

Archaeological Recording

of

**FIRE-DAMAGED BUILDINGS AT
BULLER SQUARE, CREDITON, DEVON**

By R.W. Parker, Lucy Browne & Marc Steinmetzer

For Linhay Homes



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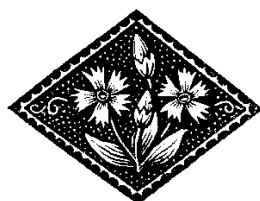
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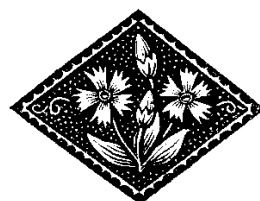




Fig. 1 Location of Crediton within the south-western peninsula.

1: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological works undertaken by Richard Parker Historic Buildings Recording and Interpretation, in association with Oakford Archaeology, on the site of two fire-damaged properties at Buller Square, East Town, Crediton, Devon (EX17 1HF). Crediton is an ancient market and manufacturing town lying in Mid Devon, approximately nine miles to the north-east of Exeter close to the confluence of the rivers Creedy and Yeo (Fig. 1). The buildings were part of a complex of thatched houses, Nos 1 to 4 Buller Square, forming a quadrangle lying on the east side of Downeshead Lane and south of Tolleys in the east part of the town at SS 83976 00078 (Fig. 2). The buildings were Listed Grade II.

The buildings were destroyed in a disastrous fire on the 2nd of February 2012. Two of the houses (Nos 3 and 4) and the rear block of No 27 Downeshead Lane have since been rebuilt in a form similar to that of their original appearance (though with slated roofs) reinstating the north-western and south-eastern sides of the quadrangle and a small part of its north-eastern side. The remaining two houses, Nos 1 and 2 Buller Square, have remained derelict until 2020. Despite some attempts to consolidate the ruins after the fire with an eye to eventual reinstatement, most of the surviving historic fabric of these two properties was demolished for reasons of public safety in 2015. At the time of the recording in 2020 only the lower section of the south-eastern wall and parts of the modern rear extensions beyond this remained standing.

1.1 The Current Project

The archaeological works described in this report were commissioned by Linhay Homes as a condition of Planning Permission for the reconstruction of the two remaining houses, fully reinstating the historic quadrangle. In accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team in January 2020, the aims of the project were to:

- Examine any surviving documentary evidence for the structural history of the buildings, including historic map evidence, pre- and post-fire records including



Fig. 2 Extract from the OS Map Sheet Devonshire SS80SW, Surveyed Pre-1930 / Revised: to 1961, published 1962, showing the location of Buller Square in the eastern part of the town (circled).



Fig. 3 Image of the houses before their destruction by fire, showing (from left to right) Nos 3, 2 and 1 Buller Square (supplied by Edward Holden, Architect, through Linhay Homes).

topographical drawings and other pictorial and documentary sources, in order to understand the origins of the building and its development.

- to investigate and record any buried archaeological deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the development
- to report on the results of the project.

Since the buildings had been largely demolished at the time of the recording, the present archaeological project has relied upon pre- and post-fire photographs of the demolished buildings and upon accounts of the buildings made prior to and immediately after their demolition to establish the character of the structure and to assess whether it might have originated as one large property in quadrangular form or whether its development as such was piecemeal and incremental. In preparation for the reconstruction of the buildings archaeological monitoring was undertaken during the groundwork. Documentary research was undertaken, as outlined above, and this is presented in section 2 below.

1.2 Previous Phases of recording

The houses have long been recognised as being of historic interest and were often considered among the oldest properties to survive in the town. Despite this no topographical drawings or historic photographs of the complex have yet been discovered and the earliest photographic record is an undated modern image of the main elevations towards the courtyard (Fig. 3). The houses were much admired for their picturesque qualities, however, and written accounts of the structures are surprisingly detailed and informative.

The Historic England Listing Description, (1972 and ?)

The Historic England Listing Description for the properties, originally written in 1972, but clearly augmented at an unknown date more recently, provides a great deal of detail of their external and internal appearance and is now the fullest account of the buildings prior to their destruction. It is therefore included here in full:

BULLER SQUARE,
Nos 1-4 (consecutive)
Date of listing 11/ 10/ 1972

GRADE II

“Two ranges incorporating 4 houses; originally probably one house and an agricultural building. Probably late C16 in origins or earlier, but thoroughly altered in the circa early C19 with further alterations of the C20. Roughcast, probably cob; thatched roofs with plain ridges; rear lateral and axial stacks with brick shafts. Plan: 2 ranges of a courtyard plan, the third (south) range being the barn belonging to No 27, Downeshead Lane (q.v.). Nos 2 & 3 have rear right wings. C20 rear lean-to to No. 4. Exterior: 2 storeys. 1:2:1-window east front to the east range with C20 timber casements of various designs in enlarged embrasures. The eaves thatch is eyebrowed over the first-floor window of No 1. No. 3 has a C20 timber half-glazed door with small panes to the right and one ground and one first floor window. No. 2 has a C19 panelled front door to the right, the upper panels glazed and one ground and 2 first floor windows. No. 1 has a C20 half-glazed door to the right and one first and one ground floor window. No. 4 has a C20 timber front door to the right and 3 ground and 4 first floor C20 timber small pane windows with concrete architraves. Casements with leaded panes, mentioned in the 1972 list description of this range, have disappeared. The yard has attractive pitched stone paving. Interior: No. 1 has probably

1930s or 40s carpentry and fireplaces on the ground floor. Winding stair against front wall to the right. The first floor has wide elm floorboards. Thinning of the wall round the first-floor front window suggests a possible former loft doorway and an agricultural function to the building at one time. The roof has a side-pegged jointed cruck truss against the left end wall, the upper parts cut off when the stack was inserted. The original purlins appear to extend as far as the right end wall. The other truss is a later replacement, and the pitch of the roof has been made shallower to rear of the ridge with a new set of rafters. No. 2 has a very long, chamfered, axial ceiling beam to the ground floor and a probably C18 stair to the right. Roof trusses probably A-frames of a C19 character. No. 3 has a long chamfered axial beam to the ground floor and a fireplace reduced in size. No. 4, the wing, has chamfered step-stopped cross beams and exposed joists - first floor not seen on survey.”

(Historic England Legacy ID No. 386959)

This account certainly establishes that at least the southern corner of the quadrangle contained fabric of possible late-medieval or early post-medieval date, with surviving carpentry in the form of a truncated jointed-cruck truss, and purlins apparently defining a single wide bay extending nearly the full width of the property. The second truss was identified as an insertion; however, it is not clear whether it was inserted as a reinforcement of the original roof or in the context of later alterations to support a new, shallower rear pitch. The two northern houses on the south-eastern side (Nos 2 and 3) and No. 4 on the north-eastern side of the quadrangle were inspected in less detail at this stage.

The Devon Buildings Group (1994-6)

In 1994 the town was visited by the Devon Buildings Group as part of their Annual General Meeting and an account of the buildings, giving a very good impression of the character of the area, was published in their 1996 Newsletter as ‘*A Crediton Perambulation*’ by the late Dr Chris Brooks, a noted resident of the town:

The informally grouped houses here still retain the character of farm buildings on the edge of the main town settlement, though now much altered with infill: Norden’s map shows that the layout of 1598 is still retained, with one lane - still unmetalled after a short distance - running straight on and another, Downeshead Lane, curving up to the right. Giving off Downeshead Lane is the delightful Buller Square: early cob, stone and thatch cottages grouped around a pitched stone courtyard, the large house on the left, though much altered, may be part of the one shown standing by itself on Norden’s map¹. The square is the last remaining court of its kind in Crediton though others, similarly laid out, were still standing on Bowden Hill and Church Street as recently as the 1960s. On the right hand side of Buller Square is a substantial brick house, possibly of late C17 date originally. Above Buller Square, Downeshead Lane still has early dry-stone walls, constructed with considerable care, and a pitched stone pedestrian pathway, now threatened by weeds. The lane now leads into the modern industrial estate, but the name of the estate’s principal road, Commonmarsh Lane, suggests that Downeshead Lane gave access to part of the medieval common lands attached to the town.

(Brooks 1996, 2)

This description noted that the quadrangular form of the buildings had formerly occurred in several places in Crediton and that Buller Square was the only survivor. All the examples cited by Brooks lay within East Town. The quadrangular form is an unusual one for groups of vernacular cottages and is reminiscent of the plan of larger medieval courtyard houses, such as those of the cathedral

¹ See page 10.

clergy in Exeter, or of larger gentry houses in the country. Some specialist forms of housing for working-class groups, such as almshouses, were built in quadrangular form, but this kind of planning was rare in Devon even in this context. The large 'L'-shaped structure shown on this site in Norden's Survey of Crediton, made in 1598 (see below, page 10) may represent a prestigious dwelling house. If Buller Square originated as a single large property, the quadrangular form of the buildings may result from the accretion of other structures around a rear yard, which coalesced to form a quadrangle, and was subsequently subdivided into smaller dwellings.

Recording by Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants (2012)

Following the fire in 2012, in accordance with a brief supplied by the Devon Historic Environment Service (ref: ARCH/DM/MD/18754) an historic building evaluation was undertaken by John Thorp of Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants (Keystone Report K823/1, October 2012). The report was commissioned for No. 4 Buller Square only, but for the sake of context included a brief appraisal of Nos 1 to 3 Buller Square.

The Keystone report concluded that the building on the north-western side of the quadrangle, represented the rear wing of a large medieval house which had formerly fronted onto Downeshead Lane (Keystone 2012, 5). The main building does not survive but, until the fire, the rear wing had retained parts of its medieval roof, originally of at least four or five bays, with side-pegged jointed-cruck trusses and flat curved wind braces. The cruck posts were supported on first-floor cross beams which were in turn supported by jowled-headed posts set into the walls at ground-floor level. A cross section of the building was recorded (Ibid., 8) with the missing parts reconstructed. This building seems to have been of 15th- or 16th-century date. It was a very large, high-quality structure, but apparently unheated. It was therefore interpreted by Keystone as a possible workshop range to the rear of the main dwelling house. In the late 18th-or early 19th century Keystone concluded that the main dwelling was rebuilt and the rear range converted into two smaller cottages. This was achieved by the addition of a large brick chimney at the centre of the earlier structure and by cutting a further fireplace into the cob gable end. In the 20th century the two cottages were knocked together to form a single dwelling (Ibid, 12).

As it was not part of their commission, Keystone did not study Nos 1-3 Buller Square to a similar level of detail, but their observations are still invaluable. They concluded that Nos 2 and 3 Buller Square (together with the cob wall separating these houses from No 1) had been constructed in one phase. Both houses were served by lateral chimney stacks on their rear elevations, and there was some evidence of a blocked first-floor fireplace in No. 2 (Keystone 2012, 14). The two houses were separated only by a brick wall and the first-floor structures were of pine. Keystone considered that these structures dated from the later 18th or early 19th centuries.

No. 1 Buller Square, to the south east of the quadrangle, was considered to be a much earlier building, with a roof supported by two jointed-cruck trusses similar to and probably contemporary with those in No. 4. The position of one of these trusses suggested that the building may at one time have extended further north, but no evidence to prove this remained. A fifth building, on the south side of the square, was interpreted as a 19th-century farm building which had been converted into a kitchen in the 20th century and which possibly occupied the site of an earlier glasshouse (Keystone 2012, 15)

Keystone concluded that the buildings represented the remains of a large 15th- or 16th-century house with ranges dating from the 15th to the 17th century extending around several sides of the quadrangle. As such, the complex did indeed represent one of the earliest surviving domestic buildings in Crediton (Keystone 2012, 3).

Drawings by Edward Holden, Architect

Following the destruction of the houses in 2012 a series of elevation drawings were produced by Edward Holden Architects, showing the elevations of the cottages (Figs 4, 5). These drawings were made by reference to photographs and provide the only record of the rear of the buildings.

The front elevation (Fig. 4) shows a difference in the roofline between the north-western and south-eastern buildings and this may imply that this part had a different roof structure, as suggested by the Keystone report on the houses; however, it is equally possible that the difference was simply a consequence of one section having been rethatched to a different thickness. The floor levels are indicated, stepping downwards to the north west with the ground level. The modern floor levels within the houses were evidently above the level of the cobbled courtyard rather than terraced into it, raising the possibility that archaeological remains might be preserved beneath the existing floors. The first-floor levels also stepped downwards; however, it appears from the relationship of the first-floor windows that the first-floor levels within Nos 2 and 3 may have been similar even if the ground-floor levels were not. The first-floor level in No 1 was significantly higher than these, pushing the first-floor window up to form an 'eyebrow' dormer above the eaves line.

The rear elevation had been partly obscured by the addition of small kitchen or bathroom extensions, which were probably of later 20th-century date; however, the upper parts of the two lateral stacks on the rear elevation are visible above the rooflines. The stack serving No. 3 is shown as noticeably narrower at the base than that serving No. 2. The latter chimneystack is broader because it has an offset on the south, presumably to accommodate the first-floor fireplace noted by Keystone, but there was no comparable offset in the chimney breast of the northern stack, and Keystone observed no corresponding fireplace serving No. 3. The upper storey of No. 3 may therefore originally have been an unheated room. The pattern of fenestration is also varied; No 2 has windows to both sides of the chimneystack whereas No. 3 has one only on the north side, although a blocked window might have existed and gone unnoticed by Keystone.

1.3 Discussion

These four accounts reveal that the complex of buildings at Buller Square occupied the site of a substantial medieval house and that until the fire the building had preserved the remains of two jointed cruck roof structures of this period. The character of the carpentry indicated a date for the construction of the buildings in the 15th or 16th centuries. The principal survivors from this period were the north-western side of the quadrangle (No. 4) and its south-eastern corner (No. 1). Other parts of the quadrangle, including Nos 2 and 3, were assumed to be more recent, though perhaps occupying the sites of earlier buildings and incorporating parts of their walling. Although this can no longer be confirmed by structural analysis, it seems unlikely to the present writer that the two cottages to the north of No. 1 were newly built on a clear site in the 18th century. If this had been the case one might expect the houses to be a mirrored or repeated pair and for both cottages to have heated upper rooms. Inconsistencies in the positions of fireplaces and windows, the blocking of one fireplace in cob and the narrowing of another, and also the use of brick rather than cob or timber for the dividing wall between the two cottages suggests that these dwellings represented a conversion of an older building to form two units. Unfortunately, the demolition of this section of the building makes it impossible to determine either the date of the earlier building or its possible function, though the presence of large fireplaces may suggest that it was part of the domestic accommodation of the large house shown on Norden's 1598 map.





