

Archaeological Building Survey

of

No. 35, STRAND, TOPSHAM,

By R. W. Parker

For Mr and Mrs Osborn

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Fig. 1 No. 35, Strand, from the north, showing its position within the sequence of 'Dutch Houses' in the south part of the Strand

1. INTRODUCTION

No. 35, Strand, Topsham, is a Grade II Listed Building which stands on the eastern side of the Strand approximately 0.3 miles to the south of Topsham Quay (SX96782 87552). The garden wall towards the street is also a Grade II Listed Building. The house has recently been sold to new owners, Mr and Mrs Osborn, and this archaeological survey was commissioned by them with the aim of better understanding the historic importance of the house and of its internal fixtures and fittings. The works described in this report were carried out by R. W. Parker in October 2011 and January 2012 and took the form of a rapid visual survey of the building. A photographic record of the property was prepared in digital format and manuscript notes were also made, which form the basis of this report. Plans and photographs of the property, prepared during earlier phases of alteration and repair, were examined and a rapid search of readily available documentary sources was made in order to set the house in its context.

As the survey was entirely non-invasive and much of the fabric is covered with modern renders and decorative finishes, the conclusions of this report must be considered provisional and may be subject to revision in the light of observations made during future building work or more detailed research into the documentary and tenorial history of the site.

1.2 General Description

The Strand lies to the south of the medieval town centre and continues the linear form of the earlier settlement, lying alongside and parallel with the River Exe. This part of the shoreline was formerly utilised for ship building: docks and wharves remained in operation in this area into the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The waterfront is now mostly laid out as garden plots, divided into strips whose width reflects the tenements on the opposite side of the road. Some of these narrow garden plots may have originated as jetties or quays reclaimed from the foreshore, and probably served as private quays for the properties on the eastern side of the Strand.

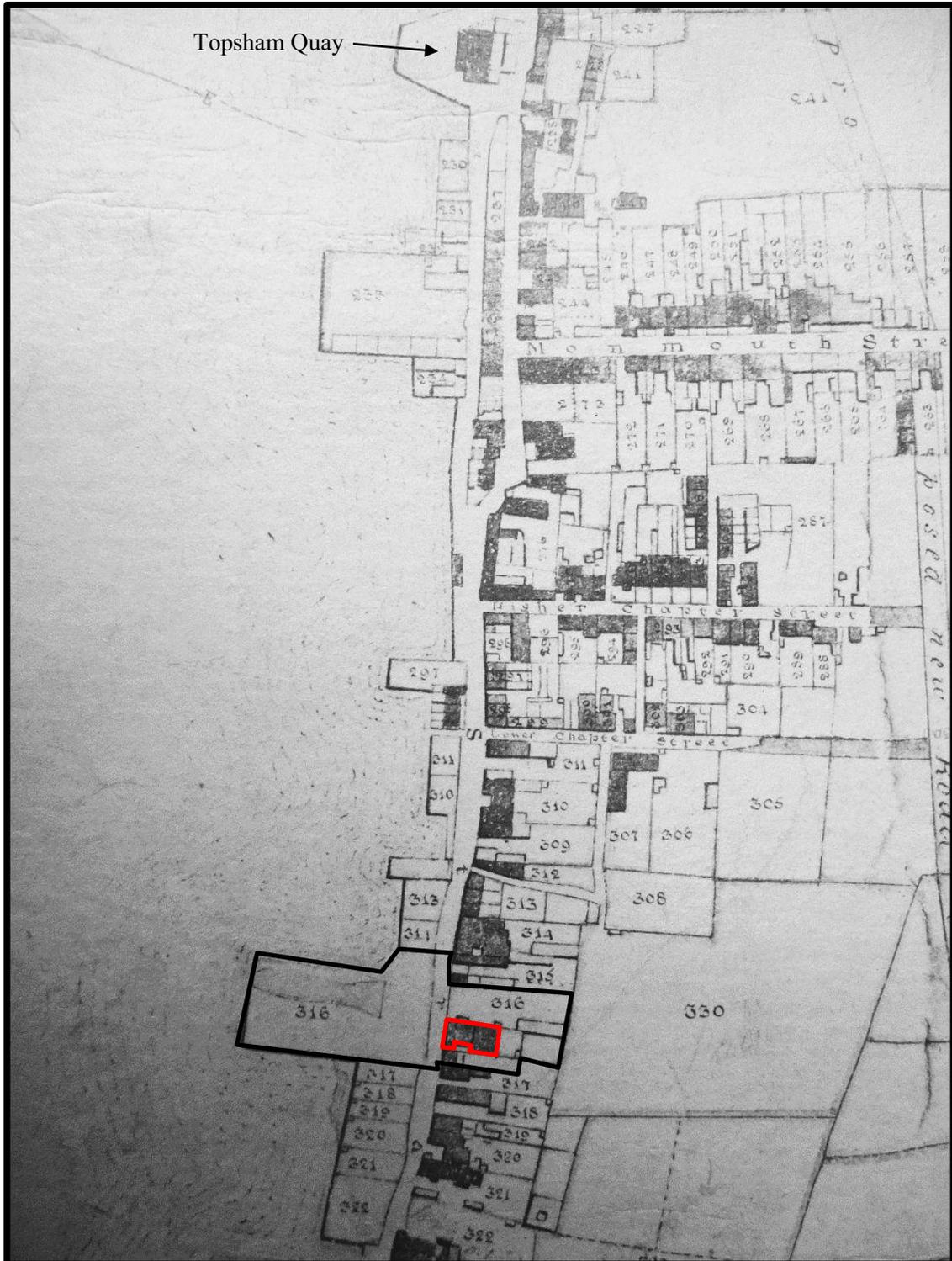


Fig. 2 Extract from Henry Troake's Map of Topsham, surveyed in 1836 and copied in 1842, showing Topsham Quay at the top and the probable extent of plot '316' (outlined in black), at the bottom, with the buildings on the site of No 35, Strand (outlined in red). (Westcountry Studies Library).

