

9 HIGH STREET GREAT TORRINGTON DEVON

A Record of the Gable of the East Elevation



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A Record of the Gable of the East Elevation

For

Sam Percival

on behalf of

Jayne Wafforne

By



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Summary

South West Archaeology Ltd (SWARCH) undertook a programme of recording of the first floor gable of No. 9, High Street, Torrington, Devon that had been exposed during recent repair work to the building.

The building is of 17th century date; probably a former merchant house with a shop on the ground floor. The first floor gable is constructed of a very fine timber frame with decorated panels that formerly surrounded a large landscape window.

In the early/mid 19th century the street elevation was 'modernised'. The 17th century window was removed and replaced by a narrower, taller sash window that cut through the tie-beam of the timber frame. The remainder of the window opening was closed with timber stud work and the whole structure, including the panels, was faced with lath and a lime render.

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1.0 Introduction

Location: No. 9 High Street
Parish: Torrington
County: Devon

1.1 Project Background

South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) was commissioned by Sam Percival of Building Conservation Services (the Agent) on behalf of Jayne Wafforne (the owner) to undertake a survey and record of the recently uncovered gable of No. 9 High Street, Torrington, Devon. The work was undertaken in consultation with Sarah Chappell conservation officer for Torridge District Council (TDC).

No. 9 is situated central to the High Street, Torrington, opposite the main entrance of the Town Hall. It is likely that the Town Hall and all of the adjacent buildings within the High Street, Fore Street, Cornmarket Street and South Street are the infill of a market square all of which post-dates the construction of No. 9. Regardless of whether this is correct No. 9 occupies a site of considerable status within the medieval core of Torrington.

Although the building is not listed the importance and uniqueness of the street elevation was recognised in 1903 (see appendix 1).

1.2 Methodology

A measured survey of the gable end structure was undertaken by Brynmor Morris and Colin Humphreys during November 2015. The work was commissioned when the timber structure and panelling of the gable were uncovered during repairs to the front elevation of the building.

