

Hartland Higher Brownsham House

Hartland

Devon



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Contents	Page No.
Introduction	3
Structural development	4
The developmental phasing of the building observed during 2013	8
DoE listing	8
Basic External Appearance.....	10
Roof.....	10
Walls.....	10
Stacks	13
Interior roof construction	13
Ceilings	14
Partitions.....	14
Floors.....	15
Stairs.....	15
Fireplaces	16
Doors.....	16
Windows	17
Miscellaneous	18
Desk-based Assessment.....	18
Bibliography	19

Figures

	Page No.
Coverplate: Detail of plaster ceiling	
Figure 1: Phased plan of ground floor and barn.	6
Figure 2: Phased plan first plan.	7
Figure 3 Drawing of the north east elevation	11
Figure 4 Photograph of the north east elevation	11
Figure 5 Drawing of north west elevation	12
Figure 6 Photograph of north west elevation	12

Introduction

This report presents the results of archaeological recording undertaken in 6th and 22nd February 2013 of the north east elevation of Higher Brownsham House. During building work the render of this elevation was removed exposing fine coursed stonework of considerable quality. As there appeared to be no alternative but to re-render the wall a detailed record of the structure was made before it was again hidden (fig 3).

The observations made during this exercise led to a different interpretation of the development of the building to that stated in the earlier report therefore this report contains both the earlier interpretation and the re-interpretation gained from the recent survey.

The phased plans included in this report (figs 1 & 2) are based on survey plans supplied by the National Trust and plans contained in the earlier reports but only shows the recent re-interpretation of the development of the building.

The building descriptions and documentary history are taken directly from the earlier report without amendment.

Higher Brownsham

Site and aspect	Present approach from the road is to the north east elevation, the house being tucked down into the hillside.
Landscape Value	Part of the northwest Devon landscape in a small hamlet of traditional buildings.
Likely date	late 16c/early 17c with later additions
Historical Value	The extremely attractive first floor decorated plaster ceiling, early 17c, makes this a very important vernacular building in Devon.
Building no.	1
Present use	Residential
Plan Type	Two remaining cells of three cell cross-passage with wing and extensions.
Important Features	Original roof timbers. early 17c decorated plaster ceiling and friezes in room H open fireplace in rooms A, B and H doors – rooms A, B, H, I, J and L windows – rooms A, B, H, J and stairs door frame with ovolo moulding at entrance to room B.
State of repair	Feb 1988 Fair, damp in ground floor rooms. Summer 2013 Recently renovated

Structural development

Phase 1: c. 16c/ early 17c.

Now two cells, but probably a three cell cross-passage house with room A the hall and B the parlour or inner room.

The cross-passage and lower room to southeast appear to have been removed in the 18c, the present southeast gable wall is very disturbed and the stonework does not appear to have been built as an exterior wall. The ground is fairly level in this area, but only an archaeological investigation would actually prove the earlier existence of a third cell and cross-passage. The rear and end walls are rubble stone, roughly squared and coursed, but the front wall is cob on a chamfered plinth, indicating a house of some standing. Archive evidence shows the Nicholl family living at Higher Brownsham from (earliest mention) 1566 to 1707. (D.R.O.).

Phase 2: Early 17c.

Either a major up-date occurred or the house was completely rebuilt. Several features of this period remain; the most important of these is the decorated plaster ceiling in the hall chamber. This has enriched ribs forming four inner heart shapes and eight outer ones, with decorations in the shapes, four plates of fruit in high relief, and a central pendant with four faces. The northwest and fireplace walls have friezes with heraldic animals and shields along them; the latter also has a moulded cornice above it. All these designs conform to known patterns in the John Abbot sketch book held in the Devon Record Office, Exeter.

The ceiling is supported by two early 17c trusses with arch-bracing, but because it is in need of attention the roof timbers can only be looked at from the access in the south corner of the hall chamber (room H) and from the wing roof. The roof structure beyond (to the northwest) is not visible.

The doorway to room B, with ovolo moulding and stop, and the chamfered and ogee-stopped transverse beam in the room also belong to this period. The dating of the fireplaces is not known as the lintels are covered over.

In room A the rear of a wooden lintel and a large fireplace can be seen from the present small opening.