The eastern side of the street is bounded by a strip of residential development, which is also divided into narrow tenements aligned at right angles to the street and the shore. These plots extend eastward to a remarkably consistent eastern boundary, but the plot widths vary considerably, the plot occupied by No. 35 being one of the widest. Some of these variations might reflect the presence of earlier topographical features, or perhaps the subdivision or amalgamation of earlier properties, but the general impression is one of consistency, with the houses forming detached blocks on the street frontage alternating with yards and walled gardens (Fig. 1).

The house

No. 35 is a long rectangular building aligned at right angles to the street and the waterfront beyond. It rises to two storeys, under a steeply-pitched slated roof containing attic rooms and presents its eastern gable, crowned with a curved parapet or 'Dutch gable', towards the street. The main façade overlooks large gardens to the north. On the south side of the house is a long and narrow courtyard entered by a wide gateway with plain gate piers and bounded on the south by further long, narrow buildings, apparently of later date. This yard is now part of the adjoining property, but may originally have been attached to No. 35. The interior is divided into four sections, with the main parlour at the end nearest the street, separated by a large stair hall from two further rooms to the east. In all its essentials the house appears to form part of the celebrated group of late 17th-century Topsham houses, known, from their characteristic curved gables (where these survive), as the 'Dutch Houses'.

The 'Dutch Houses'

These houses have been interpreted by John Thorp and others as a late 17th- or early 18th-century planned development of a type peculiar to Topsham and 'without known parallels anywhere in England' (Thorp 1990, 123).

'in their original form these houses are similar in scale and share a distinctive layout and appearance which suggests they were built as some form of controlled development' ... 'Their plan form is unusual and, although no two are quite the same, all share the same essentials. They are long buildings built gable-end onto the street, three or four rooms deep' ... 'their characteristic feature is that they have courtyards alongside separated from the street by tall brick walls containing large gateways' ... 'The gable-end fronts have distinctive curvilinear gables' (Thorp 1990, 122-3).

Although many have been severely altered, the 'Dutch Houses' are easily distinguished because of their alignment and the yards alongside. Most of the buildings face south and their chimney stacks lie in their northern walls, though some have central axial stacks towards their eastern ends. The interiors usually have a well-appointed room lying towards the west end, separated from the eastern rooms by the staircase hall. The eastern rooms appear to have been the service rooms and in some of the houses a cross wing returns across the end of the courtyard, containing a kitchen.

Although the 'Dutch Houses' vary considerably in detail and grandeur of finish, the general impression of similarity is more striking than the differences. No. 35 has many of the plan features associated with the group but it is more modest in appearance and in the character of its fixtures and fittings. For this reason, as shall be shown below, it has not always been associated with the group.

Historic Maps

The earliest historic map of Topsham (known to the author) which shows the buildings of the town in any detail is Henry Troake's Map of Topsham, a copy of which is now held at the Westcountry Studies Library (Fig. 2). This map is annotated to show that it was surveyed in 1836 but was copied in 1842 in advance of the Topsham Improvement Act of July 1843. The map is accompanied by a Tithe Apportionment which records that plot now occupied by No. 35, then numbered '316' was an extensive one, described briefly as 'two houses, yard, garden and store', in the possession of the Earl of Egremont.

The presumed outline of the plot is given in Fig. 2, but the boundaries, particularly with Plot 317 are ambiguous and the ownership of the areas to the south of the present building remains uncertain. The plot certainly extended across the road and incorporated a large dry dock which is believed to have been used for docking and maintaining the Earl's private yacht (Mr Osborn, Pers Comm).

The hatched or shaded area representing the house is shown as divided into two parts, the eastern part of which is wider than the western part. The wider eastern section might be interpreted as a primary cross wing closing the end of the courtyard, such as are found in several houses in the group. These two parts presumably represent the 'two houses', though this does not preclude possibility that the two houses had been created by subdividing a larger, earlier dwelling. Two small, un-hatched projections shown on the northern side of the building might represent porches for each house, one roughly at the centre of the façade and one at its eastern end. These correspond roughly with the positions of the two main entrance doors today.

The southern edge of the area is shown slightly indented, as though a small courtyard existed to the south of the building with other structures extruding to east and west of it. It is possible that the original footprint of the building might have been altered, perhaps by the addition of lean-to extensions to the south encroaching upon a courtyard. This might explain why the building seems to have a wider plan than might be expected from the surviving fabric and from comparisons with other houses in the group.