Fig. 4 Reconstruction of the courtyard (north-west facing) elevation of the houses made following the fire in 2012 by Edward Holden, Architect, and submitted as 'as existing' drawings with the current application. Note the change in the ridge line between No. 1 and Nos 2-3.

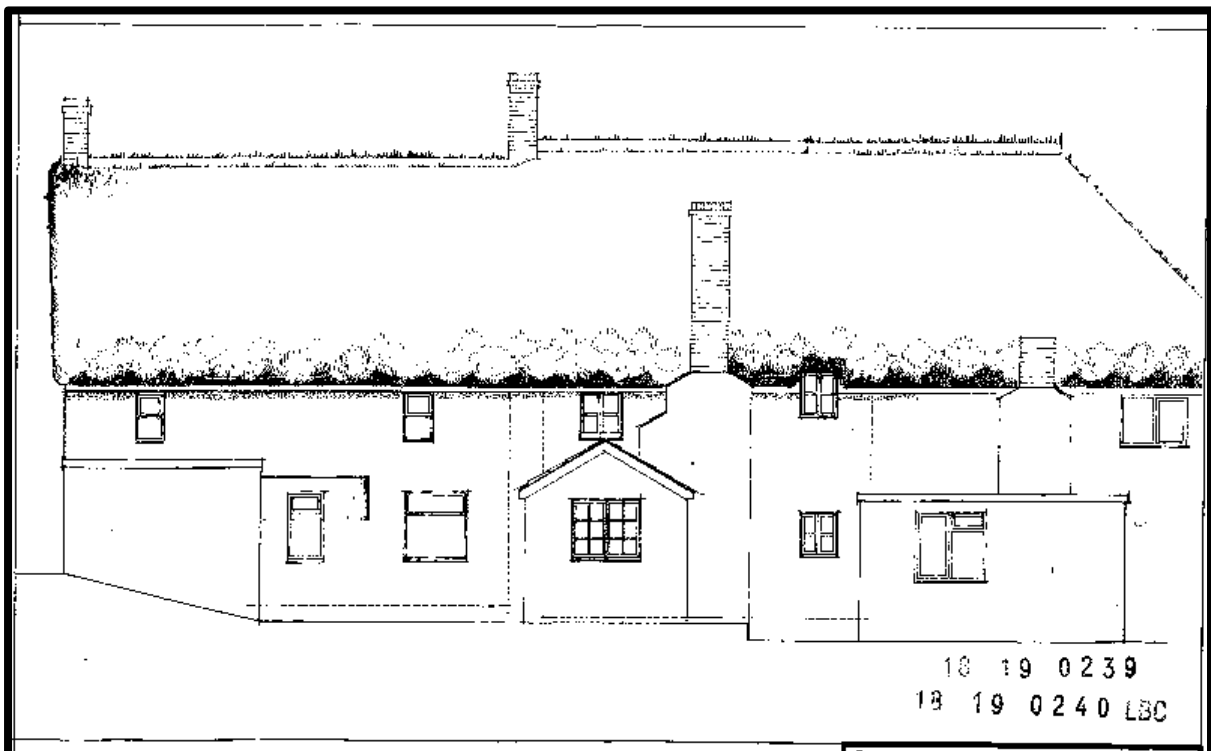


Fig. 5 Reconstruction of the rear (south-east-facing) elevation of the houses made by Edward Holden, Architect, immediately following the fire in 2012 and submitted as 'as existing' drawings with the current application, showing modern kitchen and bathroom extensions at the rear of the houses.

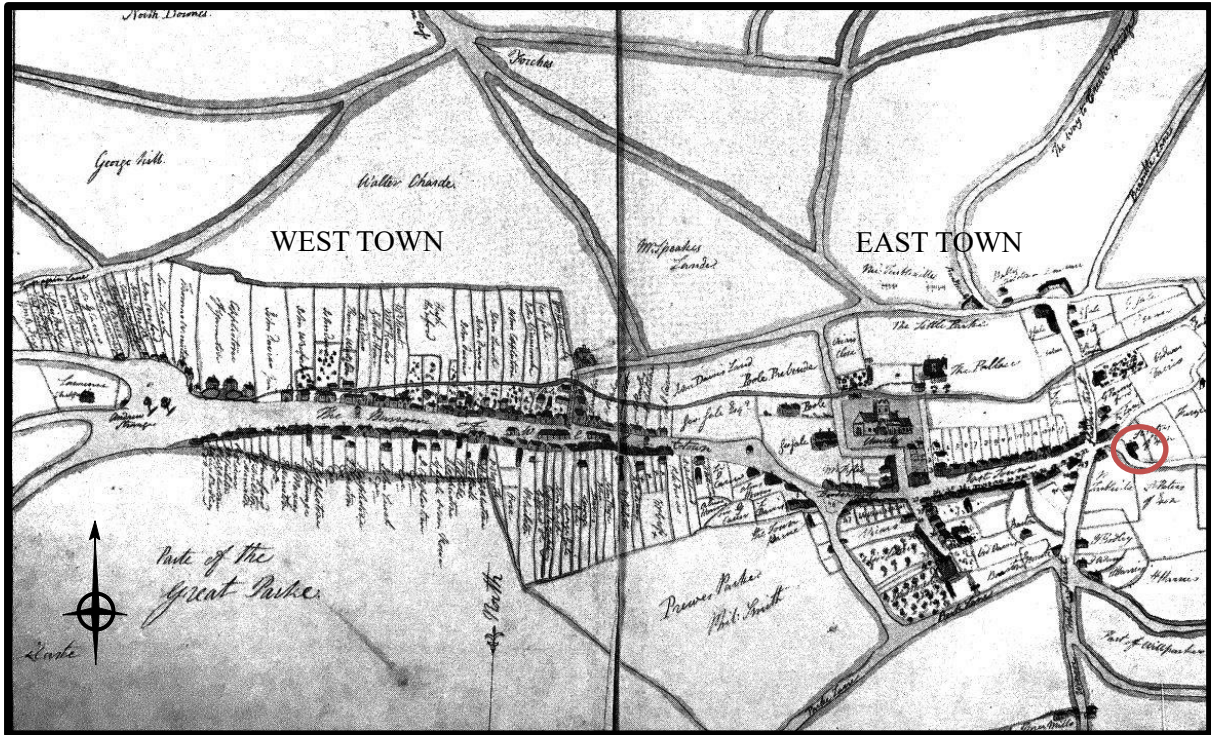


Fig. 6 John Norden's map of Crediton, dated 1598 (DHC 1660A Add4/E1), showing the distinct character of West Town (left) with a long street flanked by narrow burgage plots, while East Town (right) has a different form arranged around large enclosures formed by back lanes. Buller Square lies at the extreme eastern end of the town (circled).



Fig. 7 Extract from the OS 1st-edition map Devon sheet LXVII.6 dating from 1888, showing East Town with the sites of the Palace (A) and Vicar's College (B); Dean Street and The Chantry (C); the church (D), 'Poole'(E) and Buller Square (circled). Charlotte Street and Union Street are 19th-century interpolations aimed at by-passing the hillier and more congested parts of the old town.

2: DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

By Lucy Browne

The lockdown due to the Covid 19 virus has prevented the examination of a number of sources which would undoubtedly give valuable information about the site. The information from the indexes of the South West Heritage Trust (www.swheritagetrust.org.uk) and the National Archives (Discovery: www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk) has been utilized as far as possible to provide names of possible owners and occupiers to research, but it is recommended that these sources are seen when archives open again, to provide a more comprehensive account of the occupation of the site.

2.1 Historic Background

The Saxon Period

Crediton has a long and distinguished history, and is first mentioned in the Saxon period, in c.739, when King Aethelheard granted ‘*Cridie*’ (a large estate now represented by the borough of Crediton and the surrounding villages known collectively as Crediton Hamlets) to the Bishop of Sherborne (Hoskins 1954, 378). Crediton is thought to have had a minster church or monastery from this date, though this might conceivably have been a re-founding of an older church. Crediton is one of a number of places reputed to have been the birthplace, in c.680, of Winfrith, or Boniface, the 7th century missionary and Archbishop of Mainz, now Patron Saint of Europe; however, there is no documentary evidence of a link between Boniface and Crediton before the 1330s and his cult is unrecorded in Devon before this date (Orme 2009, 3).

From 909 to 930 a church at Crediton served as the Cathedral for a newly founded Diocese covering Devon and Cornwall, and between 930 and 1050 as the Cathedral for Devon alone. The status of Crediton as the seat of the local bishop may not, however, indicate that the settlement was a substantial one with a large population. The Saxon bishops of Devon, like many other contemporary bishops, seem to have been based on a rural estate in proximity to the principal settlement of the county (Exeter) rather than in the city itself. This arrangement appears to have been made for reasons of political expediency, ensuring that the secular and ecclesiastical jurisdictions did not come into conflict with each other (Orme 2009, 6, 7). The small size and rural isolation of Crediton during the Saxon period was probably a significant motive for the removal of the Cathedral of the Diocese to Exeter by the reforming Bishop, Leofric, in 1050. In summary, the extent and nature of the early settlement at Crediton is not known, but the long-standing local traditions that ‘Kirton was a market town when Exeter was a fuzzy down’, and that St Boniface was born in the town, somewhere in the area of Buller Square,² so far remain unsupported by either archaeological or documentary evidence.

Medieval Crediton

After 1050, when the Cathedral was relocated to Exeter, Crediton remained the property of the Bishops of Exeter. The Saxon church was replaced in the 1100s by a large Romanesque building. The church was at this time staffed by secular priests financed by eighteen prebends (allotments of land or income to support clergy) and these clerics may have occupied houses in the vicinity of the church. The church was refounded under Bishop Warelwast in the early 12th century as a Collegiate Church served by twelve prebendaries, and this foundation was confirmed and reorganised by Bishop Brewer in 1235 (Jeffrey 2004, 141). Later in the Middle Ages the number of prebendaries was increased to the original eighteen; each of these would have maintained a large household, including Vicars Choral to deputise for them at services, and the church would also have been

² A belief testified today by a blue plaque at the corner of Downeshead Lane and Tolleys.

staffed by secondaries and choristers and servants, all of whom would have needed accommodation close to the church. The best surviving evidence for Crediton in the later Middle Ages is a map made by John Norden in 1598, which survives as a 19th-century copy, following the loss of the original by fire (Rowe & Ravenhill 2002, 147). This shows a number of large houses near the church, some of which might possibly have originated as canons residences (Fig. 6).

The town of Crediton was to develop during the Middle Ages around two distinct centres; West Town, or 'The Borough', and East Town, or 'Canon's Fee'. West Town has the characteristic form of a 12th- or 13th-century planned settlement, consisting of a single long street widening at the centre to provide room for markets and with a very distinctive pattern of long and narrow burgage plots radiating from it like the ribs of a fish (Fig. 6, left). West Town thus seems likely to have been planned and laid out in the 12th or 13th century as a commercial speculation by the bishops of Exeter; it may have been founded in c.1230 at the same time as the re-organisation of the collegiate church (Hoskins 1954, 378).

East Town is quite distinct in character and its plan presumably reflects the layout of the early church property, including both the Saxon cathedral and the later collegiate church together with their ancillary buildings. Although some small burgage plots appear in East Street, suggesting medieval commercial redevelopment, this part of the town seems to have been much less obviously urban, with large houses dotted about in ample open grounds (Fig. 6, right). The principal Street, East Street, extends from the church to a crossroads at the junction with Mill Street, while to the north and south, parallel with the main street, back lanes extend westwards, returning to East Street to enclose large sub-rectangular enclosures defining large properties. Norden's Survey of 1598 (Fig. 6) names the 'Vicars' Close' and 'The Pallace' to the north and east of the church, while to the west 'Poole Prebend' contained a large house called 'Poole' and a further large property opposite the church's west front.

South of East Street, Dean Street (formerly Canon's Street) presumably contained houses for the use of the prebendaries when they were in residence, including a large house called 'The Chantry', which may have been the residence of the Precentor (Fig. 7). Other medieval structures are thought to survive at 'The Limes' and in the layout of the grounds of 'The Palace'. Buller Square lies just beyond the junction of East Street with Mill Street and is clearly shown on Norden's Survey as a substantial structure, possibly representing an important ancient house. This is clearly labelled as belonging to St Peter's, Exon, and thus a property of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter.

Crediton in the Early Modern Period

Following the Reformation the Collegiate Church was dissolved, the canons dispersed and the Bishop's property largely alienated (Hoskins 1954, 378); however, the town continued to prosper as a market town and also as a manufacturing town participating in the local wool trade. The Dean and Chapter will have retained their property in the town, including Buller Square

The character of the two parts of the town seems to have remained distinct throughout its history, indeed they were separately governed, West Town by a Portreeve and East Town by a Bailiff. By the 18th century West Town retained a strong urban form with some highly unusual features, including colonnaded walks on both sides of the main street supporting the upper storeys of the houses, and a series of public buildings running down the middle of the street, including a Butter shambles, Flesh Shambles, Wool Shops and a Weigh House a Corn Shambles and a Clock House. The superb 16th-, 17th- and early 18th-century architecture of the town was recorded in detail in a series of mid 18th-century maps (Fig. 8) produced in the early 1740s (DHC 2065M add 3/E332 and DHC 6850). Unfortunately, the sheets depicting the eastern part of the town (Sheets 1 & 2 of perhaps 5 in total), which presumably illustrated Buller Square, are currently missing.

