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**Cambrian Archaeological Association.**

COUNCIL, FOR BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY : RESEARCH REPORT 3  
NOTES ON THE INVESTIGATION OF SMALLER  
DOMESTIC BUILDINGS

(Prepared by the C.B.A. Post-Medieval Research Committee)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Present conditions are causing extensive demolition and rebuilding in town and country alike, and this at a time when historians are looking more and more to architecture as a source of evidence for the economic and social life of the past. The changes themselves are largely inevitable, but if buildings can be recorded before the work begins the historical evidence will be in large measure saved. The only official bodies responsible for such work—the National Buildings Record and its Scottish counterpart—lack the resources to record properly every manor-house, much less every farm-house and cottage. These notes have been compiled in the hope that people who are untrained in the study of architecture, but who are interested in the history of their county or parish, may be willing to assist in salvaging evidence just as valuable as that derived from documents and even more liable to destruction. The buildings most in need of record are the smaller farm-houses, often now merely cottages, which on examination will frequently be found to have a long history extending back to the late sixteenth century. The succeeding paragraphs are written with such structures, often of several periods, in mind.

2. THE BASIC RECORD

Any record is better than none, Any photographs, even poor ones, of the main elevation, or a sketch showing reasonably accurately the proportions and spacing of openings may be enough to indicate something of the building's history to the trained researcher. *The most important record is a plan.* A building of average farm-house size is easy for the untrained fieldworker to plan—a sketch showing the openings, fireplaces, partitions, and ceiling beams is the first essential. The main measurements should then be added, as well as any indication of alterations or additions. Along with this a brief description of the house, its materials, and minor decorative features (if possible sketched or photographed) will complete the summary record.

Anyone sufficiently interested to help with this important work should read the recent book by Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan entitled *Monmouthshire Houses*.<sup>1</sup> The conclusions they draw are of great importance for social and economic history and could not have been reached on documentary evidence alone, a point which should inspire local historians to emulate their example. The house-types found in Monmouthshire are by no means peculiar to that county but have a much wider distribution, extending over a very large part of England and Wales, so that the book forms an admirable basis for investigation elsewhere. The region where the actual Monmouthshire types are least helpful will probably be the timber counties of the south and east, but even there the book gives valuable guidance not only on methods but also on the kind and extent of the accommodation demanded by yeoman

<sup>1</sup>Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan, *Monmouthshire Houses*, Parts I-III (National Museum of Wales, 1951-4).

farmers over a period of two centuries. Anyone who begins work in this field on the elementary basis outlined above will probably soon be stimulated to explore some of the problems which arise. The following *Hints on Recording* recapitulate the essentials, and aim to show such a person how to proceed further.

### 3. HINTS ON RECORDING

*Plan.* A measured sketch-plan is required. Note:—

- (a) Thickness of walls: marked variations usually denote a difference in date.
- (b) Position of exposed ceiling-beams on the plan: note where the angles are shaved off (chamfered) and how the cut ends.
- (c) Blocked windows and doorways.
- (d) Position of original jambs and breadth of opening where an old fireplace has been partially blocked.
- (e) Proved or probable site of the original staircase: in any building prior to c. 1700 it may have been moved or replaced.
- (f) Original partitions and internal walls; distinguish them from later internal divisions.
- (g) First-floor (and attic) plans are necessary to a full understanding of a house.

The following general points should be borne in mind:—

- (a) At any given period houses belonging to men of the same social status will provide much the same accommodation. The arrangements of rooms may differ, but their number and their respective functions will vary only from one period to the next, not with the personal wishes of the builders. If, for instance, a house displays no visible feature prior to 1700 and yet has the proportions and plan of an Elizabethan yeoman's house, the chances are that it is an earlier building which has been completely 'modernized.'
- (b) The number of ways in which three or four ground-floor rooms of a small house can be arranged is limited; it is reduced still further by social custom. This simplifies greatly the investigator's task, since he can be sure that within certain limits the number of rooms—hall, parlour, etc.—and their sequence, will be much the same in houses of a given period. The truth of this can soon be tested by considering modern suburban houses.