The next useful historic map known to the author is the 1st-edition Ordnance Survey map sheet 92.4, dating from 1890 (Fig. 3). This seems to show that substantial changes had taken place during the 19th century. By this period the property had been acquired by the Holman family, noted Topsham Ship builders (Obussier 2005, 30) and the docks and wharves on the western side of the road had been enlarged and redeveloped to include warehousing. The footprint of the house is now very different from that shown on Troake's map: the courtyard to the south is unencumbered by other buildings except at its extreme eastern end. The main range of the buildings appears to have been extended eastwards, occupying a small enclosure shown on the earlier map, and still further eastwards by an additional structure, offset to the north and springing from the north-eastern corner of the extended range. The buildings on the south side of the courtyard have also been extended eastward in the form of a similar long, narrow range matching the depth of the main house. One small projecting feature is visible on the north side of the house: this may represent a porch sheltering the eastern of the two entrances visible today.

By the 1930s the buildings had been reconfigured one again. The 1936 revision of the OS map Devonshire Sheet XCII.4, published in 1938, shows that the gardens to the north of the house had been subdivided by a wall on the line of the present north-eastern garden wall and that the eastern part of the building had been massively enlarged to infill the end of the southern courtyard. All porches and projections had been removed from the main range of the house and further structures had been developed on the wharf opposite, possibly including a covered dock on the site of the earlier dry dock.

2. BUILDING SURVEY

2.1 Exterior

Southern Elevation

This elevation of the house looks onto a narrow yard which, though now alienated, may have originally been part of the property, perhaps its original entrance court. The yard is approached through a wide gateway with very large gate piers, which are probably 19th-century replacements for earlier piers and gates.

The elevation is now entirely rendered and all the visible window openings are tall and narrow, fitted with modern casements. These replace earlier window openings of which traces were revealed after the removal of earlier render during repairs in c.1987. At that time photographs (unfortunately rather oblique) were taken of the exposed masonry (Fig. 5). These images show that the walling is a mixture of cob and stone and that it is partly faced with large, possibly handmade red bricks. It has not been possible

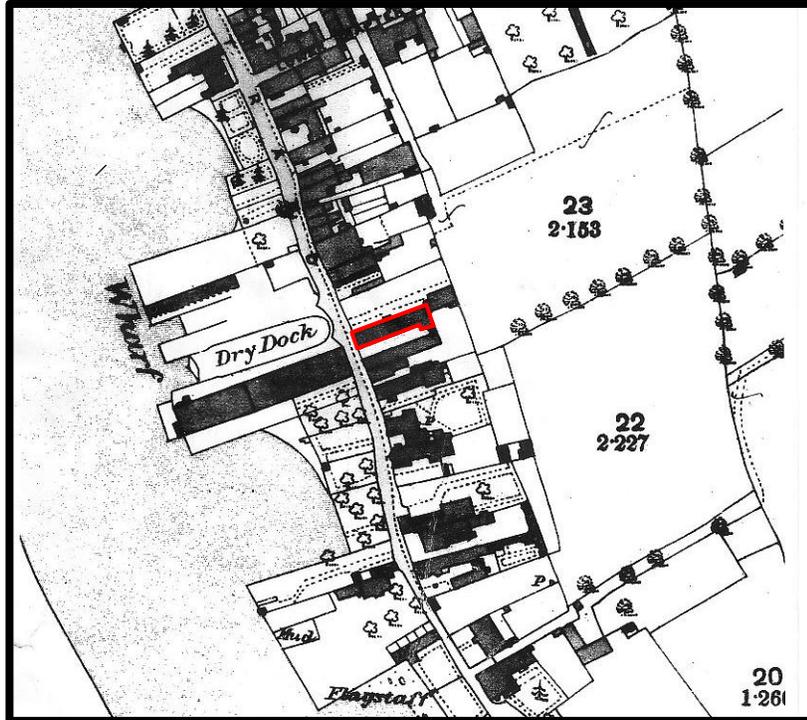


Fig. 3 Extract from the 1890 1st-Edition OS map sheet 92.4, showing the footprint of the building after 19th-century alterations.



Fig. 4 View of the house and the restored south façade from the south west, showing the gates and gate piers to the yard. The open bathroom window on the first floor is a modern insertion dating from 1992, but occupies an earlier window embrasure.



Fig. 5 View of the south façade during building works in *c.* 1987, when the plaster was removed, revealing a mixture of building materials and blocked windows and doorways (Photo held by the Osborn Family).



Fig. 6 View of the western façade during alterations, showing 19th-century alterations to the window openings and the blocked opening for a possible bay window (Photo held by the Osborn Family).

to identify the brickwork bond. Some of the cob was visible towards the south-western corner of the house at a high level. The surface of the cob appears to have decayed and the upper part of the wall to have inclined inwards, so that the rendered surface, presumably of lath and plaster had been studded off the original cob on timber studs to provide a vertical wall surface. This treatment was also apparent towards the centre of the façade, with timber studs covering brickwork and stonework. Chases for the studs could be seen to have been cut into the brickwork in places, which must show that the brickwork is earlier and not contemporary with the studs. The western part of this wall is approximately 0.7m thick, but it appears to grow thinner towards the east; this may suggest that the eastern part is of a different phase.

Further photographs show large blocks of masonry, at the centre and eastern end of the façade. Unfortunately the significance of these and their relationship with the cob walling is unclear, but they seem to form quoins at the eastern corner, and also appear at the jambs of windows. It is possible that the patch of masonry near the centre of the building is connected either with the large internal cross wall containing the chimneystack or with a wall projecting into the courtyard, perhaps associated with a demolished cross wing or projection encroaching on the yard.