Access to the first floor was probably by a turret in the position of the present stairs, with access from the northwest corner of the hall (A) to the present doorway into the hall chamber as the frieze respects this opening. The other possible position for a stair turret is on the northeast elevation near the east corner where there are ground and first floor doorways, (the former was infilled).

Phase 3: 17c.

A two cell two storey unheated wing was added to the front, built of cob and possibly added in two stages U as there is a cob gable wall dividing the roof space. This has the remnants of a moulded cornice on it. There is also a blocked doorway on the first floor (room L)

with mason's mitre joint in the frame, intimating that the wing was longer than it is now.

Probably 18th century pre tithe map 1840

Phase 4: 18c.

Barn added to northwest end of house with cheeked threshing doors.

Phase 5: late 18c/early 19c.

Room B was extended to the southwest and a sash window, no horns, inserted. The stairs were probably rebuilt at this time, there is no break visible in the external stonework but the window aperture was smaller and lower.

The south west threshing doors of the barn were altered and two halves of an ovolo moulded beam was used as a lintel. This may indicate use of materials after the demolition of the lower end of the house, or may be contemporary with the mid 19c alterations.

Phase 5: Mid 19c.

Ceiling of hall raised and a horned sash inserted in the rear elevation, this brought the chamber floor up about 25cm, the pendant being only just above head height.

The ovolo moulded beams mentioned in connection with the threshing doors may have been released by this alteration.

The two storey rear porch was added and a sash window inserted to light the stairs.

Phase 6: 20c.

The decorated plaster ceiling has caused concern at various times. Several transverse timbers were inserted early in the century, resting on the purlins, one is marked October 2nd 1917'. In 1935 I.I.M. Office of Works was consulted by the owner, the Hon. Arthur Asquith of the Clovelly Estate. The drawings show that four terminal ornaments were missing, all eight are now absent, and three floral designs above the cornice on the southeast wall have also gone. A solution to the problem of distortion in the ceiling was given in detail, but does not seem to have been followed.

In 1952 the S.P.A.B. were consulted by the Clovelly Estate and detailed recommendations were made. While some of this was followed the serious problem of vertical displacement of the northeast purlin does not seem to have been remedied.



Figure 1: Phased plan of ground floor and barn.

Higher Brownsham House, Hartland, Devon



Figure 2: Phased plan first plan.

The developmental phasing of the building observed during 2013

Phase 1: Early 17th century

Rectangular building with stair turret at the south west end of room C (the cross-passage) and adjacent lateral stack with the extant structure representing the lower end of the building, the hall and inner room having been rebuilt as a barn in the 19th century (see below).

Phase 2: Mid 17th century

The lower end of the building is extended, heated and the decorated first floor ceiling is inserted.

Phase 3: Early 19th century

The wing added to the north east side of the building.

Phase 4: Mid 19th century (post 1844)

The upper end of the house is rebuilt as a barn. The position of the truss adjacent to the wall in room J suggests that the earlier building extended further to the north west. This is supported by the tithe map that shows all of the building up to the lane in domestic use. This would date the conversion of this end of the building to a barn after 1840. The barn shown behind this end of the building adjacent to the lane partially survives as a ruin.

A mural stair is inserted replacing the stair turret (now part of the barn).

Information gathered from the earlier report states that the first floor of room D was raised in the 19th century and in this process the ovolo moulded beams that became available were reused in the barn. This could have been the case but equally as it appears that the house did extend to the lane the beams may have formerly come from this part of the building.

Phase 5: 21st century

Renovation works to the building were undertaken in 2013 that included replacing some of the ground floors, windows, re-plastering the interior walls and re-rendering of the exterior walls to the north.

During this work the flag stones in room C and a substantial amount of the fill beneath the flags were removed.

The only archaeological recording undertaken was of the north east elevation. The excavation of the floor and the partial stripping of the internal plaster were not monitored or recorded.

DoE listing

HARTLAND BROWNSHAM
SS 22 NE

2/161 Higher Brownsham Farmhouse and
barn adjoining to north-west.
20.2.58

GV II*

House formerly farmhouse. Early C17 with later C17 and probably later C18 additions. Stone rubble walls rendered at the front. Gable-ended natural rag slate roof to house, asbestos to barn. Brick axial stack and large rubble stack at left gable-end with brick shaft.