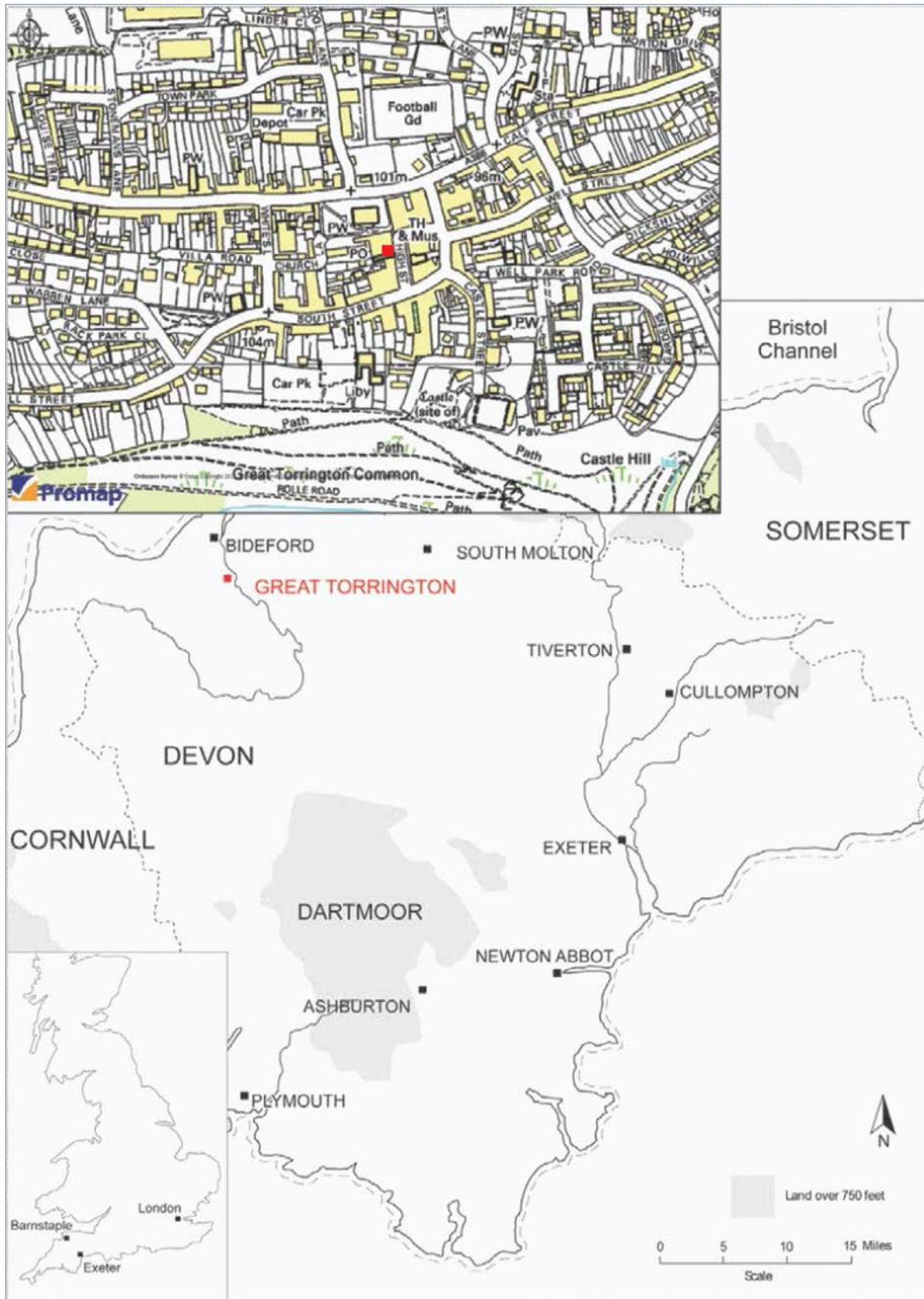


Figure 1: Site location (the site is indicated in red).

2.0 Historic background



Figure 2: Extract from a map of Torrington of unknown date; No. 9 is coloured.

2.1 General history (extract from; Devon Historic Coastal and Market Towns Survey).

Great Torrington today reflects its 1000 year plus historical development, from rural farming estate to post-industrial town. Overall, its historic urban character is distinctive for its variety - part market town, part industrial settlement, part inland resort, part village.

The core of the town, with its infilled market place, irregular grid of narrow streets, inward looking views and strong sense of enclosure, largely retains the feel of a medieval market town, and continuous use and successive rebuilding has resulted in an eclectic mix of architectural styles, details and materials.

The commercial core of Torrington (fig 2), is located on relatively level ground, sloping gently from west to the east. This area became the heart of the medieval town with South Street, its sinuous main artery, leading into a medieval market place.

Although the open medieval market place was subsequently in-filled, its location is indicated, in part, by the sub-square area enclosed by South, High, Fore and Cornmarket streets. The variation in shape, size and orientation of the buildings within the centre block, and the fact that the block's alignment is skewed in relation to the surrounding street pattern, suggests a plan-form that evolved from temporary market structures being subsequently consolidated into more permanent buildings.

2.2 No. 9 the High Street

The uniqueness of this building was recognised in the early 20th century when a Mr. George Doe photographed the street elevation and commented on the excellent condition of the structure (fig 3 and appendix 1).

The building is probably mid-late 17th century in date and is likely to have been a merchants house with a ground floor shop. The first floor was lit by a large rectangular window facing on to the market. The gable above the window is a closed timber frame structure set with decorated wooden panels.

This ornate treatment of the street elevation reflects the status of the position of the building in the medieval core of Torrington and the owners success as a merchant of the town.

During the early-mid 19th century a hornless sash window was inserted partially in to the existing window opening. To fit the 'new' shape of window the central section of the tie-beam and the lower parts of the central panels were removed. At this point (and possibly earlier) the panelled section of the gable was clad with lath and render.



Figure 3: Photograph taken in 1903 by George M. Doe, see appendix 1.

3.0 The East Elevation



Figure 4: The gable photographed from the north east.