Numerous disturbances in the walling are visible in the photographs, representing blocked window openings and doorways. Chief among these is a wide doorway with a timber lintel, which would have opened into the staircase hall and which had been blocked in two phases. The door appears to have been narrowed at first, by the addition of a column of brickwork within its western jamb and then finally blocked in orange bricks whose soft texture and large inclusions are apparent even in the photograph.

The present first-floor window serving the bathroom, just east of the stair hall, is a modern insertion on the site of an earlier window which appears to have been blocked in brick and timber studwork in the 19th century, but for which the embrasure survived as a void behind the blocking. The embrasure was revealed when the window was reopened during major alterations to the property in c.1992; it was broader than the present opening and might have accommodated a wide mullioned window.

Western Elevation

The western gable has also been rendered and painted. It has a single sash window on each storey, the ground-floor and first-floor windows being modern replacements. Stripping of the western gable during repairs revealed that the entire façade is constructed of red brick laid in Flemish bond (Fig. 6). This masonry was apparently continuous into the shaped gable, the edges of which were defined by courses of headers. There appeared to be no evidence for any horizontal breaks in the masonry and thus the gable may be integral with the brickwork of the frontage. One very surprising feature is that the windows occupy a vertical strip of later brick infilling running from ground level to at least the height of the eaves. This then narrowed slightly to include the attic window. This seems to imply either that the original windows were broader, or that a feature such as a curved bay or bow window projecting into the street (like those of several houses nearby) has been removed. The inserted windows had brick-arched lintels externally, masking timber lintels behind, and may have been of 19th-century date. The lintels were replaced with concrete during the building works.

Northern Elevation

This is the garden elevation and now forms the main façade of the house. The western part of the north wall measures about 0.8m in thickness; however, east of the staircase this diminishes by approximately half, and the eastern part of the wall varies considerably in thickness. This is strongly suggestive of different phases of rebuilding though, unfortunately, the sequence and the building materials cannot be determined as the wall is also rendered and painted.

The west end of the façade is blind due to the presence of the chimney heating the parlour and the room above. Alongside this chimney is a modern sash window at ground-floor level, apparently replicating an early 19th-century sash window with margin lights. East of this is a tall staircase window, also with margin lights, which is cut across by the first floor internally. As this window conflicts with the

floor levels it must surely relate to an earlier staircase rising against the north wall of the house, in the opposite direction to the present stair. To the east, the stair hall is lit by a broad window which has been opened up and altered to form the main entrance. This entrance now features a central 'stable' door flanked by narrow side lights, but was presumably at one time a conventional window opening. Beyond this point a thick cross wall divides the house and marks a change in floor levels, the eastern part of the house being higher by a single step. The cross wall contains a large chimney stack which is visible on the crown of the roof and appears to have been constructed in several phases. The ground-floor room to the east of this wall is lit by a large, horizontally-sliding sash window, each sash having twelve small panes. The glazing bars are very delicately moulded and this may therefore be an early 19th-century survival.

At the east end of the north wall is a very fine 18th-century front door with raised-fielded panels, the four upper panels having been altered by the addition of glazing. The door appears to have been reset within this opening since it plainly does not fit; the head of the doorway has been lowered to accommodate it. It is possible that this was derived from another part of the building, perhaps from the original main entrance. The kitchen window alongside is modern.

The first-floor rooms are lit by a broad casement windows, originally perhaps of early 19th-century date but now much repaired. Both the eastern windows have one surviving original casement and one modern replica. The window lighting the landing east of the staircase is the best surviving early 19th-century window, though the tall window to the staircase may be of the same date. These have narrow, delicately-moulded window bars and early 20th-century catches and stays.

Eastern Elevation

The eastern wall of the building appears to be of great thickness and may well contain a large fireplace at ground-floor level. This elevation is partly obscured by a large covered structure, known as the coach house, which appears to be of relatively modern date. Some of the very large beams built into this section of the building may be earlier, reused in the present structure. There is a blocked doorway from the house to this area, suggesting that it once formed part of the property, but it is now in separate ownership.

2.2 Interior

Ground Floor

The ground floor is divided into four rooms, with the principal parlour at the western end. This is entered from the staircase hall by a fine six-panelled door with raised-fielded panels arranged in an unusual pattern (Fig 7). The taller panels lie above and below with smaller square panels forming a frieze in the middle. The door has a handsome brass lock box, but this is a later addition: traces of an earlier latch mechanism and the outline of a door handle with heart-shaped terminals survive on both sides of the door. The scars of large 'H-L' hinges are visible on the side facing the parlour, which has flat panels surrounded by a diminutive ovolo moulding. The door may well be of late 17th- or early 18th-century date but it has clearly been rehung in its present position. As the doorway would have conflicted with the putative earlier staircase, it seems likely that there is a blocked doorway in the southern or central part of this wall and that the doorway was moved here and the door rehung after the reconfiguration of the stairway. The architrave surrounding the doorway is plainly modern.

The parlour would presumably have been one of the grandest rooms in the house, lit by a large window, possibly a bow (see above), onto the street. Though it is possible that the room was formerly panelled, no trace now remains. Evidence for panelling might survive in the sides of the door frame, beneath the later architrave. Most of the surviving historic features in the parlour seem to date from the 19th century. The chimneypiece is possibly of slate or marble, but has been painted. If it is not a modern importation it may have been inserted during a 19th-century refurbishment of the property. The ceiling of the parlour is crossed by a plain, unmoulded beam which was almost certainly at one time disguised by plaster. An unmoulded beam of this type would never have been intended to be exposed in a house of this period.