Plan: original plan is unclear since in its present form the house does not conform to any standard

plan types. It now consists of a larger room to the left heated by a fireplace at its left end and through which the house is entered with a smaller room to its right heated by an axial stack which divides the 2 rooms. This room is actually in 2 parts and it is evident that its right-hand part was taken out of the adjoining barn which was probably added in the circa late C18. At the front of the left-hand room is a narrow wing which judging from a 1st floor doorframe is a later C17 addition - probably for service purposes. A C19 2-storey porch was built at the rear of the left-hand room and the right-hand room has been built out slightly at the rear and a staircase inserted behind the stack. Evidently this house has undergone a complex development and any interpretation of its plan form can only be tentative but one possible theory is that the house originally extended further to the left with a passage and lower room end and what now survives is the hall and inner room of a 3-room-and-through-passage plan house which was then further extended. There is some possible evidence of rebuilding at this lower gable-end but only an archaeological survey would reveal the original extent of this house.

Exterior: 2 storeys. Asymmetrical 3-window front with barn attached at right-hand end and narrow wing projecting from left-hand end. On 1st floor to left is 3-light C20 small-paned casement, 12-pane early C19 hornless sash at centre and later C19 taller one to the right which is a half dormer. Below it is a taller C20 2-light casement and a fixed small-paned light to the centre. To the left is a C20 panelled and part-glazed door under slate hood. Extending in the same line to the right of the house is the barn which has a wide cart entrance at its left end with flanking buttresses and a smaller building projecting from its right-hand end. Wing projecting from left-hand end has 2 C19 12-pane sashes on the first floor and 2-light circa early C20 casements below. Irregular rear elevation has barn to left with small wing projecting from its end, single storey section to its right and gabled 2 storey porch projecting to right of centre. Mainly C19 sash windows with stair window with marginal glazing bars to left of porch. Entrance to porch is in its right-hand side. Probably circa early C20 single storey wing projecting to right of porch. The wide barn doorway re-uses 2 C17 ovolo-moulded ceiling beams on its lintels.

Interior: on the ground floor there are few early features visible although fireplaces are probably covered up. Doorway into right-hand room has ovolo-moulded C17 wooden frame raised and hollow step stops. Chamfered ceiling beam with ogee stops in right-hand room. On the first floor of the narrow front wing is a blocked doorway with apparently C17 chamfered frame which has masons mitres.

The most important feature of this house is the very fine decorative plaster ceiling in the chamber over the left-hand room dating circa 1620 - 40. It is designed in a pattern of 2 concentric circles of hearts formed by enriched ribs with running vine pattern. There are 4 hearts at the centre and 8 around the outside and in the 4 panels where the outer and inner hearts adjoin are 4 bowls of fruit in high relief - one of apples, one of oranges, one of lemons and one of pears. At the inner point of each heart is a spray of flowers, the one towards the rear wall also incorporates a human face. At the centre of the whole design is an unusual plaster pendant with 4 identical mens faces around it. A plaster frieze runs along the 2 end walls of the room, in a fragment on the front wall, with a design of heraldic shields and beasts. Over the outside end wall frieze is a moulded plaster cornice. The roof truss in this room consists of straight principals with a crossed apex and collar halved on with notched lap joint.

This is not an easy building to understand but despite its confusing plan and development it survives in a fairly unspoilt state retaining a traditional external appearance and with a surprisingly high quality plaster ceiling. The house forms part of an unspoilt and picturesque hamlet.

Listing NGR: SS2853625946

Basic External Appearance

Single pile two cell two storey building with two storey single cell extension into barn at northwest end and two storey two cell wing extending northeast from lower end of front. Small porch over front door. Two storey porch on centre of rear elevation and single storey catslide-roofed projection from southwest corner. All other roofs Single ridge with gable ends, main house roof has continuous ridge with barn. Wing ridge about 30 cm lower. Ridge of rear porch running into main roof about a third of way up. Single dormer with hipped roof at northwest end of front elevation. Rear roof eaves lower to northwest of porch. Two axial stacks, one at southeast gable end, one central. Fenestration irregular.

note: access to end of wing impossible as wing of Brownsham Cottage and lean—to butts onto northeast elevation of wing. .