Virtually the whole of West Town was destroyed in a disastrous fire in 1743, shortly after the maps were made; however many older buildings in "East Town" remained intact, including Buller Square and its neighbours. Unfortunately, subsequent fires in 1766, 1769 and 1772 (Hoskins



Fig. 8 Extract from an anonymous 1740s survey of Crediton illustrating the ambitious architecture of West Town and also the more modest architecture of the peripheral areas, featuring long ranges of thatched buildings. (Sheet No. 3 of a probable total of 5. Sheets 1 & 2 of the map, which may have extended as far as Buller Square are missing). The rise towards Bowden Hill (now Mount Pleasant) is shown bottom right and the area of the modern market place left centre, to the west of North Street, shown centre (DHC 2065M add 3/E332).

1954, 379) destroyed further parts of the town and significant fires are recorded in East Town in the early part of the 19th century, each destroying many houses.³ By the end of the 19th century much of the town had been completely rebuilt in brick and slate and ancient, thatched houses like those in Buller Square were a rarity in the town centre.

2.2 Buller Square: its Owners and Tenants

The earliest map to record structures on the site of Buller Square is a 19th-century copy of a survey of Crediton made by John Norden in 1598 (Figs 6, 9). The original map book, containing a series of maps, was sadly destroyed in a fire at Creedy Park in 1915 (Rowe & Ravenhill 2002, 147). The

³ <https://www.creditoninaround.co.uk/posts/crediton-a-town-jinxed-by-fire-part-1> (accessed 10th September 2020).



Fig. 9 Extract from John Norden's map and description of the Manor of Crediton 1598 (the site outlined in red), from a copy made in the early 19th Century (DHC 1660A add 4/E1).



Fig. 10 Detail of the above map showing a large house in the ownership of 'St Peter's of Exon' and the adjoining plot belonging to 'Furze'



Fig. 11 Detail of the same area from an overlapping map in another part of the same survey showing St Peter's lands outlined in dark red and the adjacent Furze property in grey-green.

survey (Figs 9, 10) is annotated with the names of the landowners. The site of Buller Square, with the field across the road to the south, is marked “St Peter’s Exon” suggesting that the Dean & Chapter of Exeter Cathedral owned it. Another map in the same series also marks these lands “St Peter’s Exon” or “St Peter’s Land” (Fig. 11). The adjacent property to the east is labelled as belonging to Thos & Jno Furze. References to records of land owned by Exeter Cathedral in Crediton identified through the ‘Discovery’ website⁴ reveal two Chancery cases appearing in the catalogue of the National Archives in the Public Record Office at Kew which (though they could not be examined due to the Covid 19 pandemic), may be relevant to the site.

The index entry of the first document, dated 1603 - 1624 names Margery Buckingham and Joan Chard, widows, John Hooper and Mary Hooper his wife as the plaintiffs and Gilbert Bond, Nicholas Ware and John Ware as defendants (short title: Buckingham v. Bond). The subject is “tenement in Crediton demised by Dean and Chapter of Exeter to Thomas Luke who assigned it to William Bremridge plaintiffs father” (PRO C2/JasI/B27/ 36 pleadings).

The second document, dated 1679, is indexed with the Dean of Exeter Cathedral named as plaintiff and George Trobridge as defendant, the subject being property in Crediton (PRO C 10/495/72). One or both of these documents might refer to the property, and the names of the plaintiffs and defendants should be traced as possible owners, as well as Thomas Luke and William Bremridge who are recorded as owning the land in question.

Bremridges, Buckinghams, Chards, Hoopers and Wares

In index entry for the first Chancery record Margery Buckingham, Joan Chard and Mary Hooper are described as the daughters of William Bremridge. Members of the Bremridge (and variants in spelling) family appear in parish registers and catalogued index entries for this period in mid, west and north-west Devon. Research found William Bremridge of Crediton in the Calendar of Wills for the Consistory Court of the Bishop of Exeter in 1564.⁵ This William might be the plaintiffs’ father, or perhaps of the previous generation. The original wills from this court were destroyed in the Exeter Blitz of 1942.

Margerye Bremridge married Philipe Buckynam on 14th April 1572 in Shobrooke (Shobrooke Parish Registers).⁶ Philipe Buckingham was buried in Crediton on the 30th of April 1597, leaving a will (which does not survive) and a widow. He was named as father to six children baptised in Crediton between 1583 and 1595: Grace, Nicholas, Marjorie, Mary, Thomas and Thomasyn. Thomasyn was baptised on the 26th of May 1589.

On the 24th of January 1604/5 “Tamsin” Buckingham and John Ware were married in Crediton. If this is Margerye and Philipe’s daughter, and she was baptised soon after birth, she would have been a few months short of her 16th birthday – young but legal. A licence might have been applied for and this would support the identification.

John Ware’s baptism was recorded in Crediton on the 1st of July 1579 with neither parent named. However, one Nicholas Ware married Mary West on the 18th of November 1573, so the Nicholas and John Ware named in the Chancery record might have been father and son, and Thomasyn/Tamsin Buckingham’s father-in-law and husband. The complete document needs examination to see if all the dates tally. An index search for Crediton records naming the Wares showed land transactions in the 16th and 17th centuries naming them as husbandmen and yeoman and clearly enjoying increasing prosperity.

An inventory for Nicholas Ware of Crediton dated 1611 was transcribed by Olive Moger and is included in her typescript collection (DHC Transcriptions by Olive Moger, Volume 21, Page 7641). A will dated 1638 was also transcribed and is copied on the same page. This would be worth examining for any details of property and family relationships. Joan “Brimridge” and John Chard

⁴ www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk and www.swheritage.org.uk; the catalogue of the National Archives, including nationwide repositories and the local catalogues of the South West Heritage Trust.

⁵ The original wills from this court were unfortunately destroyed in the Exeter Blitz of 1942.

⁶ www.findmypast.co.uk ‘Devon Marriages’ (viewed 12th May 2020).

married in Crediton on the 5th of June 1576. Children of John Chard baptised in Crediton were Kathryn, Kathryn, John, John, Margaret, Philip and Simon.

No marriage record has been found using online indexes for the other plaintiffs in the first Chancery case, Mary and John Hooper. It might be that Mary had been married before, or more likely that the entry has not survived. Hoopers appear in the baptism registers for Crediton and the surrounding area, but none have been identified so far as children of John Hooper and Mary Bremridge. The second Chancery record of 1679 names George Trobridge. This might be the “George Trobridge Esq” who was buried in Crediton on the 23rd of November 1696. It would be worth exploring his origins to see if he is connected with the Buckingham, the Chards, the Wares or the Hoopers. Other sources indexed in the Devon Heritage Centre record Trobridge and his father George acquiring various pieces of land from the Tuckfields and also from John Ware.

John Tolley

While John Tolley does not appear in indexed documents linked with any of the names above, the land next to Buller Square is called “Tolley’s” today. On the 1905 County Series Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 12), “Tolley’s” is marked as a row of cottages next to the site, and “Tolley’s Cottage” is shown further up the road, out of the town. Tolley’s land might be identified in records by descriptions of the land and ownership next door – i.e Buller Square. Two documents in the Devon Heritage Centre were seen to throw more light on John Tolley and his possible connection with Buller Square.

Firstly, the marriage settlement of John Tolley of Crediton and Grace Dyer of Shobrooke dated 1721:

John Tolley of Crediton Malster of the first part and Grace Dyer of Shobrooke widow and Grace Dyer her daughter of the second part and John Foxe of Plimtree gent and William Arscott of Shobrooke Yeoman of the third part WHEREAS ... John Tolley and Grace Dyer the daughter to marry .. WHERAS John Tolley stands possession of all that Messuage Tenement & Garden with Appurtenances in the East Town of Crediton heretofore in the possession of Mary Ware widow, now determinable on the several deaths of Frances Tolley, mother, Mathew Tolley, brother, the said John Tolley and Mary Cleave his sister wife of James Cleave of Crediton, Yeoman.
(DHC 1721 1049M/FS 16)

This gives some genealogical information: John Tolley was the son of Frances, and brother of Matthew Tolley and Mary, the wife of James Cleave. This made him the son of John Tolly and Frances his wife, baptised on the 15th of May 1679 with his brother Francis, possibly a twin. However, most interestingly, the property “in the East Town of Crediton” is described as “heretofore in the possession of Mary Ware, widow. “Mary War widow”, who was buried in Crediton on the 30th of March 1683/4 is a possible contender, but it is not known at this point whose widow she was, and from how many years back her connection with the property. There is now a link, through records described above, between land in Crediton’s East Town, the Dean & Chapter of Exeter Cathedral, the Ware family and the Tolley family. This makes it even more imperative to see the Chancery documents in the hope that they specify the property concerned.

The second Tolley document seen was a copy of the Will of “John Tolley of Crediton ...malster” dated 1727 (DHC 1049M/FW 35). He names Grace as his wife, so it makes him John Tolley the younger. His main beneficiaries were Grace and his sister Mary Cleave, the latter made his sole executrix. No specific property was named apart from “one meadow lying nigh Horner’s Lane” and a tenement in Shobrooke called Gutton’s Ground. Notes attached to the will detail a dispute about Grace’s dowery. While nothing was seen in the paper work which shed any light on whether Tolley owned Buller’s Square, it was noted that he had... “intermarried with Grace his now widow with whom he had a handsome fortune in estate and money and possessions to such marriage”. This suggests someone who owned more than a few labourers’ cottages.



Fig. 12 Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition Sheet LXVII/6 (1905) showing the former Dean and Chapter plot of land just south of the lane called Tolley's and Tolley's Cottage near the end of this lane, presumably named after an early 18th-century landowner in the area.



Fig. 13 A map of the lands belonging to James Buller in 1787, with the site shown at the top, marked as "Wid Risdon" (DHC 2065M E3). Susannah Risdon possessed eight properties in Crediton in the 1790s.

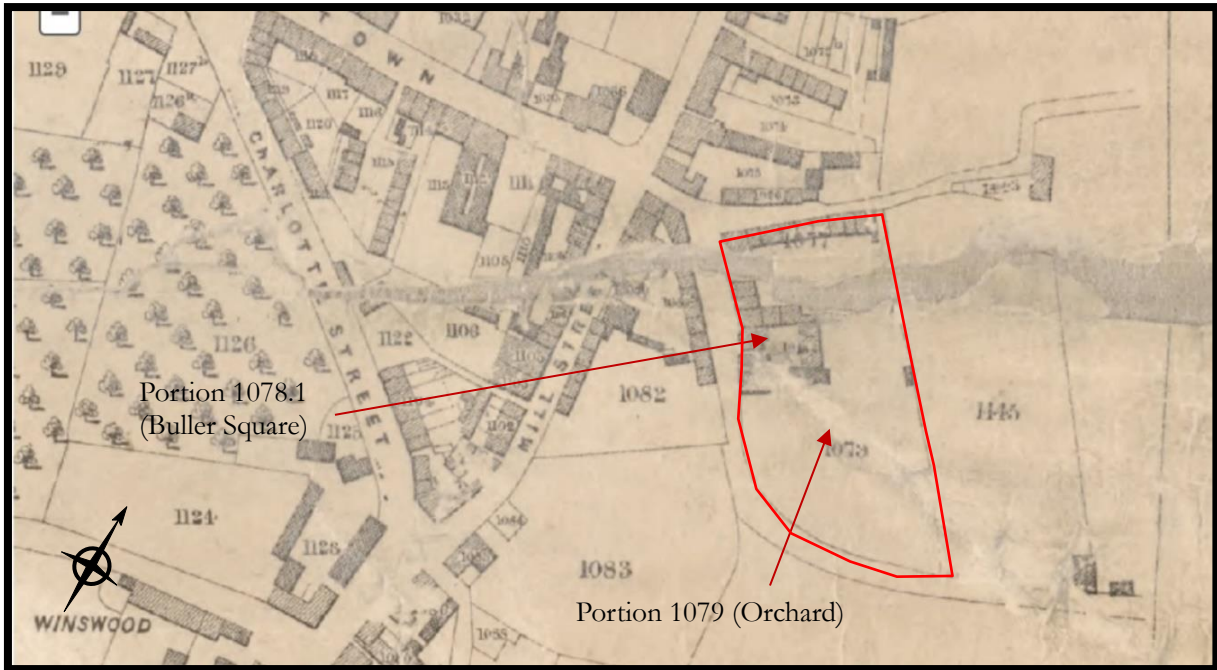


Fig. 14 The 1841 Tithe Map for Crediton showing the site incorporating Buller Square and the Orchard, both being owned and occupied by James Wentworth Buller and Richard Nicholls.

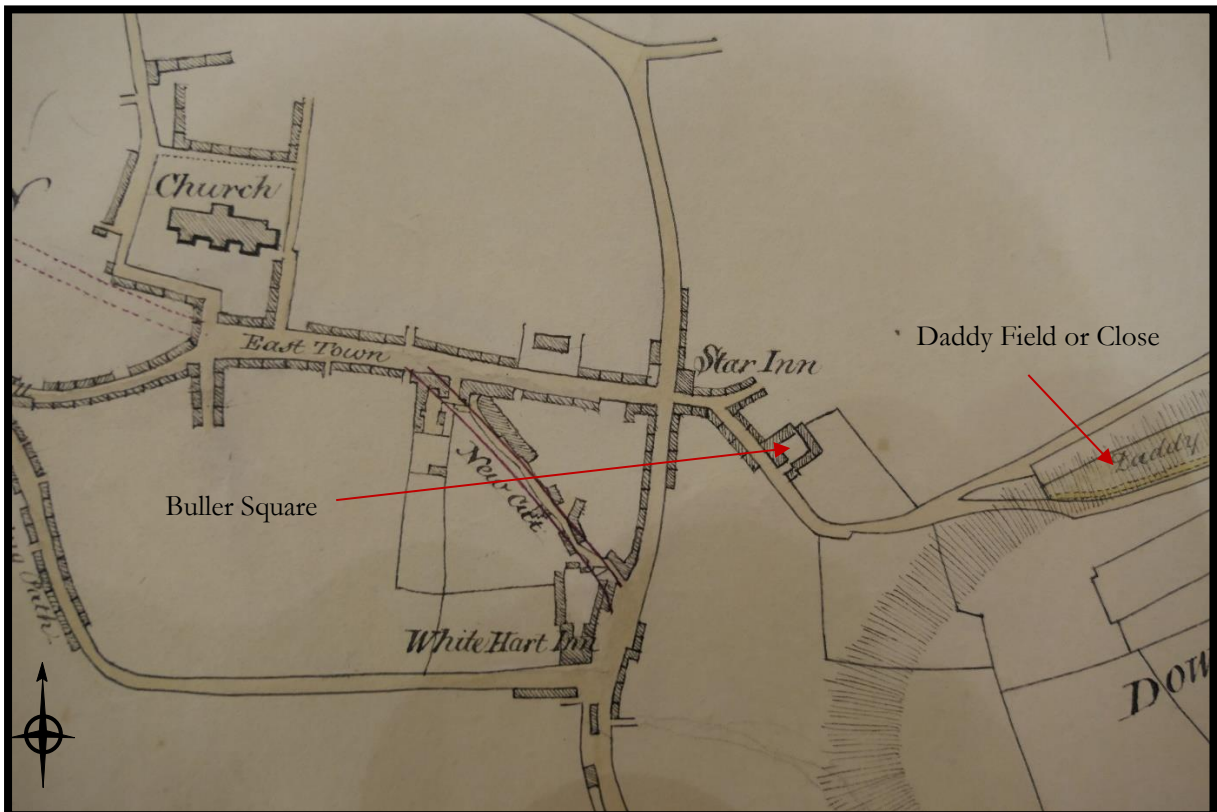


Fig. 15 Crediton East Town, the site shown next to the Star Inn in 1836. Daddy's Field or Close is also marked.