Fig. 7 Detail of the early 18th-century door reset within the doorway to the parlour. Several doors of this period survive in the house.



Fig. 8 View of the staircase hall at ground-floor level, showing the awkward relationship of the floor levels with the stair window and the recess in the wall below it. It seems likely that the stair formerly rose to the north alongside a partition under the beam above.



Fig. 9 View of the fireplace and alcoves in the stair hall.

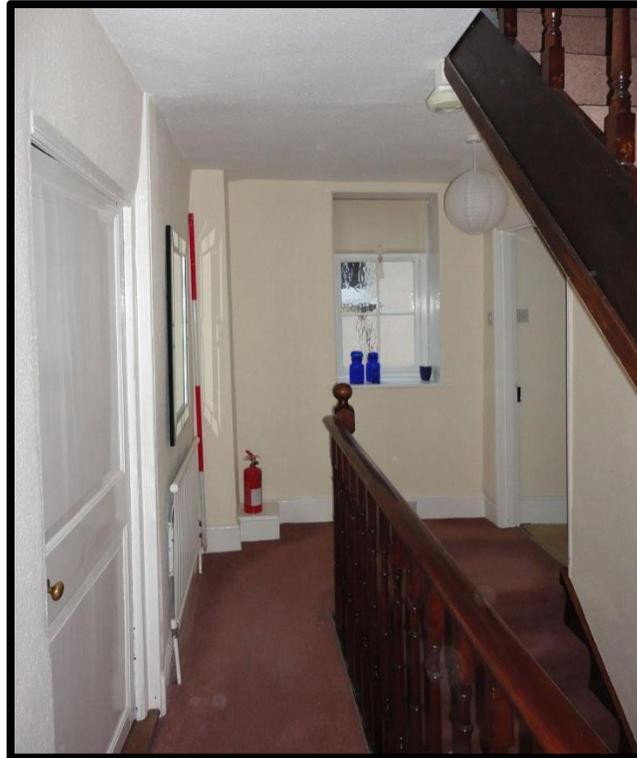


Fig. 10 View of the stair landing at first-floor level, showing the scar across the ceiling and offset betraying a partition. The 18th-century door at left must have opened onto the original stair head.

The central room or staircase hall has been much altered, probably at the time the staircase was reconfigured. In its present form the staircase appears to be a modern rebuilding, incorporating poorly reassembled elements of a mid to late 19th-century staircase. The original form of the staircase is betrayed by the stair window and the curious recess or niche beneath it, in the north wall of the room (Fig 8). The stair must have risen to the north and turned at a half landing or winders just above the level of the top of the niche, before returning to the south alongside the wall of the western room.

It is difficult to be certain of the original plan of this part of the building. It is unlikely that the stair was originally open to the room to the east, as at present. The stair and the room alongside were presumably separated by a partition, as on the first floor above. The ceiling is crossed by an unmoulded pine beam running across the centre of the room, but this does not align with the first-floor partition, perhaps as a result of alterations. Nonetheless it seems likely that this beam betrays the position of the partition. Evidence of wall footings for the partition and for the original form of the staircase might survive below the floor.

The eastern wall of the room contains a pair of semi-circular-headed alcoves fitted with wall cupboards, flanking a central fireplace. The fireplace retains a late 18th- or early 19th-century chimneypiece, originally with flanking pilasters crowned with delicate acanthus-leaf capitals. The pilasters appear to have been cut away to widen the opening and the entablature has been dressed up with modern applied ornaments. The mantelshelf also appears to be an addition and the grate has been removed. An archway 1.31m deep alongside the northern alcove leads to a doorway featuring a second oak door with raised-fielded panels. This has been rehung and reversed; it has fielded panels to one side only and shows traces of a latch mechanism and handle with heart-shaped terminals. The existing door furniture is probably of 19th-century date.

The room to the east of the centre of the house is heated by a fireplace with a large slate chimneypiece which may have been imported. A small service stair rises to the south of this chimney, entered through a flush four-panelled door with an early latch mechanism and drop-handle. A cupboard alongside has similar details. These features may be of early 19th-century date.

The kitchen at the eastern end of the ground floor is entered from this room by a small archway with a shaped arch supported on small, moulded corbels, reset in this position. The wall containing this arch is modern, replacing an earlier wall in a slightly different position which was removed and rebuilt in 1992. Photographs, now in the possession of Mr and Mrs Osborn, show that this wall was constructed of large timber studs with diagonal braces crossing at the centre and that it contained evidence of a blocked doorway. No other historic features are visible.

First Floor

The main stairs to the first floor are probably 19th-century in origin, though modern in their present form, and their original configuration was probably different. The remains of a post from a 19th-century four-poster bed have been built into the staircase at the point where it returns towards the second floor and the balusters do not fit the string, providing clear evidence that the staircase has been reassembled from earlier fragments. Examination of the walls and ceilings of the first-floor landing shows that there was originally a partition crossing the landing at the head of the present stairs, the scar of which is still visible (Fig. 10). The original staircase must have reached the landing at a point further to the north than at present, and the southern part of the landing was enclosed as a separate area. This area might have served as a closet or lobby, or perhaps a corridor linking the western and eastern rooms. Alternatively, there may have been a second staircase in this area, partitioned off from the main stair, to give access to the attic rooms.

