building consent for changing the roof covering from combed wheat reed to water reed. This appeal was upheld in March 2014 but then quashed at a judicial review by the High Court; hence the reason for a re-determination of the appeal.

The proposed works involved the stripping back of the top coat of combed wheat reed thatch and replacing it with water reed. While the requirement for re-thatching was not at stake, and the Inspector agreed that combed wheat reed may not in fact have been the original roofing material, the key issue centred on the significance of the roof as one of the Grade II listed building's features of special interest. Evidence suggested that the original thatched roof was done using long straw, albeit well before the cottage was listed in 1987.

The inspector highlighted the facts that Park Cottage is situated within a designated conservation area, and in a prominent location in close proximity to several other listed buildings having thatched roof coverings. Also, that its thatched roof makes "a significant and positive contribution" to the appearance of the heritage asset, with the present combed wheat reed top coat of "considerable importance to the historic character"; the appellant had argued that the current top coat did not contribute materially.



Park Cottage with temporary verge repairs

The inspector weighed many diverse factors in reaching a decision, primarily the nature of the proposed water reed top coat, its projected durability/longevity and the availability of alternative thatching materials. In dismissing the appeal the Inspector cited that "the use of water reed was not historically prevalent in the local area and has not been used previously on the building". Its introduction now would materially diminish the historic character of the listed building and have a harmful impact on its value as a heritage asset; with consequential harm to the significance of the conservation area.

Malcolm James (photo © Alison Henry)

**Planning Appeal: Land at
Oddington Road, Stow-on-the-
Wold, Gloucestershire
(APP/F1610/A/13/2203411)**

An appeal by Bovis Homes Limited for 146 new homes to be built on the edge of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) has been dismissed by the Secretary of State. He agreed with previous comments made by the Planning Inspector that the appeal site "makes a valuable contribution to the character of the landscape and the hilltop setting of Stow, and that it would be highly sensitive to change".

Other factors assessed in reached the decision included the contentious issue of housing land supply (in the absence of an adopted Local Plan by Cotswold District Council), highways safety, local services provision and the appellant's claims towards sustainable development. The Secretary of State concluded that the benefits of the proposed development would be "far outweighed by the environmental harm that it would cause".

Malcolm James

Llanthony Secunda Priory is a ruined former Augustinian priory situated on the western side of Gloucester Docks and near to the River Severn.

Founded by canons from Llanthony Priory in Monmouthshire, the surviving elements include the outer court (with gatehouse), a 15th century tithe barn, late-medieval range of storage buildings



Llanthony Secunda Priory showing the late-medieval range and the Victorian farmhouse

(including a lodge and brick built 'Great Stable') and a Victorian farmhouse.

Since its inception in 1136 the Priory has experienced a chequered history, having enjoyed periods of great wealth and influence, interspersed with relative poverty and decline. The industrialisation of Gloucester from the 19th century onwards posed a significant threat to the site and it is thanks to the efforts of a diligent minority of local people that the any structures remain at all. By 2007 all of the Grade I listed structures on the site (i.e. gatehouse, precinct walls, tithe barn and the remains of the outer range) were on English Heritage's national 'Heritage At Risk Register'. The overall site is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The Llanthony Secunda Priory Trust was formed in 2007. It owns the site and works to conserve the structures, with wider plans to bring the key buildings back into long-term sustainable use. Funding of just over £100,000 has recently been awarded by the Architectural Heritage Fund (Challenge Fund) towards the restoration of the medieval lodge and the Trust are now finalising a Stage 2 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund; which if successful, should see delivery-phase works starting in 2016.

In addition to securing long-term viable re-use for the buildings, the Trust's plans

also envisage 'developing' the site as a key green space within the city environs and, crucially, 'placing' it in the context of the city's historic development by linking it into the wider regeneration of the Gloucester Docks immediately to the east.

Cotswold Archaeology carried out a historic building assessment at the site during September and October 2014. Two buildings were assessed: the late-medieval timber range north of and including the Victorian farm, and the brick-built 'Great Stable'.