Roof

Main house	Large slates on front elevation, with rear having later, more usual size slates, similar to barn roof. Red ridge tiles. Front porch and dormer slated.
Wing	irregular size slates, ridge as main roof.
Rear porch	slate with red ridge tiles.
Rear projection	corrugated iron.

Walls

Main house	
Front	possibly cob, rendered with chamfered plinth, whitened. Front porch supported by wing wall and curved timber.
Rear	stone rubble, eaves level raised, northwest section different build and extended out. Stairs window cuts through earlier small square opening.
Side	(southeast) elevation stone rubble, disturbed and cracked, buttressed at base, stack apparently at right angles to front and rear walls, stepped twice, while wall cuts across at an angle (see plan). Small break to southwest side of stack. Roof slopes meet stack at differing levels, front roof lower.
Side	(northwest) inserted wall of stone rubble visible in barn.
Wing	
Front	rendered and whitened. Northeast window inserted in former doorway, blocked window above. Two airbricks in wall.
Rear	cob on stone rubble base, some stone patching .
Porch	stone rubble with flat arches of vertical stones and larger protruding keystones. Access opening single wood lintel, slightly arched on lower side.

Outhouse

Barnstaple brick, front whitened, blocked doorway in front (northwest) and rear (southeast) faces. Rear elevation has cob and some stone near house, remnants of an earlier building, possibly infilled doorway.