“Widow Risdon”

The map of James Buller’s lands shown in Fig 13 shows the property marked as “Wid Risdon” in 1787. Susanna Risdon was born the daughter of John Guins and Susanna Cobley in 1733. She married William Risdon in Zeal Monachorum on the 9th of August 1753, and he was buried in Crediton on the 29th of February 1784. Susanna’s father John Guins was buried on the 10th of July 1737 in Crediton.

In the 1798 Land Tax Assessment for Crediton, viewable on the Ancestry website,⁷ Susanna Risdon was recorded as owning eight properties, including one she was occupying herself. The locations of her properties aren’t identified, although the tenants are named. Examination of Land Tax Assessments might identify her properties, which might have included cottages in other parts of the town. Alternatively, the medieval house in Downeshead Lane might have been subdivided by this time to form eight smaller units in her ownership.

In her will proved in 1812 (DHC 1078/IRW/R/452) Susannah Risdon named her “Late deceased mother Susanna Guins” who was “leised and possessed of diverse freehold and leasehold messuages Tenements Lands, goods, chattles, monies and effects.” In her own will dated the 24th of December 1780 (the date given in her daughter’s will) Susanna Guins had named her grandchildren “William Guins Risdon, Susanna then the wife of Henry Burges and Mary Risdon both since deceased”. Susanna Risdon included her own grandson, also her executor: “William Henry Burgess, the only son of my deceased daughter Susanna Burgess.” Susanna Guins was buried on the 27th of November 1782. William Guins Risdon outlived his mother by three years. He died aged 60 and his interment is recorded in the Crediton burial registers on the 18th November 1815. The Devon Heritage Centre holds copies of Inland Revenue Wills on microfiche, and William’s will is included, dated 1814, and should be examined for property descriptions (DHC 1078/IRW/R/454). If the Devon Heritage Centre holds family folders for the names of Guin and Risdon, they should be consulted.

2.3 Information from the Tithe Map and Apportionment for Crediton

Two deeds archived in the Devon Heritage Centre include three of the names associated with the site (DHC 2065M/T1/41). The land was “Daddy Field” in Lower East Town, Crediton, and the year was 1812, the year of Susannah Risdon’s death. The names are Rison, Quins (a mis-transcription of Guins?) and Buller. Was this a sale of part of Susannah’s estate by her son and executor, William Guins Rison? The plot appears on the Tithe Map of 1841 as Portion 1483 “Daddy’s Close” near to the site in the fork between Common Marsh Lane and Downeshead Lane. It is marked on the 1836 map (Fig. 15) and labelled “gardens” in 1905 (Fig. 12).

On the Crediton Tithe Map the site of Buller Square is shown as Portion 1078.1 (Fig 14). It is described as “Tenement and Gardens”, occupied by Richard Nicholls and owned by James Wentworth Buller, and measuring 5 perches. Buller and Nicholls also owned and occupied the site to the south, Portion 1079, an orchard measuring 3 rods and 7 perches. From the earlier maps, the orchard might have formed part of the property for a long time before.

Richard Nicholls has not been identified so far; he is not named in White’s 1850 Directory (White 1850, 268-276) - though a John and Thomas Nichols are listed as practising as Butchers in High Street (Ibid., 276). No local marriages, deaths or census entries can be obviously linked to Richard Nicholls. It is likely that he sublet the property; he was also named owner of an orchard and buildings close by. A map is included at Fig. 16 to show land he owned and/or occupied in 1834 (DHC 2065/E3/3). Manorial presentments for the Manor of Canon Fee beginning in 1828 included William Nichols in the Jurors Lists and Thomas Nichols in 1835 (DHC 2065M/SS/5/2, 4). William Nichols was also recorded paying rent for one year ending at Lady Day 1833: “Wm Nickles P[ar]t of Popes (late Saunders) rent due 2s 6d.” This has not been located so far.

⁷ www.ancestry.co.uk viewed 19th May 2020

2.4 Information from the Census Returns

The Buller Square site will be included somewhere in District 4 of the 1841 census for Crediton (HO 107/215/9) and District 2e in 1851 (HO 107/1887 Folio 152) which includes East Street, the Star Inn, Mill Street and Tolley's. Tolley's Cottages are named on the 1905 25-inch Ordnance Survey map (Sheet LXVII.6 County Series 2nd Edition) after the Star Inn and are probably the nearest named group of houses geographically to the site. The Star Inn and the site are clearly marked on the 1836 map of East Town (Fig. 15). However, it is not possible to identify the site in the census before the enumerator's route gives way to Mill Street. The occupations included for householders between the Star Inn and Mill Street are almost all poorer classes of workers such as agricultural labourers, weavers and shoemakers, and there is no suggestion that any dwelling larger than a cottage was listed in this part of Crediton.

Both the 1888 1st Edition County Series 25-inch OS map and the 1905 2nd Edition name the street leading from Tolleys, on which Buller Square is situate, as Common Marsh Lane, forking with Downshead Lane. However, further information about the names in this part of the town were found in a document and plan entitled: "Rough Plan: cottages at Tolley's" (DHC 2065M/E3/30). It concerned cottages owned by a Miss Partridge, adjacent to land owned by Sir R H Buller. The plan and notes suggest that the name "Tolley's" included the area around Buller Square at the top of Common Marsh Lane. These cottages were identified from the plan as being across the street from the entrance to Buller's Square, and were described as being in "Tolley's Road" which might have differentiated it from "Tolley's" round the corner, still named as such. This might have implications when looking for records.

However, the censuses do not clearly identify the site until 1911, when it was named as "Buller's Square": four dwellings, listed after 24 Tolley's. The 1911 census includes a box to be filled in with the number of rooms including the kitchen, but not the "scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom nor warehouse, office, shop". Each of the four Buller Square cottages had three rooms, and each household included either a farmworker or a widow of one, suggesting that these cottages might have been converted specifically for farm labourers on the Buller estate.

In 1911, No 1 Buller Square was occupied by the Ford family: George aged 40, a cowman, and his wife Harriet aged 41 with their four children Louisa, William, Winnie and Evelyn. Louisa the eldest at 15 was a domestic servant (RG14; Piece: 13195; Schedule Number: 278).

No 2 Buller Square was occupied by the Coles family: Elizabeth, a widow aged 70 and her three adult children. Henry was a general labourer with a maltster, Frederick, a wood sawyer on the estate and Albert, a gas fitter. Sarah, aged 22, is crossed out, possibly because she is living elsewhere (RG14; Piece: 13195; Schedule Number: 279). Elizabeth was the widow of John Coles, a labourer.

At No 3, Elizabeth Perkins aged 74, the widow of James a wood sawyer, lived on her own (RG 14; Piece 13195; Schedule 280), while No 4 was occupied by another widow, Emma Chudleigh aged 46 and her 18 year old son Charles, a farm labourer (RG 14; Piece 13195; Schedule 28). Emma was the widow of Samuel Chudleigh who had also been a farm labourer.

Searching for the names of 1911, in 1901 widow Elizabeth Perkins was living in property described as a "private house" with her granddaughter, while the Fords were next door but one with an uninhabited house in between (RG 13/2129, Folio 84, Schedules 156 and 157). It is quite possible that these properties formed Buller Square, but the census enumerator evidently saw no need to make a distinction between the Square and the other Tolley's cottages. Earlier censuses do not include the family names of 1911 and 1901 linked to Buller Square, so it is not possible to identify the occupants.

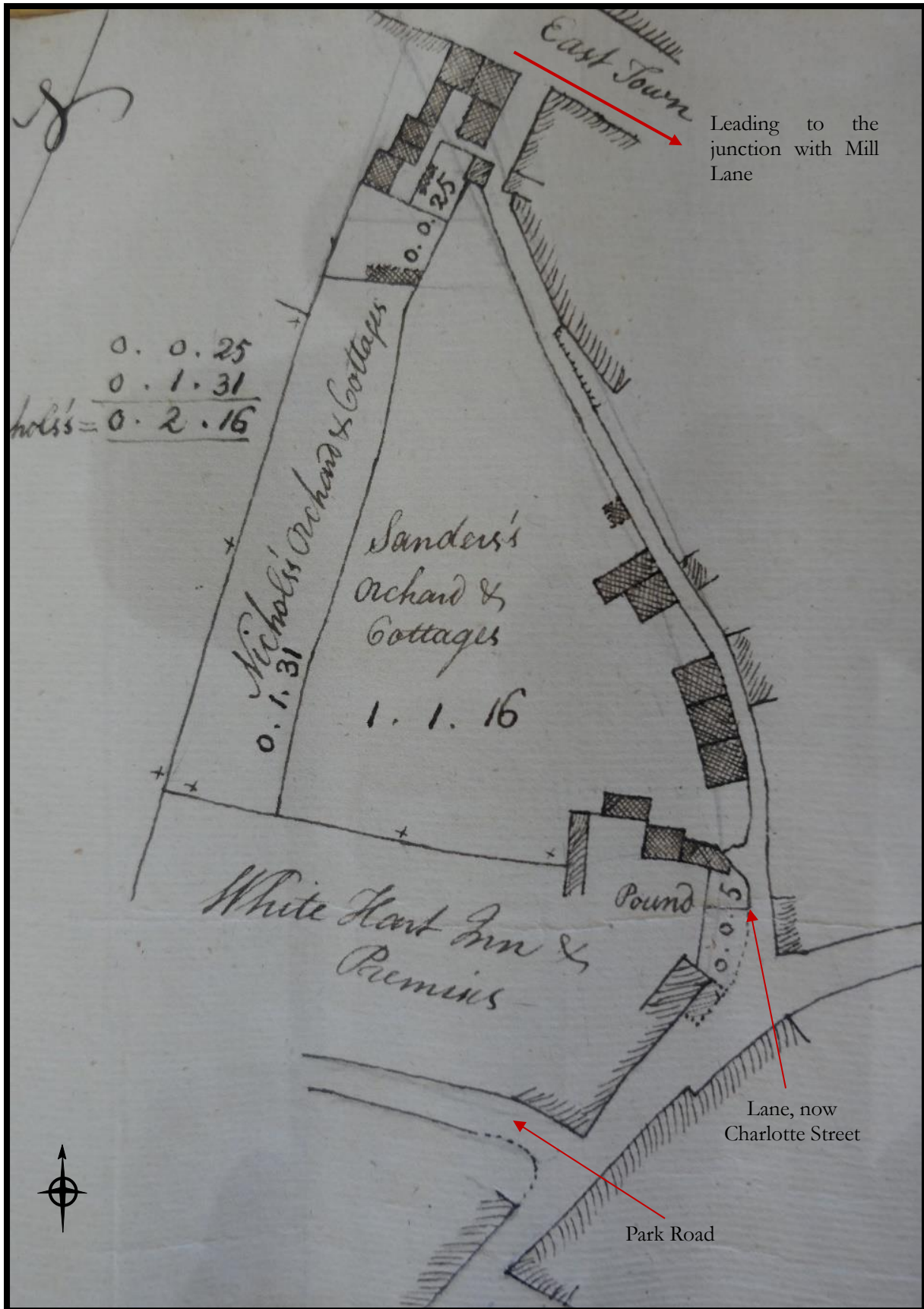


Fig. 16 Sketch map dated 1834 showing Richard Nichol's Orchard and cottages on what is now approximately the junction between East Street and Charlotte Street.

2.5 The 20th Century

Kelly's Directory for 1914 was searched for residents of Buller Square without success, probably because entries had to be paid for, and all the workers in the 1911 household were likely to have been employees of the Buller Estate. A document in the Devon Heritage Centre records the sale of the cottages and other properties to the tenants.

“Cpt. M L Buller to Mrs Sutton, 2 Buller Square, Miss I Bennett: 3 Buller Square, Mr E J Pester, 4 Buller Square as well as Mrs L L Steer, 19 Exeter Road, C H Basting of 1a Exeter Road, and Mr S Sloman, Garden Ground, on 16th September 1927.”
(DHC 2065M/E7/X5 Buller Square 1922 – 1932)

No. 1 does not appear in this document and it is possible it remained tenanted or changed hands at another time. Either way, in the 1939 Register taken on the outbreak of World War II in order to organise rationing, amongst other administrative challenges, No 1 Buller Square was occupied by Winnie Ford, George and Harriet's third child, now aged 39 with her occupation listed as a maker of medicinal lozenges. Emma Sutton and her husband John, a retired stoker at the Gas Works were still living at No. 2, and No.s 3 and 4 were empty, awaiting new families.