Interpretation of the timber range proved extremely complex, but in essence it comprises a stone ground floor of medieval origin (subsequently subjected to many phases of alteration and repair) and a timber-framed upper floor which is believed to date from the late-15th/ early-16th century. The building as it stands today is a remnant of a range that once extended as far again to the north, and prior 1853 would also have covered the area occupied by the Victorian farmhouse. Analysis suggests that the upper floor was of jettied construction, even though the stone ground floor footprint is wider (not narrower as would be expected). One



The upper storey of the late-medieval range highlighting the impressive 'cut' roof structure

theory is that the jettied section may have originated from elsewhere and that the rest of the structure was adapted to suit. The two-storey brick range of the Great



Interior recording elevations of the late-medieval range's ground floor showing the various phases of alteration and repair

Stable was conventionally dated to the early 16th century, confirming an earlier



Part of the brick-built range; note the tree planting and overall harmony of the green space



Artist's impression of how the site could be 'developed', with a re-roofed brick range (left), late-medieval range with Victorian farmhouse (centre) and gatehouse (far right); the landscaped grounds would include planting schemes indicative of the site's monastic history



One of the exhibits from the Annual Gloucester Stone Carving Festival held at Llanthony Secunda Priory over the Spring Bank Holiday weekend; this Boar's Head by Ross Southerington of South Cerney achieved a credible 4th place overall

Dr Edwina Bell Project Manager

Violet Pinwill worked as a professional woodcarver in Ermington, Devon and then Plymouth from about 1890 to 1957. She and her sisters, Mary and Ethel, were the children of Revd. Edmund Pinwill and his wife Elizabeth, who encouraged their daughters to learn woodcarving from a team of craftsmen who came to Ermington to restore the church there between 1884 and 1889. While it was not unusual in the late Victorian period for young women to learn to carve, the three sisters took a bold step in starting their own company, Rashleigh Pinwill & Co.

The early success of the firm was due in no small part to the patronage of the architect Edmund H. Sedding. He was the nephew of the Arts & Crafts architect John Dando Sedding and came to know the family well during the restoration of Ermington church. Commissions from Edmund H. Sedding ensured a high standard of design and a good reputation was soon gained. Before long other architects recognised the talents of the Pinwill sisters, including Frederick Bligh Bond and George H. Fellowes Prynne.

When Mary married in 1900, she left the business but Ethel and Violet carried on, with an office and probably a workshop in Plymouth as well as in Ermington. By 1907, however, Ethel moved away to Surrey to work as a woodcarver, leaving Violet the sole proprietor of Rashleigh Pinwill & Co. although she gradually changed the name to V. Pinwill. She continued to work with Sedding, but gradually established an independent reputation and won commissions in her own right. After Sedding's death in 1921, Reginald F. Wheatly took over as architect to the company while Violet increasingly created her own designs. Violet travelled all over Devon and Cornwall by train and bicycle to meet with vicars and churchwardens to discuss the work they required. By the time she died on 1st January 1957, Pinwill carvings could be found in over 180 churches in Devon and Cornwall.

Violet recorded a lot of the work carried out by the firm through photographs, taken either just prior to dispatch or when they were installed in the churches. These she assembled in albums, several of which survive in the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office. These photographs are by



The fine traceried rood screen with painted figures at St Peter, Buckland-in-the-Moor, Devon

no means a complete record; they do not include much of the early work and often show only one or two items from a particular church in which there are several more. However, they form the basis of the Pinwill archive from which a database of work has been compiled, supplemented by information from many other sources. It is hoped that this database will be published in the next year or so on a dedicated Pinwill website.



The fine carved altar furnishings at the Church of St Carantoc, Crantock, Cornwall

Meanwhile, there are several churches that can be recommended to visit to see the best carvings by the Pinwills. In Cornwall, probably the finest work is at Crantock (open to the public), where the entire furnishings were designed by Sedding and executed by the Pinwills. At St Martin-by-Looe (by appointment) there are many fine examples of bench ends and fronts designed by Violet in the 1920s and 1930s. Several pieces of work, including a magnificent chancel screen, can be seen at St Mary's Launceston (open to the public). In Devon, a Sedding-designed church, St Mary's in Abbotsbury, Newton Abbot (by appointment), was entirely furnished by Violet Pinwill between 1912 and 1924. Postbridge church (open to the public) was converted



Alabaster reredos by Violet Pinwill depicting the Adoration of the baby Jesus by the shepherds and wise men; St Peter and St Paul, Ermington

from a school in the 1930s and the furnishings, with numerous carvings of birds, animals and plants, were carved by Violet's company. Beautiful examples of the restoration of ancient chancel screens can be seen at Manaton and at Buckland-in-the-Moor, with new screens at Mary Tavy and Lydford (all open to the public). St Peter and St Paul church at Ermington, where it all started, contains many examples of Pinwill work, the finest being the wood and alabaster reredos behind the main altar, which was carved entirely by Violet and is a magnificent piece of work. The church is normally open to the public.