The principal first-floor bedroom on the western side of the stair hall has also been much altered. It is approached by an 18th-century two-panelled door with raised fielded panels towards the landing, but plain panels to the room, which have been dressed up with additional timber to resemble a 19th-century four-panelled door. The fireplace is in the north wall and retains a small, plain 18th-century fire surround, fitted off-centre to the chimney breast and possibly preserving a hob grate behind a modern chimney board.

The bathroom to the east of the stair hall is entered by a raised-fielded-panelled door with two panels which, although rehung, retains its original H-L hinges. This door occupies the middle of the eastern wall of the stair hall and may in fact have opened from the original landing at the head of the primary staircase (Fig. 10). It is not shown on the 1990s plans of the house, but may well have been blocked for a time and reopened during the 20th-century alterations. It is likely that a corresponding doorway to the western room may survive, still blocked, in the opposite wall. The bathroom appears formerly to have been a large, heated room which may have spanned the full width of the house. It had a generously-sized window in the south wall, which was later blocked. The northern part of this room has been partitioned off to form a corridor which gives access to the bedrooms in the eastern part of the house. The doorway from the corridor to these rooms has a tall, narrow, two-panelled door with raised fielded panels and later, 19th-century, door furniture.

The eastern central bedroom has a pronounced chimney breast in its west wall, adjoining which is a small cupboard contrived between the chimney breast and the service stair. This cupboard is closed by the remains of a former window shutter featuring three raised-fielded panels. The shutter has been adapted and widened to serve as the cupboard door; it was presumably at one time part of a panelled room, or at least a panelled embrasure to a window. It may have been derived from another part of the house, perhaps the parlour or the western room at first-floor level, both of which are likely to have been well appointed. The partition between this room and the eastern room was constructed of relatively slight timber framing consisting of vertical studs and diagonal bracing nogged with red brick, exposed during the alterations in 1992 (Fig. 12). The mortar had pressed and spread out against a pre-existing surface, showing that the bricks were secondary and had been inserted from the eastern side of the partition. The floor structure was also exposed during these works; the primary joists appear to have been large, square-sectioned timbers unlike the plank joists one would associate with 18th- or 19th-century construction (Fig. 13). The earlier joists appear to have been truncated, as though there was a void in the floor here, but it is possible that this was just a result of the repairs. A large part of the floor structure was renewed during the works and the architects' drawings record that the floor levels were raised in both this room and the adjacent bedroom.

To the south of this room is a small landing at the head of the lower flight of the service stairs. The doorways off the landing to north and east retain several 18th-century doors and there is a handsome 19th-century fixed linen press on the landing decorated with delicate mouldings. The upper flight of the service stair is enclosed by a plain 19th-century four-panelled door.

At the eastern end of the house are a further bedroom and a small bathroom. These appear to have been a single room originally, entered by a doorway with a broad, moulded architrave from the landing. Both rooms have traces of a moulding running around the ceilings and the bathroom retains a wide window embrasure suggestive of a large mullioned window. In the eastern bedroom is a fitted sideboard with a curved end, probably dating from the 19th century.

Attic Storey

The large eastern attic room is reached by the small service stair, which terminates at a square, chamfered newel post and a horizontal rail without balusters. There appears to be no fireplace in the eastern side of the chimney stack and the only heating is a very small fireplace built into the eastern gable wall of the house at the far end of the room. This has an early 19th-century cast-iron hob grate. There are few other surviving historic features. Inspection of the roof spaces and historic photographs revealed that the roofs over the eastern part of the house have been extensively renewed during alterations in 2001, and it is highly likely that there were formerly other partitions, now removed, dividing this space into separate rooms.

The central attic room is approached by a small doorway fitted with a plank door with 19th-century door furniture, including strap hinges with expanded ends. This opens upon the central attic room, an unheated space in which traces of the original roof can be seen. The roof has the remains of an 'A'-frame truss of softwood timbers of very large scantling, lying against the back of the central chimney stack. The joints of the collars and the principals are secured with both pegs and spikes, a method of construction



Fig. 11 View of the partition between the eastern rooms at first-floor level before demolition, showing secondary brick nogging within the partition (Photo held by the Osborn Family).



Fig. 12 View of the floor structure at first-floor level, exposed in 1992, showing the character of the early joists, interrupted by a modern intrusion (Photo held by the Osborn Family).



Fig. 13 View of the partition at second-floor level, showing the early plank door and, left the remains of truncated planking protruding into the room, relating to an unknown feature (possibly an hoarding for a service stair).



Fig. 14 View of the stair landing at second-floor level, showing the false-panelled door, the character of the roof trusses, and the recess with the sloping soffit (right), possibly for a service stair.

known from other late 17th and early 18th-century buildings in the Exeter area. Oddly, the northern principal rafter appears to have been removed below the collar and is now apparently unsupported. The reason for this mutilation of the roof is uncertain, but it may perhaps be connected with the rebuilding of the northern wall of the house or, perhaps, the insertion of the chimney stack. A large softwood purlin running along the north side of the roof fails to contain provision for a junction with the truncated truss blade, which suggests that the purlin may have been inserted after the truss was truncated. This purlin bears upon the masonry of the chimney stack, which could support the conjecture that the chimney stack is a later insertion.

The western wall of the room is of great interest and is formed of a stud partition formed of vertical studs and plaster panels (Fig. 13). The nature of the infilling is uncertain but it is clear that the studs were originally lathed over and concealed behind plaster, since many bear traces of lath nails. The partition contains a central doorway closed by a plank door decorated, towards the western landing, with applied fillets so as to resemble a two-panelled door. The door is hung on 18th-century 'H' hinges and has very interesting door furniture, including latch, bolt and handle.