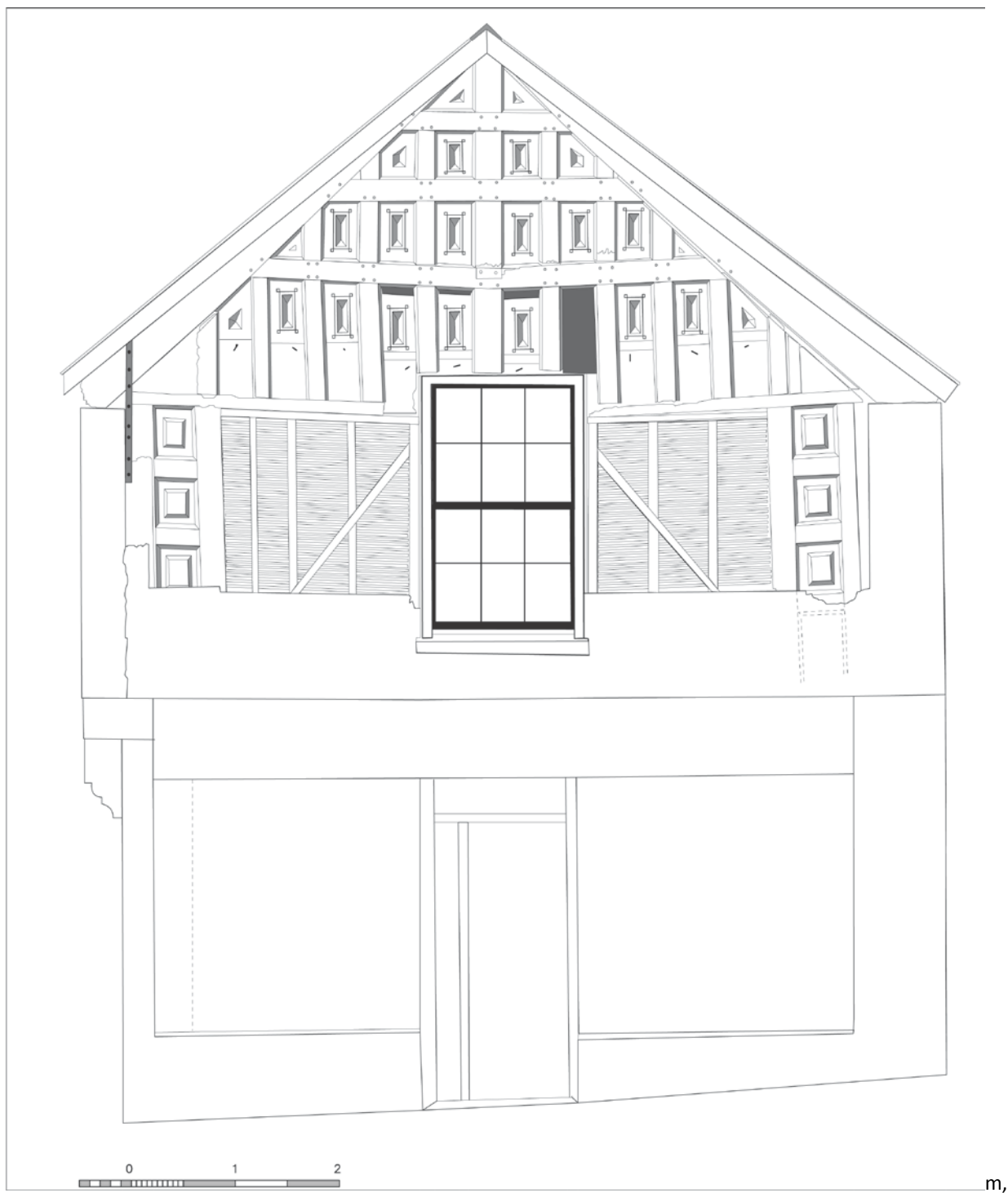


Figure 5: The east facing gable of No. 9 High Street, Torrington.