2.6 Discussion and Further Research

Although it has not been possible, under the circumstances, to complete the documentary history of the site with absolute certainty, the fact that the property seems to have belonged to the Dean and Chapter between the Middle Ages and the later 18th century - and was then transferred to the Bullers, a local gentry family with a known reputation for record keeping - raises the possibility that further work could be fruitful. It might, for example, be possible to identify the point at which the large, ancient house shown on Norden's survey was subdivided into smaller units for occupation by tenants. On balance, it seems likely that this took place in the late 18th-century, perhaps long after the property had passed from the ownership of the Dean and Chapter and into that of the Risdons or the Bullers.

In addition to examining the unseen sources referenced in the text, further 20th century sources such as electoral registers and telephone directories held in the Devon Heritage Centre will help take the ownership of Buller Square up to recent times. The collections of Crediton Museum, also presently closed, should also be investigated for further information of the families identified, and for illustrations of the buildings.





Fig. 17 Elevation of Nos 1-3 Buller square following the fire, but before demolition works, taken from the Keystone report (Keystone 2012 Report No. K823-1).

3: BUILDING SURVEY

This building survey is based upon the evidence of the remaining footings, augmented by previous descriptions of the fabric, and upon the photographs of the ruins supplied by the contractors, the architect and others (Figs 17-21). Close investigation of the standing structures, which by 2019 survived only as low footings, was impossible. The scope of this section is therefore extremely limited.

The earliest photographs of the buildings following the fire, taken by Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants in October 2012, show that the masonry structures of the buildings had survived but that the roofs and internal floors had been completely burnt out. Measures had been taken to protect the structure of No. 3 by covering it with waterproof sheeting, but Nos 1 and 2 were open to the weather. Scaffolding around the rear chimneystack of No. 2 may suggest that demolition of upstanding parts of the ruins was already in progress by this date (Fig. 17).

The next series of photographs were taken by Edward Holden, Architect in 2014-15, following concerns about the stability of the structure. Demolition before this point had involved the reduction of the south-western wall of the buildings to first-floor level. The rear lateral chimney stacks and the upper parts of the axial and gable chimney stacks serving No. 1 had also been demolished while the south-eastern gable and the north-eastern wall of No. 1 remained standing to eaves height. The upper part of the south-eastern gable was scaffolded and draped in tarpaulin at the time of Mr Holden's visit and therefore, any features that survived here at the time were obscured. Unfortunately, there are very few photographs of the ruins of No. 2 Buller Square (the front wall of which seems to have been largely demolished by this time) and none at all appear to have been taken of No. 3, which may, by this time, have been at least partially rebuilt.

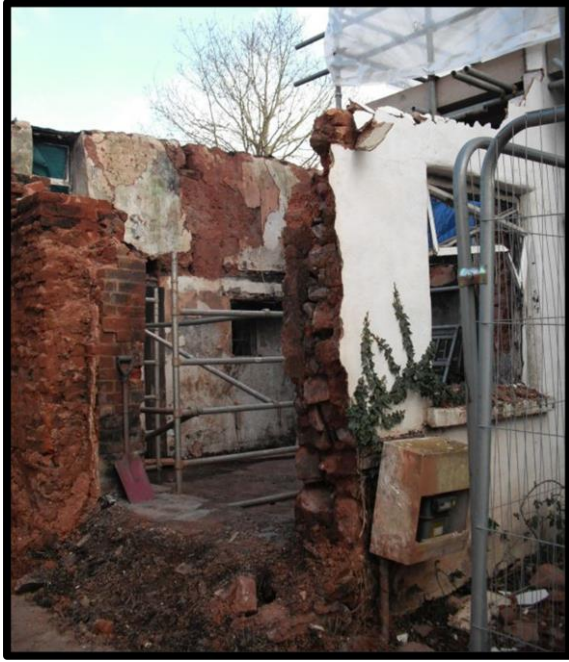


Fig. 18 The remains of No. 1, the southernmost of the two houses, looking east prior to the demolition of the remains of the front and rear walls.



Fig. 19 View of the interior of the front wall showing the rebuilding of the jamb of the window and the post supporting a ceiling beam.



Fig. 20 The former front door of the No. 1, looking north west, showing the post and beam immediately adjacent to it.



Fig. 21 The interior of No. 1, looking towards the 19th-century partition at its south-eastern end, showing the post and beam built into the north-western wall.

Following Mr Holden's visit the remaining parts of the standing fabric were subsequently demolished to ground level, leaving only low footings and the remains of the former rear extensions, all of which were of later 20th century date. This was the condition of the site at the time of the watching brief, which is described in the Section 4 of this report.

3.1 Description of the Fabric

The south-western wall

The front wall of No. 1 Buller Square, the south-western wall of the range, was still standing to first-floor level at the time of Mr Holden's visit (Fig. 18). The partial demolition of the party wall between the two houses and the complete demolition of the front wall of No. 2 had revealed a section through this wall where it met the party wall between the two houses. Although it is possible that the wall may have been a primary part of the medieval building, it had been cut through by many later door and window openings and it is likely that only the lower parts were primary.

In the area below the main ground-floor window the masonry was largely of rubble consisting of large blocks of grey/brown volcanic stone. Unfortunately, the bonding material cannot be determined, but the wall was probably clay-bonded. The north-western jamb of the window lighting the ground-floor room was probably of 18th or 19th-century date, being of rubble masonry which was thicker than the earlier walling below the window sill (Fig. 19), but its south-eastern jamb seems to have been earlier.

The photographs show that, above first-floor level, the front wall had been partially rebuilt with concrete blocks (Figs 19, 20). This area of modern rebuilding terminated to the south east at a good quality masonry jamb overlying the lintel of the entrance doorway of No. 1 Buller Square (Fig. 20). This must either represent the jamb of an opening or evidence of a change to a lighter form of construction for this part of the façade. The extent of rebuilding to the north west could not be determined. The Listing Description (see page 4) noted a reduction in the thickness of the wall at this point and interpreted this as 'a possible former loft doorway'. This would imply an agricultural function for the building; however, the building is known to have been in domestic use by 1911 (see page 18) and almost certainly since the 1840s (Keystone 2012, 14). It seems unlikely that a loading door would have survived in a domestic building long enough to have been blocked in modern concrete blocks.

One possible context for the rebuilding of the front wall might be the insertion of the current doorway and window at ground-floor level; the presence of two closely-spaced openings in the lower part of the façade might have necessitated the substitution of a lighter form of construction in this part of the wall. The concrete blocks may have replaced earlier masonry when the modern fenestration was inserted. A timber-framed wall might also have existed here, butting against the masonry jamb to the south west, but, if so, no evidence remained. The ground-floor window had a concrete lintel, and it seems likely that the original lintel of the window, which was presumably of timber, had failed, necessitating the reconstruction of much of the wall above in blockwork during the 20th century.

Between the window and the doorway the first-floor structure was supported on a timber post set against the wall (Figs 19, 20, 21). Unlike the posts in the north-western range (Keystone 2012, 5) this post did not have a jowled head and was not built into the wall, but rested against it, and was clearly an addition. The remains of a first-floor beam survived, but this was built into the wall slightly off-centre in relation to the post, suggesting that the two timber timbers were not contemporary. It is unlikely that the post represents a surviving medieval feature; it must surely be a later insertion to support the first-floor structure following alterations to the front wall of the building or the removal of an internal feature such as a timber screen or partition which had formerly supported the first-floor structure in this part of the house. The post is assumed to be of late 18th- or early 19th-century date, and to be contemporaneous with the alteration of the internal volumes on the ground floor at that period.

The remains of the beam seemed to bear the traces of large, rectangular joist sockets, and might originally have supported a first-floor structure extending to both sides of the beam. The head beam of a brick internal partition wall lying to the south east of this (Fig. 21), however, showed sockets for smaller, vertically-set plank joists, revealing that the first-floor structure had either developed in several stages, or that it had been very substantially replaced with smaller timbers in the 18th or 19th centuries, probably as a result of alterations to the ground-floor plan. The position of the beam may have corresponded roughly with the position of an earlier timber screen or partition, the post being added to provide additional support for a first-floor structure following the removal of the screen during a later phase of alterations to the building.

The north-western wall, the party wall with No. 2

The party wall dividing Nos 1 and 2 Buller Square was a very substantial structure (Figs 22, 23, 24). The lowest courses of the wall were constructed of volcanic rubble, rising only about 0.2 to 0.3m above the modern floor levels. Above this low level of volcanic masonry there was an area of larger blocks of red breccia underlying the cob walling of the upper section of the wall (Fig. 22). At the time of the archaeological recording the rubble footings alone survived. These appeared to be indistinguishable from the footings of the north-eastern wall, suggesting initially that the two structures were contemporary. The relationship of the wall to the roof trusses was, however, unusual, with the remains of one of the primary roof trusses lying unusually close to the dividing wall, but not against it (Fig. 23). This awkward relationship had been previously noted both in the listing description (See page 4) and in Keystone's account of the building (Keystone 2012, 14). The author of the listing description also noted that the upper parts of the truss had been truncated 'when the stack was inserted', and the observation of this relationship, if it has been correctly interpreted, would seem to confirm the conjecture that the roof truss must have pre-dated the dividing wall, which was not a primary feature, but had been inserted to subdivide a longer range.

Cutting into the south-eastern face of the dividing wall was a 19th-century brick chimneystack featuring a broad segmental-arched opening supported by a metal strap. The large, red bricks appeared to date from after 1800 (Figs 23, 24). The rear parts of this stack were of much rougher construction (Fig. 22) because the bricks were built against the earlier cob walling and there was no need to do this tidily. Keystone observed that there were traces of an earlier fireplace here, with a timber clavel or lintel (Keystone 2012, 14). Keystone assumed that the wall was contemporary with the two cottages to the north and that it may have been constructed at the conversion of an earlier agricultural range into a row of dwellings in the 18th century.

It is now possible to suggest a new interpretation of the features in this dividing wall. The lowest courses of volcanic masonry were seen to be a thin facing continuous with the masonry of the rear wall of the house and may now be interpreted as underpinning following the reduction of the floor levels (see below). The upper parts of the wall predated this and were entirely of cob except for the large breccia blocks, which may have served as the back of a post-medieval fireplace, the large stone blocks being designed to resist damage to the cob chimney from heat.

The upper, cob, sections of the wall contained sockets for substantial first-floor joists in the south-eastern parts of the house (Fig. 24), but no trace of sockets for the floor structures to the north-west. It is therefore likely that the floor structure and the beam in the bay immediately to the south east of the wall were contemporary with the dividing wall and built into it, whereas the ceiling timbers in the two cottages to the north west, which were on a different alignment with joists running from SW to NE from axial beams (Keystone 2012, 14), were inserted at a later date. This would explain the anomalous position of the jointed cruck roof truss: prior to the insertion of the dividing wall, it had spanned an open volume extending further to the north west. The height of the first-floor in relation to the curved feet of the roof trusses was very close (Figs 23, 24) and this would also seem to confirm that the floor structure was inserted into a formerly open volume. It is probable that, prior to the subdivision of the range its central section was originally open to the roof, even if its end bays were storeyed (see below).

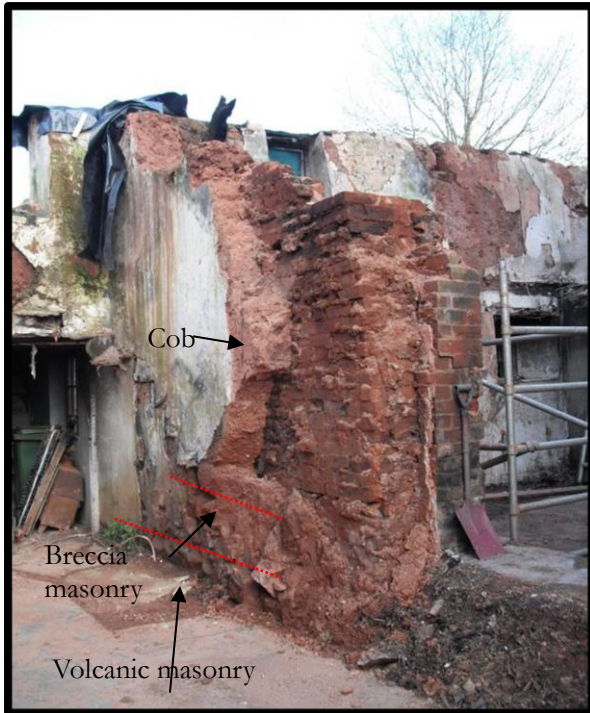


Fig. 22 View of the party wall between the houses, looking east, showing the brick chimneystack cutting the cob wall, and rubble masonry in the lower part of the wall below this.



Fig. 23 View within the southernmost house, looking north, showing the remains of a jointed cruck truss with a curved blade surviving in the east wall close to the dividing wall.



Fig. 24 View of the fireplace in the party wall between the two houses, showing the 19th-century brick fireplace cutting into the earlier cob walling and the remains of a second fireplace embrasure at first-floor level above.



Fig. 25 Traces of three evenly-spaced roof trusses in the north-eastern wall of No. 1 Buller Square, two of which are without cruck posts (compare with Fig. 23).

The post-medieval fireplace embrasure was later infilled with a brick structure projecting into the room (Fig. 24) and completely infilling and taking the form of the earlier embrasure, the remains of the earlier opening apparently remaining visible (*Ibid.*), perhaps in the form of parts of the earlier clavel on each side. The new brick chimney stack also provided a first-floor fireplace in one of the bedrooms; it probably dated from the 19th century and would have been typical of the domestic improvements of the period; before this, bedrooms were often unheated.

The north-eastern wall

The north-eastern wall survived to eaves level at the time of Mr Holden's visit and contained important evidence for the form of the medieval building. The wall appears to have been of cob construction, the upper parts of the walls retaining the sockets for roof trusses, and the surviving foot of at least one of these, showing that the roof of No. 1 Buller Square had been supported by three roof trusses. These were evenly spaced over the length of the building.