The Pinwill database is being added to all the time as new information emerges, often from newspapers in which the dedication of church furnishings were reported. There are many gaps in the records and one of the joys of researching Pinwill work is to discover new items in the many churches in which they worked. If you would like to know more or have information that could be useful, please email hwilson@plymouth.ac.uk.

Further information is available from:

<http://www.ermingtonchurch.org.uk/woodcarving.htm>

<http://archiveshub.ac.uk/data/gb1086-pinwill>

Dr Helen Wilson University of Plymouth

Grimshaw's Plymouth Ship Saved

Internationally-acclaimed architect Nicholas Grimshaw's iconic *Ship* building in Plymouth has finally been saved from the threat of demolition.

The former Western Morning News headquarters has been sold to a Devon-based developer with a commitment to secure its re-use as offices for small businesses. Its previous owners, the Daily Mail & General Trust, had threatened to call in the bulldozers on the grounds that the building was no longer fit for purpose. Despite a recommendation for statutory listing at Grade II* by Historic England and the Twentieth Century Society, administrative delays at the Department for Culture Media & Sport (DCMS) allowed the demolition plans to reach an advanced stage.

Henrietta Billings, senior conservation adviser at The Twentieth Century Society, welcomed the news that contracts had been exchanged. *"The fact the new owner is making positive noises about the listing ahead of the minister's decision is a really good thing, as is the fact they have a much more positive attitude to the building than the previous owners who wanted to demolish it,"* she said.

Burrington Estates, which made a name for itself working with historic buildings, will rename the *Ship* the *Spirit of Enterprise* and turn it into a "Thrive Hub" offering flexible workspaces to entrepreneurs and growing businesses. It hopes to roll the model out into other cities. Chairman Mark Edworthy welcomed the listing bid and said: *"Saving Plymouth's glass Ship building marks an investment of £5 million and we look forward to working alongside Plymouth City Council to ensure The Ship reaches its full potential within the city."*

Co-founder Paul Scantlebury said: *"Burrington Estates has a strong track record in delivering large-scale construction and renovation projects, preserving the heritage of sites like Dean Clarke House, once the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, and now a pride of the city rather than a derelict, unloved site."* He added: *"In Ivybridge, we hope to create a new heart of the community, with a sensitive but ambitious multi-use housing and retail development at the historic Stowford Mill, while retaining the heritage of the site. Meanwhile, in Plymouth, we have taken Ocean Crescent and transformed it into a stylish and sought-after apartment building and continue to develop Burrington Business Park into a thriving place to do business."* **Stop Press:** Maureen Pearce informs us that the *Ship* has now been listed at Grade II* as recommended!

Elizabeth Hopkirk ©Building Design 2015
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Your SW Regional Committee

Chair

Maureen Pearce: mpearce@teignbridge.gov.uk

Secretary

Kate Baxter-Hunter: kbaxter-hunter@eastdevon.gov.uk

Treasurer

Alyson Cooper: p.rugg@btinternet.com

Council Representative

James Webb: jameswebb@forumheritage.co.uk

Immediate Past Chairman

Ian Lund: lund2@sky.com

Membership Secretary

Liz Smith-Gibbons: lsmith_gibbons@swindon.gov.uk

Historic England Representative

Caroline Power: caroline.power@HistoricEngland.org.uk

Private Practice Representative & Bulletin Editor

Malcolm James: mj@ccons.co.uk

Policy/Consultations

Colin Ellis: colin.c.ellis@btinternet.com

Training & Events

Greg Venn: Greg.Venn@southsomerset.gov.uk

Cornwall & Scilly Isles County Representative

Alyson Cooper

Devon County Representative (incl. Plymouth & Torbay)

Maureen Pearce

Dorset County Representative

James Webb

Somerset County Representative

Greg Venn

Wiltshire County Representative (incl. Swindon)

Helen Garside: helen.garside@wiltshire.gov.uk

Gloucestershire County Representative (incl. South Glos.)

Charlotte Lewis: Charlotte.Bowles-Lewis@gloucester.gov.uk

'Cuba' Representative (incl. Bristol & Bath)

Guy Bentham-Hill: guy.bentham-hil@bristol.gov.uk

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