An unusual feature in this wall, low down to the south of the doorway appears to represent an area of blocking. Horizontal timbers or battens have been applied to the eastern face of the wall and the remains of sawn off planks can be seen, apparently passing through the thickness of the partition (Fig. 13). On the other side of the partition the plaster is slightly recessed and has a sloping soffit (Fig. 14). This feature is very difficult to interpret, but it is possible that a minor staircase originally rose from east to west along the south wall of the house, cutting through this part of the partition between the floor levels, and boxed in within a raised, boarded hoarding. This could have been a service stair from the first floor to the attics. It is uncertain whether it was a primary or secondary feature.

The upper main landing has very poor, modern balusters and handrails relating to the modern reorganisation of the staircase (Fig. 14). A modern bathroom has been contrived at the head of the stairs, divided from the landing by a 19th-century timber partition, with four panelled doors, aligned under the main truss. A four-panelled door with panted mouldings leads onto the western attic room. This appears to have always been unheated, but has a large window in the west wall. It is possible that this room and the present landing were formerly a single room until subdivision in the 19th century, in which case there may be a blocked fireplace in the western side of the large central chimney.

Roofs

The entire eastern part of the roof was rebuilt in the 19th and again in the 20th century and is now supported by plain common rafter trusses. Four of the original main trusses of the primary roof survive, forming three bays covering the western part of the house. The best surviving sections of this primary roof are over the western room and landing (Fig. 14). The roof is supported by massive 'A'-Frame trusses, formed by pairs of principal rafters linked by collar beams which are applied to the faces of the principal rafters and secured with several large square pegs and iron spikes. The construction of the apex of the roof is not visible. The purlins appear to stagger over the backs of the principals, but the detail varies from truss to truss and it is possible that some of the purlins are replacements. The character of the original roof construction would be consistent with a date in the late 17th- or early 18th-century.

3. DISCUSSION

Summary of the Probable Development of the House

Much of the early fabric identified in this rapid and non-invasive survey of the property would be consistent with a date for the first construction of the house in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The character of the early part of the roof structure, the steep pitch of the roof, the unmoulded beams supporting the ceilings, the mixed masonry of the walling and the few surviving early doors with their unclassical pattern of panels would all be consistent with this period. The western part of the house is its best preserved section: the eastern part has been much rebuilt. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to

determine with certainty to what extent the plan of the eastern part of the house was altered during rebuilding. It is conjectured here that the basic, four room plan does reflect that early house but that many of the original features, doorways and internal partitions have been repositioned as a consequence of later alterations.

The photographs taken during the repairs reveal that much original fabric survives in the south wall of the house, which features many blocked openings and might be interpreted as the original main façade. This fabric is of high importance for the understanding of the original form of the house and it is a pity that it was not analysed in more detail when the render was removed. The map evidence may support the conjecture that there was formerly a cross wing returning across the end of the yard, removal of which may account for some of the unusually mixed masonry and anomalous features in this wall.

The western elevation shows signs of 19th-century alterations and may be cautiously reconstructed as featuring a two storey bay or bow window. It is uncertain whether the high-quality brickwork of this elevation represents the original facing bricks or later refacing to present a fair, brick front to the street. The 'Dutch gable' appears integral with this brickwork and does not appear to be a 19th- or 20th-century addition.

The north wall clearly contains evidence of the original staircase, which must have risen in a dog-leg against this wall. To the east of the staircase the wall seems to have been rebuilt. The most likely context for this would be the realignment of the house to face north, away from the original courtyard and towards the gardens and yards to the north of the house. This alteration may have been made in the early 19th century, perhaps when the house had been converted into two separate dwellings. As the large central chimney stack appears to interrupt the primary roof structure, it is possible that this chimney is also an early 19th-century insertion; perhaps made to serve the eastern house. If the original chimney stacks were in the north wall, as in many of the houses of the group, their removal may have been necessary in order to realign the house.

The eastern part has clearly been much rebuilt in a series of alterations during the 19th and 20th centuries. The first of these alterations may have taken place when it was first converted into a separate dwelling, perhaps during the 1830s and 40s when the whole property was held by the Earl of Egremont. The division of the house may well have affected the layout of both parts of the house, necessitating the provision of new staircases and kitchen facilities for both dwellings, and may have led to the removal of important architectural features.

Subsequently, at some point before 1890, the eastern part of the house was extended eastwards. This may have involved the addition of ranges of stabling or outbuildings and perhaps also the development of the long range on the opposite side of the southern courtyard. The date of this extension is uncertain, but the flattened 'Tudor' arch of the doorway in the north wall of the present coach house may suggest that this new building dated from the mid 19th century, perhaps after its acquisition by the Holman family. The main property may now have been converted back into a single dwelling. These alterations could provide a context for the provision of a new main staircase and for the renewal of nearly the whole eastern part of the roof.

The subsequent contraction of the eastern part of the structure appears to have taken place in the 20th century, when the eastern extension was partially demolished and the present 'Coach House' was formed from its remains. Later 20th-century alterations have tended to obscure the development of the house. These included the rebuilding of the main staircase, which has unfortunately confused the evidence for previous stairs in this area and the renewal of the eastern roof, which may have removed evidence of other attic rooms. Although the house has no fittings of outstanding quality, as found in some other houses in the street, it does remain exceedingly rich in historic fixtures and fittings. These include a number of early doors dating from the 18th century, some of which retain evidence of their original door furniture.