*Elevation.* Note:—

- (a) If it is symmetrically arranged. Is the symmetry exact or approximate?
- (b) The proportions: are there wide stretches of unbroken wall for deep open fireplaces, or small stair lights?
- (c) Blocked openings.
- (d) Lengthening or heightening of the original structure: differences in material or a change in building methods will determine this.

As a general point, note (i) extreme asymmetry (an early feature), (ii) what influence the desire for symmetry had on the plan; often it produced very inconvenient internal arrangements.

*Materials.* Timber was the material most widely used for building in the later Middle Ages. Its use continued in many regions until about the middle of the seventeenth century, but about 1550 its use began to be abandoned in favour of stone, or stone laid in alternating courses with flint, or cob, or brick. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century the use of brick was becoming widespread, and it increased until by the early nineteenth century it had virtually ousted all other materials completely. Note:—

- (a) Peg-holes and empty mortices show where timbers have once stood. By measuring and plotting them and determining their angle on paper, the structure and plan of a timber-framed house can be reconstructed.
- (b) In dealing with brickwork, the bonding, i.e. the mode of laying. Take the average measurements of several bricks—length, breadth, and thickness—and note the height through which four courses rise. Observe any peculiarities of treatment, e.g. the use of blue or vitrified bricks, and the pattern they make. Differences in the colour and size of bricks within a locality may be a help in dating buildings.
- (c) Cob is very seldom exposed to view; usually it is stuccoed or cemented. Great thickness of walls sometimes betrays the presence of cob; one infallible sign is the existence of slight curves in the outer surfaces, since it is difficult to give a true vertical face to this material. Note if it has a stone or brick base.
- (d) The kind of stone used is important; if you do not know the proper name, describe its characteristics. Distinguish between coursed and uncoursed work, and between rubble, squared rubble, and ashlar.
- (e) Roofing materials. The pitch of the roof should be noted.

*Interior.* Note:—

- (a) The form of roof construction should be sketched and noted. Look for any signs of alteration, e.g. insertion of dormer windows or heightening.
- (b) Any noteworthy features of a framed staircase should be sketched, e.g. balusters, and the moulding of a handrail.
- (c) Note all mouldings and the way they end.
- (d) The mode of construction of internal partitions is important; if of wood, a sketch and a note of decorative features are desirable. Stud-and-panel (or plank-and-muntin) partitions can easily be re-used. See if the uprights (studs) are tenoned and pegged into a beam above; if they are, it is a sure proof that the partition is in its original position.
- (e) When a wooden partition has been moved, the beam into which its studs were fastened will still retain mortices and peg-holes; note them carefully.
- (f) Internal walls are sometimes in a different material from the outer walls: this may be a sign of alteration to the original structure.

*Historical Development.* Base this on any dated buildings in the neighbourhood. It is important to be quite certain to what part a datestone in a building refers: to the whole, to the original house, or to an addition? If the stone has been reset in a new position, consider carefully what it relates to, because a datestone rarely 'migrates' from the house for which it was intended.

*Setting.* Note:—

- (a) The relation of a house to the ground; to slopes, and to roads and streams.
- (b) Changes of frontage; the building of a new eighteenth-century turnpike road may cause the back of an old house to be rebuilt as the main frontage. Allow for this in reconstructing the original plan.
- (c) Any associated buildings, such as barns, granaries, and stables. There may be parts of old farm-yard walls remaining, and traces of a monumental entrance.
- (d) Before 1600 it was rare for a house to include a kitchen, which was normally a detached building. Not until after 1700 did it become normal to incorporate the kitchen in the house. In dealing with houses of earlier date than this, consider the question of when the kitchen became part of the main house.

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