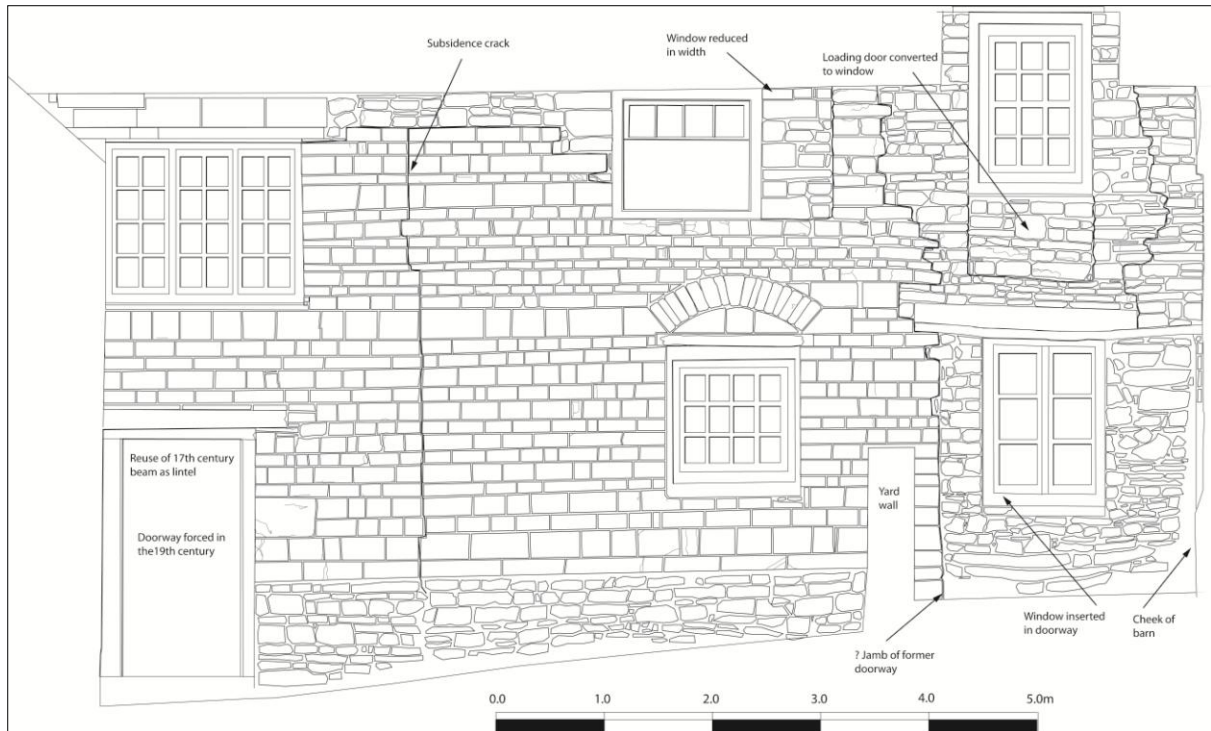


Figure 3 Drawing of the north east elevation



Figure 4 Photograph of the north east elevation



Figure 5 Drawing of north west elevation



Figure 6 Photograph of north west elevation

Stacks

- Southeast gable rectangular, stone rubble to about 50 cm above ridge, capped with slates except for modern square brick flue, with single oversailing course.
- Central brick rectangular, single oversailing course, lead flashing.

Interior roof construction

- Main house (roof access in south corner of room H.)
- Original roof Two trusses are visible, apices halved and lapped with three square-cut pegs, forming housing for square, diagonally-set ridge piece, scarf jointed. Collars notched, halved and lapped, reaching to outside edges of truss blades, each joint held by two squared pegs. Collar above plaster ceiling (room H) slightly cranked with arch bracing, which is now held to collar by metal clamps. Truss 2 (northwest truss) arched bracing only visible on southwest side, truss obscured by inserted timbers supporting ceiling. Truss feet set in tops of walls. Two sets of purlins, trenched, scarf-jointed. Old rafters (now gone) were pegged to purlins. Pitch of roof was steep enough for thatch. Surviving ridge piece over northwest end of bedroom broken, and pointing down at an angle of about 30°. Southeast end of northeast lower purlin now rotted and slipped down from housing on end stack.
- Modern roof This is very difficult to describe fully as so many timbers have been inserted over the years to support the ceiling, and timbers and ties obscure and confuse the roof-space.
- Modern roof - clasped rafter construction with southeast end of ridge supported on two timbers, set on step in stack and forming two sides of triangle: both rotting at base as water comes in between stack and slates, the flashing has gone and daylight shows. Far end of ridge presumably housed in central stack but behind second truss. Vertical braces from old trusses to ridge. New purlins; that on northeast side probably resting on stack, end wet.
- Ceiling given extra support by various timbers set across (northeast/southwest) roof space, mostly resting on purlins. Vertical wire supports, and vertical timbers support ceiling (see photos). One such timber has 'This hung up October 2nd 1917' written in pencil on it. Renovations of the ceiling were possibly done in 1935 and 1952 (see copies of documents from Muniments included in report.)
- Wing roof Above room K: single pair of truss blades, apex halved, nailed and crossed with vertical timber nailed to thin vertical ridge piece. Tiebeam nailed. Purlins on back of blades. Modern rafters with irregular sized slates apparently cemented together. Northeast partition wall (rooms K/L) cob to apex with moulding on northwest side to below purlin level (former ceiling line) consisting of fillet, ovolo, fillet, cavetto. Junction of extension to main roof has valley boarding with main roof rafters continuing to eaves level. Above room L: no access. No trusses visible. Round purlins. Northeast gable wall cob.

Ceilings

Ground floor

Room A	plastered and papered.
Room B	probably plasterboard, stepped up 10 cm near stairs. Transverse beam chamfered with well-cut scroll stops at northeast end, none visible at other end.
Room C	probably plasterboard with two axial modern beams 15 x 7 cm, lightly chamfered.
Room E	low, probably plasterboard.
Room F	as room E.
Room G	hardboard with battens, single roof support showing.

First floor

Room H	<p>early 17c decorated plaster ceiling (see photographs and drawings). The design shows eight outer hearts and four inner ones formed by enriched double ribs, with mouldings in the hearts and in four of the spaces, and a central pendant with four faces. The double ribs have a design of bunches of grapes and vine leaves running between them. The mouldings in the hearts are of various flowers and leaves, the mid one on the southwest side also incorporating a face. The decorations between the hearts are four plates of fruit, pears, lemons, apples and oranges. This ceiling is badly overpainted, is cracking and bulging, and is in urgent need of repair, as are the supporting timbers in the roof.</p> <p>Comparison of the present ceiling with the 1935 Ministry of Works drawing in Muniments shows that all the terminal ornaments are now missing, as are the decorations above the frieze on the southeast wall.</p>
Room I	boxed in collar and truss blade.
Room J	truss blade.
Landing N	truss blade.