The foot of the north-easterly truss survived until the demolition of the ruins (Fig. 23). This truss was of jointed cruck construction, the foot of the principal rafter being buried in the fabric of the wall and supported upon a short cruck post extending downward to a long horizontal plate built into the wall just above the level of the first floor. This extended much further south east than might be expected, but did not support the foot of the adjacent truss. It may have represented the lintel of a wide doorway in the rear wall, perhaps serving a cross passage running through the width of the range. The jointed cruck was side pegged, the carpentry being characteristic of the late medieval period, and similar to that recorded by Keystone on the north-western side of the courtyard. The short distance between the foot of this truss and the first-floor structure implies that there was originally no first-floor structure in this area; it is possible that the curved feet of the trusses were meant to be displayed from ground level as an elegant piece of carpentry in a high, open roof. The proportions of the interior would better suit a single storey structure, at least in the centre of the range. Unfortunately too little of the truss remained to see whether or not there were other features intended for display, such as wind braces, as was the case with the adjoining range on the north west side of the courtyard.

The two trusses to the south east of this one had either been completely destroyed by the fire or were removed in the subsequent demolition; however, evidence remained to show that they were of a different type, without supporting cruck posts built into the walls. The two sockets visible in the upper part of the north-east wall to the south east of the remaining jointed cruck truss (Fig. 25) had no cruck chases below them; instead, the lost roof timbers had been seated upon short timber pads built into the walling. These, then, appear to have been simple 'A'-frame trusses whose principal rafters rested in the wall tops, without additional supports. The Listing Description (See page 4) notes that one of the trusses was 'a later replacement', which suggests that this part of the roof might have been altered and truncated. Alternatively, the inspector may have been misled into thinking that the different form of the trusses betrayed an alteration by the different character of the trusses and the fragmentary state of the roof; the truss feet appear to have been at the same height as those of the jointed cruck truss and were apparently evenly spaced throughout the roof. This implies that they had all formed part of the primary roof structure.

There may well have been a structural reason for a variation in the design of the roof. If there had been a primary loft or chamber storey over the end of the building, for example, curved cruck posts may have been deliberately omitted as an encumbrance on the upper floor; alternatively, a simpler form of truss might have been used to designate a lower status area. One of these south eastern trusses may have been a closed truss, infilled with a timber and plaster partition, dividing the putative chamber at the end of the building from the central part of the range. The closed truss possibly rose directly over the inserted first-floor beam or over a jetty and jetty bressummer above this. This design, with storeyed end chambers jettied out into an open hall was a common feature of Devon vernacular houses in the medieval period. Although the evidence is very limited, it is possible that the beam was inserted beneath an earlier jetty to support a new set of joists extending the first-floor structure to the north west to meet the inserted cross wall and chimney, flooring over what had formerly been an open volume roofed with jointed-cruck trusses. This may represent the annexation of an earlier cross passage into the adjacent south-eastern room and the repositioning of the internal partitions at ground and first-floor level. This may have necessitated the renewal of parts of the earlier ceiling structure, which had been replaced with plank joists of small scantling, typical of the later 18th or 19th centuries.

There are no known photographic records of the remaining parts of the north-eastern wall, within Nos 2 and 3 Buller Square, and it cannot be known whether evidence remained of further cruck posts in this part of the building. Keystone had noted 'two side-pegged jointed-cruck trusses' with elements surviving in the front and rear walls of the house (Keystone 2012, 14); however, as has been shown above, the photographic evidence shows that there was only one jointed cruck truss spanning the ruins of No. 1, the other trusses being without cruck supports (Fig. 25). The second jointed cruck truss observed by Keystone may thus have spanned the area of No. 2 Buller Square, suggesting a central section of the roof more richly ornamented than its ends. It seems probable that the central part of the range covered an open hall.

If the extent of the pre-fire building is taken to correspond with the full length of the medieval structure, extrapolating the spacing of the trusses in the south-eastern part of the building throughout its length, suggests that there were five or six trusses over Nos 1 & 2 Buller Square, two bays- over the south-eastern rooms and three or four jointed-cruck trusses covering the northern end of No. 1 and No. 2, forming an open hall of perhaps four bays. Beyond this, the extent of the range would allow a further two trusses over No. 3, giving three more bays and forming a nine bay roof over the whole range. Unfortunately, there is no record of the ruins of No. 3 Buller Square and it is not known whether there was a variation in the design of the roof at the north-western end of the building to accommodate a first-floor chamber here. The Listing description of the roof of this part of the building - 'probably A-frames of a C19 character' (see Page 4) - does not exactly reverberate with confidence, but shows that the roofs over this part of the building did include some 'A'-frame trusses; these may perhaps have defined a further upper room, or may have been merely replacements due to later alterations.

The footings of the south-eastern part of the rear wall remained standing to a low height at the time of the recording in 2020 and this proved of considerable interest (Fig. 26). The core of the wall was a baulk of natural clay which appeared to have been left standing while the ground levels on either side were cut down by around 0.4 m (Fig. 27). The baulk of upstanding natural clay had been refaced on both sides with clay-bonded volcanic rubble masonry. It seems clear that the original building had simply been constructed directly on to the natural clay and that at some point the levels both inside and outside had been reduced below this and the walls underpinned in new masonry.

The underpinning continued around the angle with the dividing wall between the houses (Fig. 26), showing that this wall had been in existence before the levels were reduced. On the exterior of the house a slight thickening of the wall may represent buttressing for this cross wall; this was clearly a separate phase from the wall itself, and this would seem to confirm that the cross wall was itself an addition to the building.

Within No. 2 Buller Square, to the north-west, little of the fabric survived, the rear wall having been broken open to create an entrance into one of the 20th century rear extensions. Beyond this opening the footings of a wall of later masonry remained, extending for just over a metre towards the party wall with No. 3. This incorporated a great deal of rough brick, and had been deepened to the rear of the house by a baulk of brick masonry approximately 0.4m thick which appears to have been added against the rear of the house to support an inserted chimney breast. Butting against the inner face of the wall was a curved footing forming a semicircular plinth. The semi-circular footing may relate to a domestic fixture such as an oven or water boiler built up against or within the fireplace.

Keystone describe the fireplace as it stood before demolition as ‘a secondary refurbishment’ of an earlier fireplace, the later opening, in brick with a segmental head, being contrived within an earlier opening with a timber clavel. Above first-floor level Keystone describes a second timber built into the wall, which they interpreted as the clavel of a first-floor fireplace which had been later blocked in cob (Ibid., 14). The elevation drawings by Mr Holden certainly show a broad chimney breast rising to a high level on the rear of the building at this point (Fig. 5, centre) which would have allowed for slightly offset fireplaces on each storey, the flues contracting just below eaves level to rise into the chimney shaft. The blocking of the upper fireplace opening in cob seems unusual, however, since a fireplace in an upper room would have been a useful feature which is unlikely to have gone out of use while it might still have provided comfort. It might have been necessary to block the fireplace because of the inserted staircase, which rose against the party wall with No. 1 and then turned to run alongside the rear wall, beneath the hearth. This would indicate that the first-floor structure and fireplace probably pre-dated the staircase. As the chimney stack also appears to have been in brick; it was clearly not an original feature of the building. It might well be that the addition of the chimney pre-dated the conversion of the building into cottages and perhaps served a larger dwelling extending throughout the whole range.

Alternatively, the timber observed by Keystone may not have been a clavel over a fireplace, but rather a trimmer to support the feet of roof trusses of jointed cruck form over this part of the building, or perhaps the lintel of a tall window opening lighting an open hall and predating the addition of the chimney. It is regrettable that the timber was not recovered or at least examined at the demolition of the wall so that its significance could have been understood.

Further to the north-west, nothing remained visible of No. 3, which had been entirely rebuilt by the time of the archaeological recording. Keystone observed a ‘generous’ ground-floor fireplace in the rear wall here, with ‘plastered jambs, cheeks and back with a (now charred) oak lintel’ (Keystone 2012, 14). This was considered to be the earlier of the fireplaces. There appears to have been no first-floor fireplace corresponding with the presumed blocked one in the adjacent cottage, and this tends to reinforce the interpretation that the cottages were a conversion of an earlier building, rather than newly built as a pair, as had been suggested by Keystone (Ibid., 13).



Fig. 26 The remains of the rear wall of the houses in 2020 during the reduction to the formation levels of the modern buildings, looking north east, showing the remains of stone underpinning to earlier walling, returning into the cross wall between the houses.



Fig. 27 Detail of the remains of the north-eastern wall during demolition showing the upstand of natural clay within the core of the wall.



Fig. 28 The remains of the party wall with No.3 showing brick masonry, and the apparent vertical break (left) possibly allowing for a doorway.

The north-western wall, the party wall between Nos. 2 and 3 Buller Square

This wall survived to first-floor level in 2012 and has been retained in the rebuilt fabric. The wall was covered in plaster and partially obscured by a large pile of reclaimed building materials (Fig. 28), but areas of fallen plaster revealed that it was rather crudely-constructed of large, late 18th- or 19th-century bricks laid very roughly, perhaps in header bond. This wall must surely have been an insertion into the original building rather than a primary wall dividing two contemporary dwellings, as had been suggested by Keystone. A vertical break in the brick work near the front wall of the buildings may show that there was originally a doorway here, and the area of No. 3 may formerly have been a part of the same dwelling. It is suggested that the wall may have been inserted to replace a timber screen of plank-and-muntin type, enclosing a high-status heated room.



Fig. 29 The remains of the south-eastern gable wall showing the abutments for an inserted fireplace and chimney and the brick footings of a partition wall contemporary with a cobbled floor.



Fig. 30 Detail of the cobbled floor within the south-eastern end room of the house.



Fig. 31 Detail of the late partition defining the south-eastern room of No. 1 Buller Square.

The south-eastern gable wall and internal partitions

This was the southern end gable of the building, and was obscured by tarpaulins at the time of Mr Holden's visit. No photographs of the fabric by Keystone are known to exist; however, Keystone described 'the entire chimneystack in the southern wall' as being of 18th- or early 19th-century brick (Keystone 2012, ; it was clearly a late addition to the buildings. The watching brief, however, undertaken after the demolition of the wall to about 0.5m of its original height (Fig. 29) showed that the brick jambs of the fireplace had in fact superseded a set of earlier jambs for a rather deeper fireplace, also in brick, which had also been built up against the earlier gable wall. The jambs of this earlier fireplace appear to have been contemporary with the cobbled floor which survived in this room

The cobbled floor extended about 2.25m to the north-west where it butted against the footings of a narrow brick partition wall (Fig. 29, 30). This had survived the fire (Fig. 31), but had been demolished by the time of the archaeological recording. It was constructed of large, soft, handmade bricks which may have been of late 18th- or early 19th-century date. The wall contained a tall, narrow doorway set to the north east of the front wall by the width of the staircase, which climbed against this wall and may have been contemporary with it. The wall supported a horizontal timber featuring small sockets for vertically set joists of a type rarely used before the 18th century, and quite different from the larger, square joists which had survived in part in the north-western bay of No. 1. It seems likely that an earlier ceiling structure at this end of the house was removed and replaced in the early 1800s, perhaps when the building was divided into cottages and the floor levels in the centre of the building were reduced.

The only other feature surviving from the interior of the building was a cobbled floor in the north-western part of No. 2 Buller Square (Fig. 32). This, unusually, featured cobbles laid on two different alignments, those against the north-eastern wall, forming a patch 1.5m by 1.75m deep, being aligned parallel with the wall and those to the centre of the range, forming a patch nearly 2m deep and 0.75m wide being aligned on the same alignment as the adjoining party wall with No. 3 Buller Square. The reason for this is unknown.

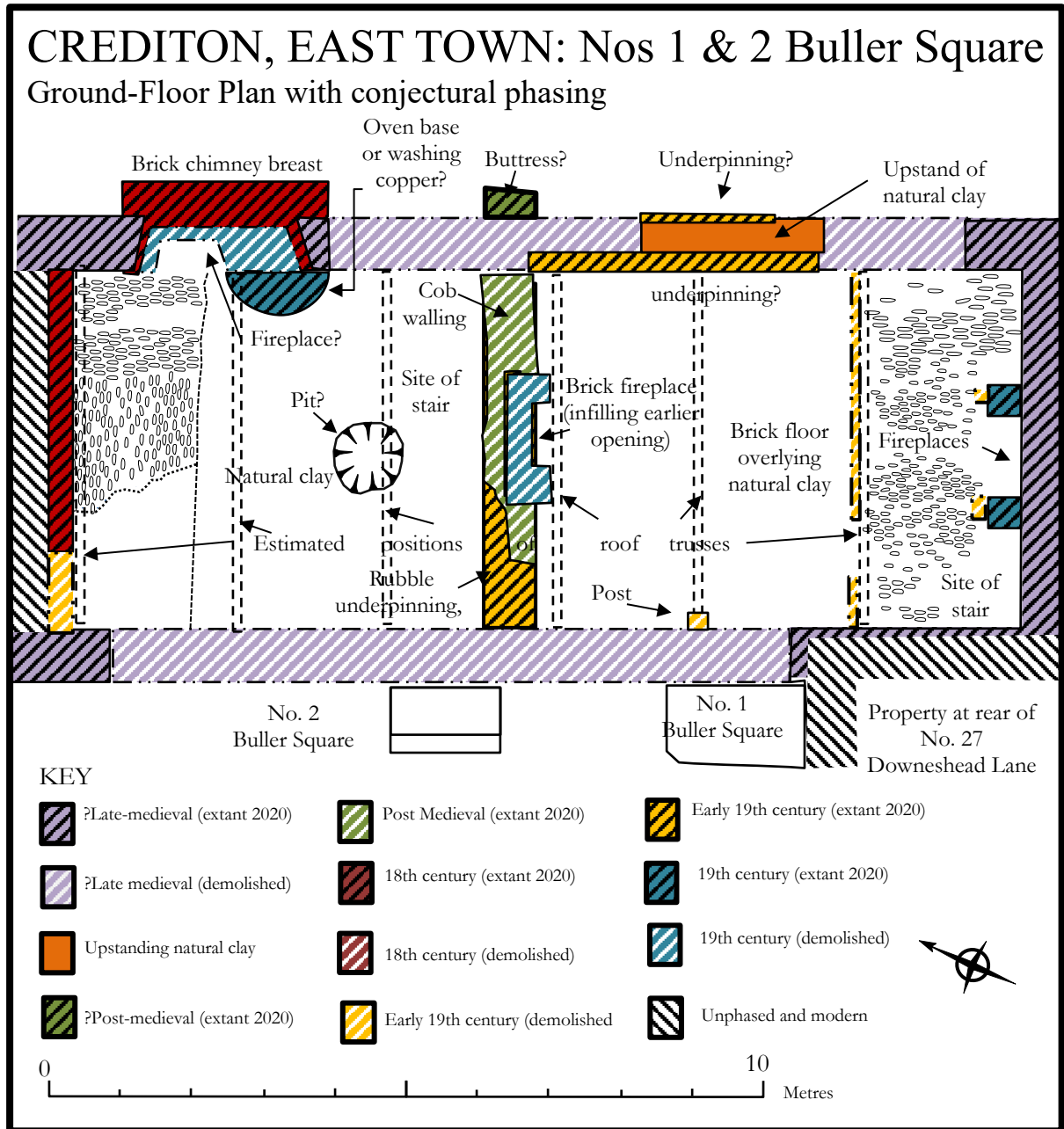


Fig. 32 Phased plan of the ruins made by the author(RWP) during the watching brief in 2020 showing a possible interpretation of the surviving building fabric, with missing elements extrapolated from post-fire photographs and from the Keystone report.