Is No. 35 A 'Dutch House'?

Since No. 35 possesses all the characteristic features of a 'Dutch House' it seems highly likely to be one of the group. When the building was first listed in 1952, however, the inspector came to the conclusion

that this was not the case, for reasons which he does not divulge. His description was based upon an external inspection only, and reads as follows:

'THE STRAND 1. 1092 (East Side) TOPSHAM No 35 (Formerly listed in the rural district of St Thomas) SX 9688 9/1181 11.11.52 II GV 2. Late C17, altered. Roughcast cob. Garden front has mostly wood casements. Gable-end to road has restored Dutch gable and sash windows. One window, modern sash below, with glazing bars above. Central chimney stack. This is probably not a merchant house but has been given a Dutch gable to appear like one'. (English Heritage National Heritage List)

This interpretation of the house as unrelated to the group was later reiterated by the late Caroline Obussier in her account of Topsham Buildings, on the grounds that the house was more modest than the other houses in the group:

'Although this house has a Dutch-type gable it does not follow the usual plan. The walls are mainly cob and its character is more that of a cottage. It faces north, and has casement and horizontal sliding windows on this side. There is a large central chimney stack with a winding stair alongside. A plan of 1842 shows it as two houses attached to the dockyard opposite. (Obussier 1971, 30).

In a later revision of this work Obussier adds that:

'Parts of (the house) are probably much older, as some medieval stonework was revealed on the south wall when it was re-rendered. Some walls are of cob. Clearly much altered over the years, a plan of 1642 (sic.) shows it as two houses under the same ownership as the dock opposite. It was owned in the 19th century by the Earl of Egremont, who had kept his yacht in the dock across the road, later to become the dry dock owned by the Holmans' (Obussier 2005, 30).

The 'plan of 1642' presumably refers to Troake's map of 1842 and must be a misprint, since it appears, correctly, as '1842' in the first edition of the book.

The tradition that No. 35 is not one of the group of 'Dutch Houses' thus seems to originate with the Inspector who first Listed the building in the 1950s and has been perpetuated by later writers. It is likely that the reason for this interpretation was the lack of grand features surviving within the house, the extent of subsequent alterations which had obscured its character and also a misreading of the documentary and physical evidence as supporting two houses in '1642'.

In all but a few respects the plan and layout of the house conforms with those of other 'Dutch Houses' and the general proportions of the building are directly comparable with other, undoubted, members of the group, such as Nos 29, 38 and 40. The few differences may simply reflect the variations in detail known to exist within the group, or subsequent alteration of the properties reflecting the differing economic circumstances of the owners. Variations in the ceiling heights and sizes of rooms, as well as the irregular spacing of the houses, could reflect the piecemeal nature of the development, which is considered to have been built over a long period rather than in one single phase. This would be typical of speculative developments of the 17th and 18th centuries, which had to proceed as and when sufficient land and finance were available. It was not uncommon for a developer to complete the shell of a house before its sale, and for fitting up to follow later, minimising the outlay and the risk for the speculator (Summerson, 1988, 28, 53). Many of the surviving 'Dutch Houses' show fittings such as panelling and staircases of exceptional quality, but these can often be identified as additions made after the houses were constructed, as the buildings were customised to reflect the taste and wealth of their new owners. As No. 35 has undergone much alteration, it is more than probable that features which would otherwise have

allowed it to be comfortably identified with and in the ‘Dutch’ group have been lost in the process of modernisation.

The unusual form and layout of the Strand houses remains a mystery. Other speculative developments previously identified in Topsham, such as White Street and Monmouth Street conform to the normal pattern of such developments, the houses being constructed as more-or-less continuous terraces within new streets extending away from and at right-angles to the linear medieval settlement along the waterfront.

Medieval and post-medieval urban waterfront reclamation elsewhere, as recorded by Exeter Archaeology at Dartmouth, Mayors Avenue and Plymouth Vauxhall Street and also, famously, in Great Yarmouth, has revealed a process in which piers and jetties projecting into the water became gradually built over with later buildings: although initially these structures would have remained separated by narrow docks and slipways, these would eventually have been infilled or built over and the working waterfront eventually consolidated as a continuous row fronting a new ‘Esplanade’ or ‘Strand’, the process often repeating itself subsequently on the other side of the street as more land was reclaimed. This process of urban development produces a typical townscape of long narrow buildings at right angles to the shoreline, often with narrow yards or ‘Opes’ between them.

At Topsham the development of this part of the waterfront has not been examined archaeologically, but comparison of historic maps shows that there were formerly narrow projecting quays here. Troake’s map shows several such projections, while the OS 1st-edition 1:500 map shows that many had been enlarged during the mid-to late the 19th century to form larger rectangular projections into the river. Although it is perhaps unlikely that the Strand houses were ever separated by working docks, it is possible that the pattern of long narrow houses alternating with yards could reflect an image or tradition of waterfront development in prosperous towns of the period which was familiar to the 17th-century residents of Topsham and to the unknown developer who first conceived the ‘Dutch Houses’.

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This report is based on a very rapid visual survey of the property and the conclusions here presented may need to be revised should future alterations to the house reveal any further evidence of its structural fabric.

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