Partitions

Ground floor

Room A	plastered and whitened. Partition between Room A and lobby D of planks (see below).
Room B	plastered, whitened, possible doorway on right of fireplace.
Room C	plaster, whitened, with plinth showing on front and back walls. Damp showing above floor level, particularly on northwest wall.

Room D	niche in front wall. Partition with room A of wide beaded boards, southeast side 3 horizontal ones, southwest wall vertical boards with horizontal above door.
Room E	plastered and whitened.
Room F	as room E.
Room G	rubble stone and cob on southeast, rest brick, painted.
First floor	
Room H	plastered and whitened with plaster frieze on southeast and northwest walls repetitive pattern of two Pegasus horses supporting a shield, with grapes and foliage. Bounded above and below by simple mouldings. Southeast wall three repeats of pattern with two part repeats included. Northwest wall three repeats of pattern, with one pattern in entrance to room, and one on each side of the alcove in the north corner. Vertical boards form front of airing cupboard.
Rooms I, J, K. & L	as room E.

Floors

Ground floor

Room A	large rectangular slabs of slate in north half of room, slabs near entrance to washroom G floated over with cement. Rest of floor concrete.
Room B	cement, possibly floated over slate slabs.
Room C	concrete.
Room D	slate slabs, with step down from front door also slate.
Rooms E, F and G	concrete.

First floor

Room H	pine boards, one step higher than probable earlier floor level.
Room M	cork tiles.

All other first floor rooms pine boards.

Stairs

Main stairs	dog- leg with bathroom opening off first quarter turn and bedroom H from second. Plain wallstring on northeast (stack) side, stepped wallstring on southwest wall. Short balustrade on landing, newel chamfered with run-out stops and pointed finial. Handrail ogee curved, balusters square.
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Back stairs new, very steep quarter turn then straight run into bedroom K. Bottom step concrete. Balustrade has square newel, flat handrail and rectangular balusters.

Fireplaces

Ground floor

Room A small open hearth in blocked open fireplace with firebasket and fireback. Rear of lintel, interior of stack and small flue on right side can all be seen by peering up the chimney. Shadow of lintel can be seen in stack wall. Northwest wall - possible fireplace lintel shadow 1.65m from floor , with jambs showing behind cupboard. Possible lintel of doorway showing on left.

Room B decorated stripped pine surround and mantel shelf (see photo). Fireplace blocked with metal sheet screwed on, blue enamel Mirus log- burner standing in front on slate hearth.

Room G newly inserted boiler for central heating.

First floor

Room H blocked small open fireplace with position of wood lintel apparent in wall.

Room I plain wood surround and mantel on brackets , infilled, slate hearthstone.

Doors

Ground floor

Room A D1 (back) 5 planks and 4 battens , nailed on pointed strap hinges on pins, rimlock with bakelite knobs . Frame well- made, exterior has small chamfer with step run-out stops, probably early 19c .

D2 5 planks and 3 battens, shield- ended s trap hinges, rimlock with Bakelite knobs.

Room B D1 4 plank 2 x 2 (panels possibly hardboard), catchlock with brass knobs. Door frame 17c with ovolo moulding finishing in double scroll stops on the jambs (see photo). Short length o f moulded board in left (stack wall) but later in date (19c ?)

D2 5 plank and 3 battens, slightly shield-shaped ends to strap hinges, rimlock, bakelite knobs .

D3 (in alcove, fixed) 5 plank and 3 battens , spear- ended strap hinges.

Room C Opening supported by R.S.J.

Room D	(front) modern framed, upper 2 x 3 frosted glass , lower 2 x 1 panels, rimlock, bakelite knobs, weather board.
Room E	modern 8 plank and batten, lower braced, strap hinges, catch-lock with bakelite knobs. (understairs) 4 plank, strap hinges , wood button fasteners, door now fixed shut.
Room F	modern, 4 plank and batten, rimlock, bakelite knobs, strap hinges.
Room G	4 panel 2 x 2, covered on room G side with board, chrome lever handle . 2 blocked doorways.