Fig. 33 General view of No. 2 Buller Square showing pit 102 in the foreground and cobbled floor (104) in the background. 2m scale. Looking north.

4: WATCHING BRIEF

By Marc Steinmetzer

An archaeological watching brief (Figs. 33-34) was maintained during the excavation of the concrete floor within Nos. 1-2 Buller Square and the removal of the remains of the wall at the rear of the buildings (see Fig. 27 above). The removal of the concrete floors (100), which were 0.15m thick exposed a mid-red clay natural subsoil (101) immediately underneath and extending across the entire footprint of the two buildings, indicating that the building range was terraced into the gentle northwest facing slope.

Within No. 2 Buller Square a shallow pit (102) and the fragmentary remains of an earlier cobbled surface (104) were uncovered. The pit lay immediately to the north west of the inserted party wall, at the centre of the range, and may have been excavated to accommodate a post at the foot of an inserted staircase serving the property. Approximately 0.52m wide and 0.12m deep the excavation of the homogeneous mid reddish brown silty clay pit fill (103) recovered five sherds of 18th- or 19th-century South Somerset coarseware and three sherds of late 18th- or 19th-century industrial white wares. The date of the pottery suggests that the post was probably inserted in the late 18th or 19th century to support the end of the principal beam supporting the earlier first-floor structure, which may have been truncated to allow for the ascent of the staircase. The Listed Building description identified this staircase as possibly 18th-century in date.

Surviving along the northern edge of No. 2 Buller Square were the fragmentary remains of a cobbled floor consisting of small to medium size sub-angular worn cobbles set into the underlying natural clay. Although the surviving cobbling is located at a slightly lower level to the

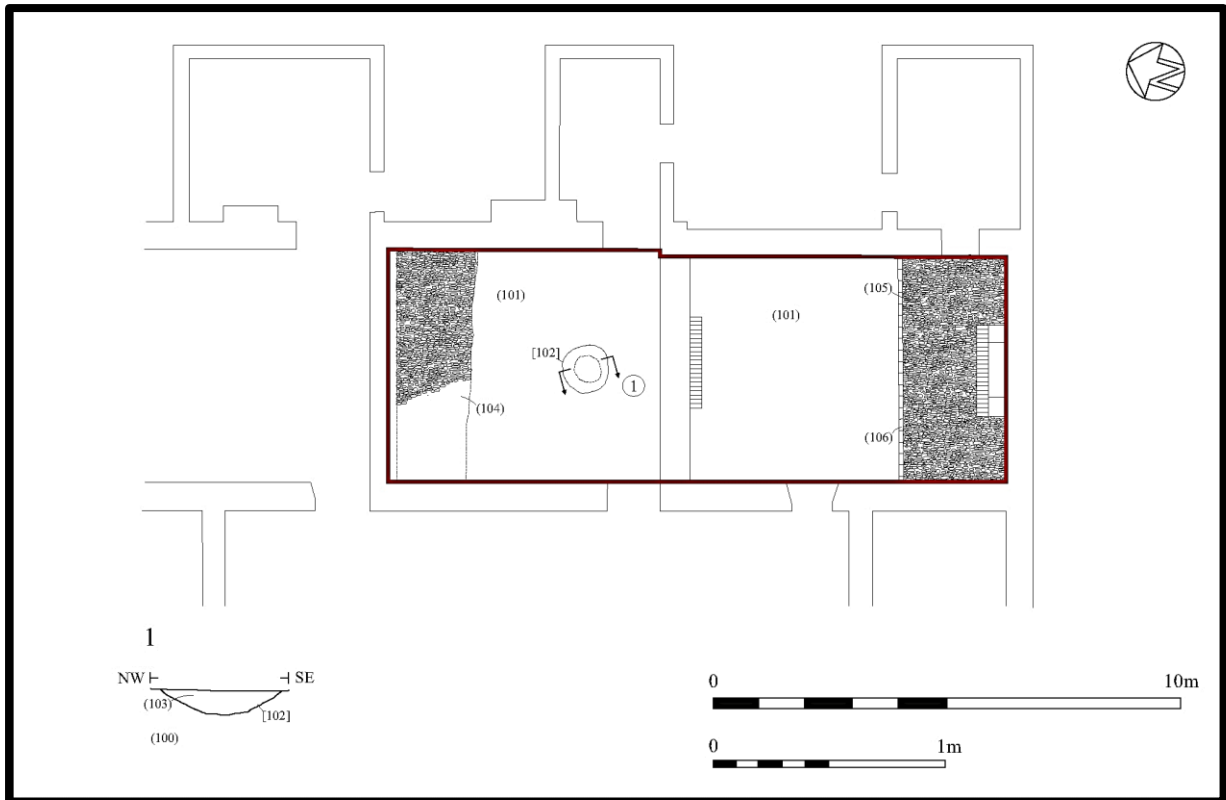


Fig. 34 Plan of the site prepared by Oakford Archaeology showing the location of the features revealed in the watching brief, with a section through the shallow pit.

natural subsoil within the remainder of the building it is probable that the surface dates to the late 18th or early 19th century, when the eastern range was divided into three separate smaller dwellings.

At the southern end of the range excavations within No. 1 Buller Square exposed the remains of a cobbled floor (105) (see Fig. 29 above). Consisting of small to medium size sub-angular worn cobbles set into the underlying natural clay the floor, extending the full width of the building, was edged with 19th-century bricks (106). This surface is contemporary with the insertion of the fireplace in the south gable sometime in the late 18th or early 19th century.



SUGGESTED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDINGS By c.1550 (roof trusses indicated)

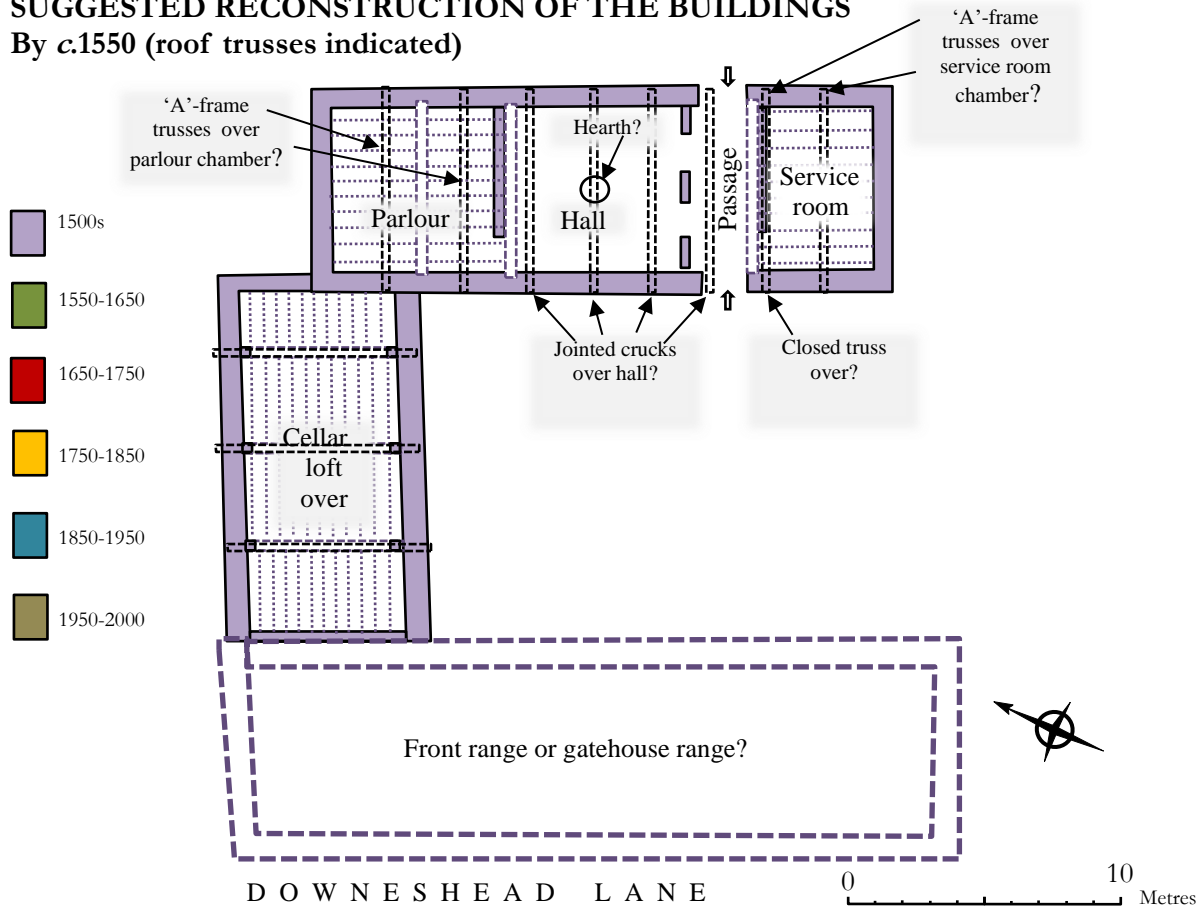


Fig. 35 Suggested phasing and reconstruction of the house in the 15th century.

5: CONCLUSION

The following text and drawings (Figs 35-39) attempt to establish a conjectural interpretation of the development of the buildings on the site based upon the evidence previously described.

5.1 Phase 1: A 15th-century Courtyard House (Fig. 35)

Keystone interpreted the main part of the medieval house, as having lain on the street frontage, with ancillary buildings lying to the rear, enclosing a small courtyard. An alternative interpretation, however, is that the north-eastern range, Nos 1, 2 and 3 Buller Square was actually the main part of the medieval house, with the hall standing back from the street behind an enclosed forecourt or garden. This may have been a typical medieval hall house, and can be interpreted as having a three-room-and-cross-passage plan, with a central open hall roofed with jointed cruck trusses and end bays, possibly storeyed, roofed with 'A'-frame trusses. The building probably had a nine bay roof. The internal partitions had all been removed and replaced with other structures, but it is possible that the north-western part of No. 1 formed a cross passage, divided from a two-bay south-eastern service room by a timber screen and separated from the open hall by a further screen or set of speres on the line of the inserted cross wall. The passage was probably open to the roof and the service room enclosed by a closed truss. At the opposite end of the building, the 'inner room', later No. 3, may also have been storeyed and probably had three bays. This large room may have been a parlour with a chamber over. It is uncertain whether or not the buildings communicated with the north-western range, or how that building functioned, but it, too, may have been a high-status space at first-floor level, with cellars below. No evidence now remains for a front range.

SUGGESTED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDINGS

By c.1650 (ground-floor plan)

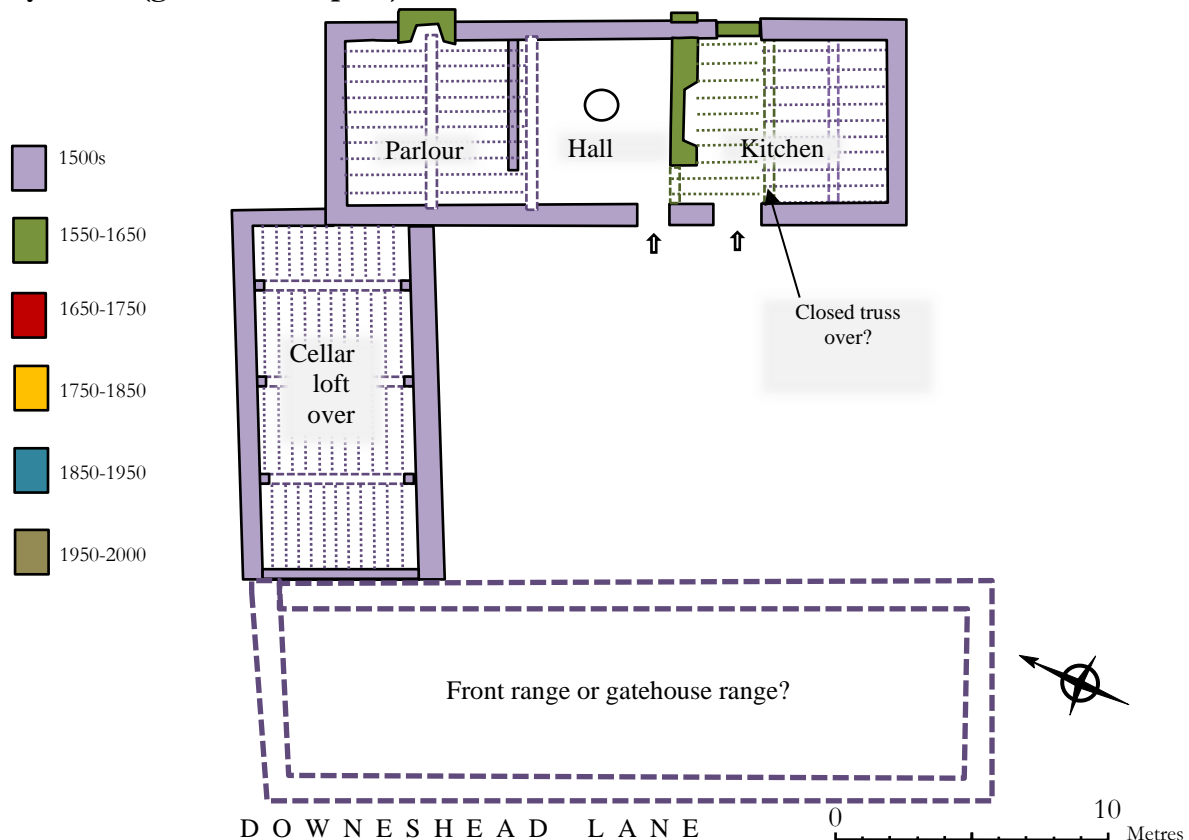


Fig. 36 Suggested phasing and reconstruction of the house in the 17th century.

5.2 Phase 2: Alterations in the 17th-century? (Fig. 36)

In this phase the large cross wall containing a chimney appears to have been added at the south-eastern end of the house, possibly replacing an earlier hall screen. This wall appears to have been added while the open hall was still in existence, as there were no sockets for joists in the north-western side of the wall and, unless the hall was provided with a chimney by this date, it is possible that an open hearth was retained. Sadly, the reduction of the floors in a later period has removed any evidence for this.

The cross wall featured a large ground-floor fireplace facing the service end of the house. The presence of the fireplace in the cross wall suggests that the putative cross passage had been abandoned and annexed to enlarge the service room to form a new kitchen. The service room ceiling may have been extended by an additional bay of joists covering the former passage, supported on a new beam bearing the ends of the joists of the earlier ceiling, presumably because an earlier screen which had supported the original ceiling had been removed. A few of the inserted joists survived before the demolition of the ruins; these were large, squared timbers built into the inserted cob wall and would have been consistent with a 16th or 17th-century date. Mr Holden's plans show that, before the fire, the first floor here was divided into two equally-sized chambers, and the whole end of the building may have been reconstructed at this time. It is presumed that one or both of the two fireplaces in the north-western parts of the house was also added at this time; Keystone interpreted the most north westerly as earlier, and this interpretation is followed here. No evidence of other alterations of this period were observed, but the large size of the presumed new kitchen may suggest that this was still a very large and important house.

SUGGESTED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDINGS

By c.1750

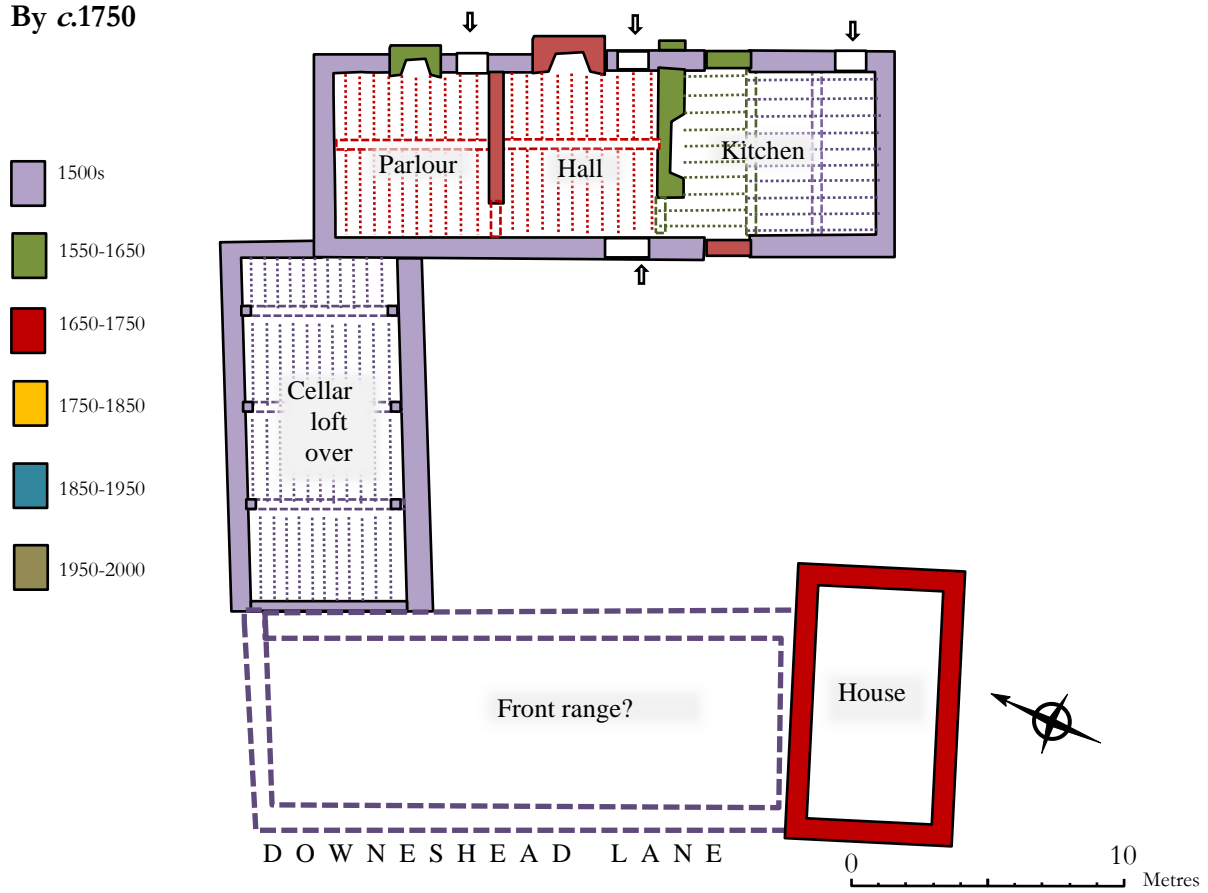


Fig. 37 Suggested phasing and reconstruction of the house in the 18th century.

5.3 Phase 3: Alterations in the 18th-century? (Fig. 37)

In this phase it is assumed that the house remained in use as a single dwelling, but that the hall was completely floored over to provide a new first-floor chamber over the centre of the house. The partition between this and the adjoining inner room (now No. 3) was constructed of soft, red handmade bricks, with a possible doorway to the inner room near the front wall of the house, and this wall may conceivably have replaced a medieval plank and muntin screen. The floor structure of the whole north-western part of the house may have been renewed, bearing upon the new brick cross wall. The new ceilings of both areas were supported on pine axial beams, with chamfers but without stops, supporting 'upright joists' (described by Keystone), which would seem to be consistent with a date in the 18th century. The chimney stack in the former hall may also have been added at this time, since it was also partially of brick. It may have replaced an earlier chimney, but was either completely rebuilt or newly inserted to serve fireplaces on two storeys, as suggested by Keystone.

At this stage of its development it seems likely that the putative range fronting the street, if it still, or had ever existed, was now in decline, for at least one end of it appears to have been demolished and rebuilt in the late 17th or early 18th century to provide a new brick dwelling, No. 27 Downeshead Lane, which was apparently a completely self-contained dwelling. Thus began the subdivision of the early building into smaller and smaller tenements, maximising income for the landowner but probably obscuring the original character and status of the house.

SUGGESTED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDINGS

By c.1850

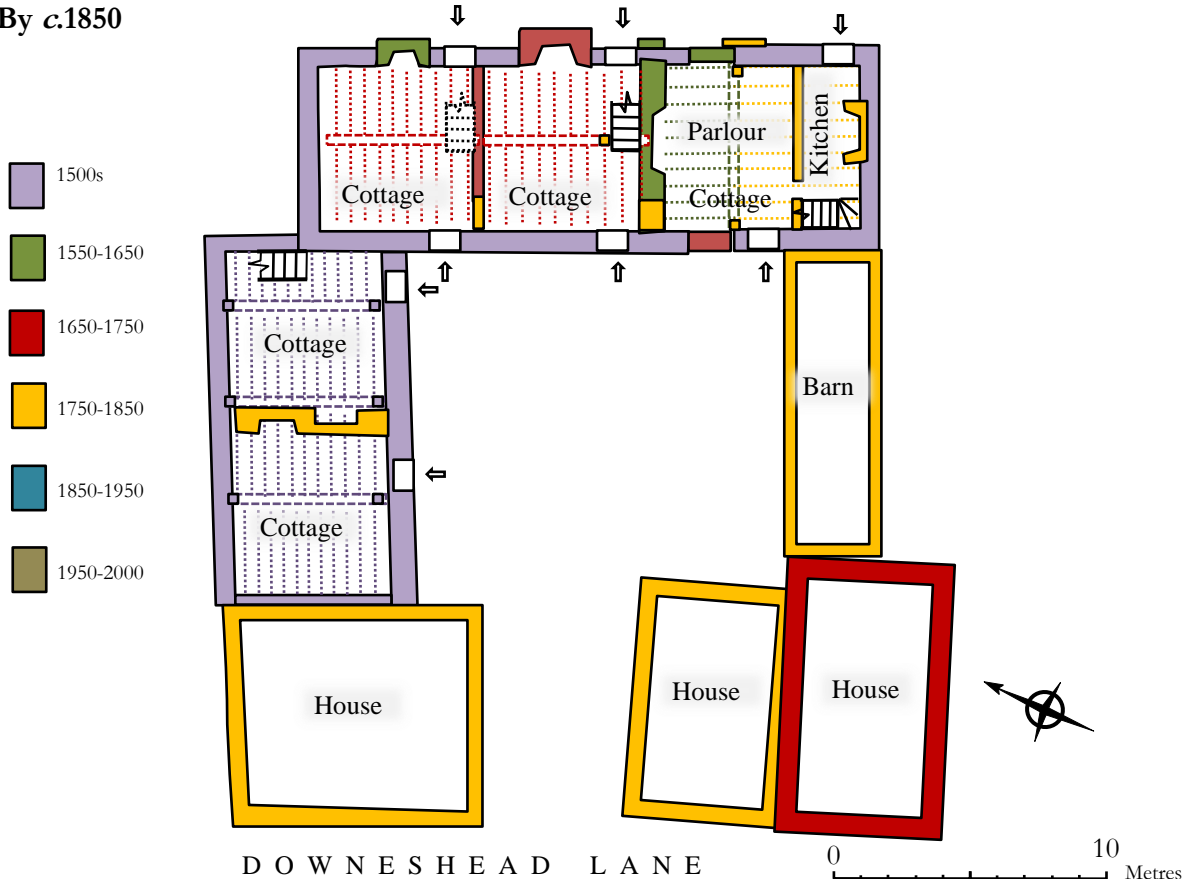


Fig. 38 Suggested phasing and reconstruction of the house in the early 19th century.

5.4 Phase 4: Alterations in the early 19th-century? (Fig. 38)

In this phase it is assumed that all the older parts of the house were subdivided, more or less on the line of the existing internal partitions, to convert the house into eight self-contained dwellings, possibly the eight dwellings in East Town recorded as belonging to Susannah Risdon in the 1780s. The large kitchen in the former service end of the medieval house appears to have been divided to provide a new parlour and a cobbled kitchen, separated by a brick wall, with a new staircase to the first-floor rooms and a new chimney in the end gable, necessitating renewal of part of the ceiling structures and the reinforcement of the remaining section with inserted posts. Both the former hall and inner room were now separated to form individual cottages and a staircase was inserted to serve the upper floors, truncating the axial beam in No. 2, the end of which now had to be supported on an inserted post, its base buried within a pit in the floor. The floor levels throughout the range were reduced and the walls were underpinned at the same time.

At this stage the north-western wing seems also to have been converted into two cottages, divided by a new brick chimney stack, and it seems probable that any remaining sections of the front range were either completely rebuilt or converted to provide two further dwellings. Both new houses on the street front have a late 18th or early 19th century appearance, but the possibility remains that at least No. 24 retains some medieval fabric. The barn also appears to have been added in this phase. The conversion of the house into a group of small dwellings may well have occurred in the Widow Risdon's time (if these were her eight dwellings), or perhaps more probably after the property was acquired by the Buller family to add to their substantial land holdings in the area.

SUGGESTED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDINGS

By c.1950



Fig. 39 Suggested phasing and reconstruction of the house in the 20th century.

5.5 Phase 5: Alterations in the 20th-century? (Fig. 39)

In this phase it is assumed that improvements were made to several of the fireplaces, entirely replacing the late 18th or early 19th-century chimney in the gable end of the house, for example, with a smaller stack of less projection, to make a saving of space in what must have been a very narrow room. The fireplace in No. 2 was provided with a possible water boiler or washing copper and a series of lavatories were built against the end gable of No. 4. Other alterations may have included repairs and replacement of parts of the roofs and the rebuilding of many of the chimney stacks. The end of the barn also appears to have been rebuilt to provide a new service element for No 27 Downeshead Lane.

At this period the cottage immediately adjoining No. 24 Downeshead Lane may have been rejoined to that property, temporarily; it was later separated again and, before the fire, was united with the cottage to the north east, the whole range forming a single property.

Later in the 20th century a number of additions and extensions were made to provide improved kitchen and bathroom facilities. These were constructed or concrete blockwork and brought the houses up to an acceptable modern standard.

5.6 Summary

This report and drawings have attempted to collate all the available information on the destroyed buildings at Buller Square and establish, using this information, a conjectural outline interpretation of the development of the structures, their probable character, plan form, function and significance.

Sadly, this interpretation seems unlikely to ever be tested or qualified by further work, unless further documentary research reveals more information. The lack of a full photographic record of the buildings following the fire (which is of course quite understandable given concerns about the safety of the ruins) and the absence of monitoring during their subsequent demolition means that a great deal of the fabric went unrecorded and that the interpretation of certain features by Keystone and others, in less than ideal conditions, could not be re-examined.

This report, therefore, makes no claim to accuracy and authority. There remain many areas of uncertainty. Nevertheless, the report and its conclusions are offered here for discussion, in hope of recovering something worthwhile from the tragic loss of what was clearly one of Crediton's best remaining medieval domestic buildings.

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