First floor

Room H	D1 4 panel 2 x 2, catch-lock, brass knobs. D2 missing, frame plain. D3 (airing cupboard and roof access) 5 plank and batten, thumb- latch. blocked doorway in alcove to room I.
Room I	as H D1.
Room J	as room H D1. (cupboard) 4 plank and batten , knob, button fastener .
Room K	plank and batten, strap hinges, thumb-latch.
Room L	as room K but older. blocked doorway in southeast wall.
Room M	4 panel 1 x4, moulded both sides, catch- lock with brass knobs, old hinges.

Windows

Ground floor

Room A	horned sash, 4 x 2, panes square.
Room B	W1 fixed, 4 x 3 rectangular panes, window seat. W2 sash, no horns, 4 x 2, rectangular panes, window seat.
Room C	both same, 2 light casement 1 x 3, both lights opening , button fasteners.
Room E	modern 2 light casement 1 x 3, mullion, hook and eye fixtures.
Room F	as room E but spiral-ended stays.
Room G	W1 single light casement 2 x 2 , frosted, modern fixtures. W2 (in blocked doorway) single light 3 x 1, frosted, bottom hinged.
Porch	fixed single light 5 x 4.

Main stairs long and narrow, margin lights all round, centre 1 x 2 engraved glass. (see photo).

First floor

Room H W1 3 light casement 2 x 4, mullions (not old), centre light opening, hook and eye fastener, spiral- ended stay.
W2 single light casement 2 x 2, hook and eye fastener, modern stay.

Room I sash, upper 4 x 1, lower 4 x 2.

Room J sash, 3 x 2. Opening hooded, fitting in dormer.

Room K 2 light casement 1 x 3, modern spiral- ended stays.

Room L as room K
blocked opening in north corner.

Room M horned sash, 2x2.

Miscellaneous

Rooms I, J, M plain skirting.

Desk-based Assessment

The earliest record of Higher Brownsham so far found comes in 'Lord Dynham's Survey' dated 1566 when it was held by Robert Nicholl & his wife Agnes as Customary Tenants at this date the farm appears to have been quite an established holding. Many of the sixteenth century field names correspond with those in the nineteenth century tithe apportionment as follows:

'Robert Nicholl,

Granted to Agnes his wife, Peter & Agnes their children for fine of £46:13s:4d.

1566 SURVEY

House Barn & Garden & C

Voydyparke-3acres

Southdowne-10acres

Neweyate Parke-3acres

Esternorthdowne-6acres

Westernorthdowne-4acres

Ester Motten Darke-4acres

Wester Motten Parke-4acres

Lawneparke-1 acre

Esterstokfield-1½ acres

Westerstokfield-1 acre

Moore Park-3 acres

Yolden-11 acres

Knapp-3 acres

Yappen Corner-12 acres

Solom-1½ acres

TITHE APPORTIONMENT

East South Down

North Down Hill

East Mutton Parke

West Mutton Parke

Lane Parke

Stockfield mead

Moor Parke

Youlden

Salem (Lower Brownsham)

1 Meadow Bewest the House-1 acre

1 Withybere-¼ acre

Total: 69 ¼ acres

At the same time, John Nicholl & Thomas Avery held Lower Brownsham. We know this because the field names of their holding have survived & appear in the Tithe Apportionment as part of the estate of the present day Lower Brownsham.

'John Nycolle & Johanna his wife' had held Lower Brownsham by copy of court roll since at least 1521, if not earlier. Six of the 39 acres which John Nicholls held belonged to Higher Brownsham at the time of the Tithe Apportionment.

R. Pearse—Chope in his notes mentions that in 15752 John Nicholl appeared to be the owner of Higher Brownsham. He also records in his book: 'The Story of that the glove—making industry had been the preserve of the Nicholls' remaining in that family alone.

In 1609, Lawrence Sincocke (3) granted land to Peter Nicholl who is described as of Brownsham'. Peter Nicholl was married to Mary Cleverdon in 1635. It is possible that the plaster ceiling at Higher Brownsham was constructed at this time to the marriage with the 'green man motif as a fertility symbol incorporated into the plasterwork design. Certainly if not at this date, the work was carried out a little later during the mid—17th century & was possibly the work of John Abbott or one of his apprentices (see below).

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