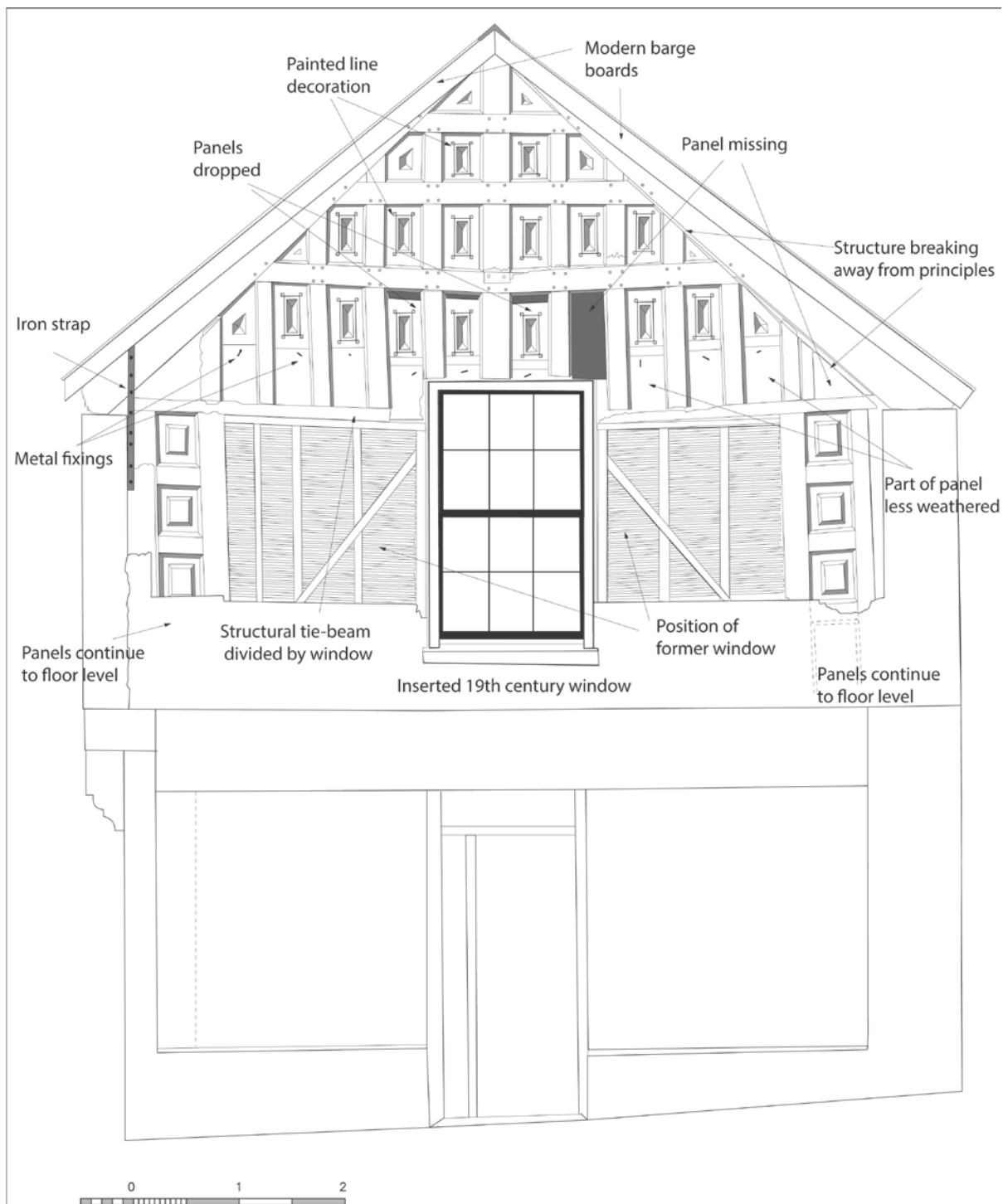


Figure 6: The east facing gable of No. 9 High Street, Torrington (annotated).

3.1 The gable structure

The structure consists of a timber frame work forming a closed truss with a pair of principle rafters and a tie-beam, the space between being filled with three fairly equally spaced collars. Between each of the horizontal members are a series of uprights forming rectangular spaces into which the decorated panels are fitted.

The panels are decorated with centrally placed recessed designs that reflects the shape of the panel. Each recess is framed with a painted line (possibly red).

The panels that frame the former window opening are raised and fielded.

The lower row of panels above the former window show less weathering on the lower part, this area is defined by score marks and towards the centre of each there is the remnants of a metal fitting. This combination would suggest that a covering detail was fitted over part of the lower panels which would seem to be fitted from the back of the panel.

3.2 Condition at the time of survey

Apart from the wet rot which appears to have developed behind the lath and plaster covering the major problem has been caused by the insertion of the sash window in the 19th century. To enable the 'modernisation' of the building a large central section of the structurally important tie-beam was removed. The effect of this work has been to weaken the structure and allow the principle rafters to spread.

4.0 Conclusion

The core of the building is a mid-late 17th century merchant house possibly once with a detached block to the rear (beyond the scope of this survey).

Although the majority of the building is of little merit the treatment of the first floor gable is of extremely high quality, unusual, if not unique in Devon.

The prominent position within the town and quality of the workmanship deserves proper restoration and presentation. To correctly repair the structure would involve repairing the tie-beam and returning to the 17th century window shape. This would remove the 19th century window however, this would seem to be a small sacrifice to enable the display of timberwork that like of which is unknown in North Devon.

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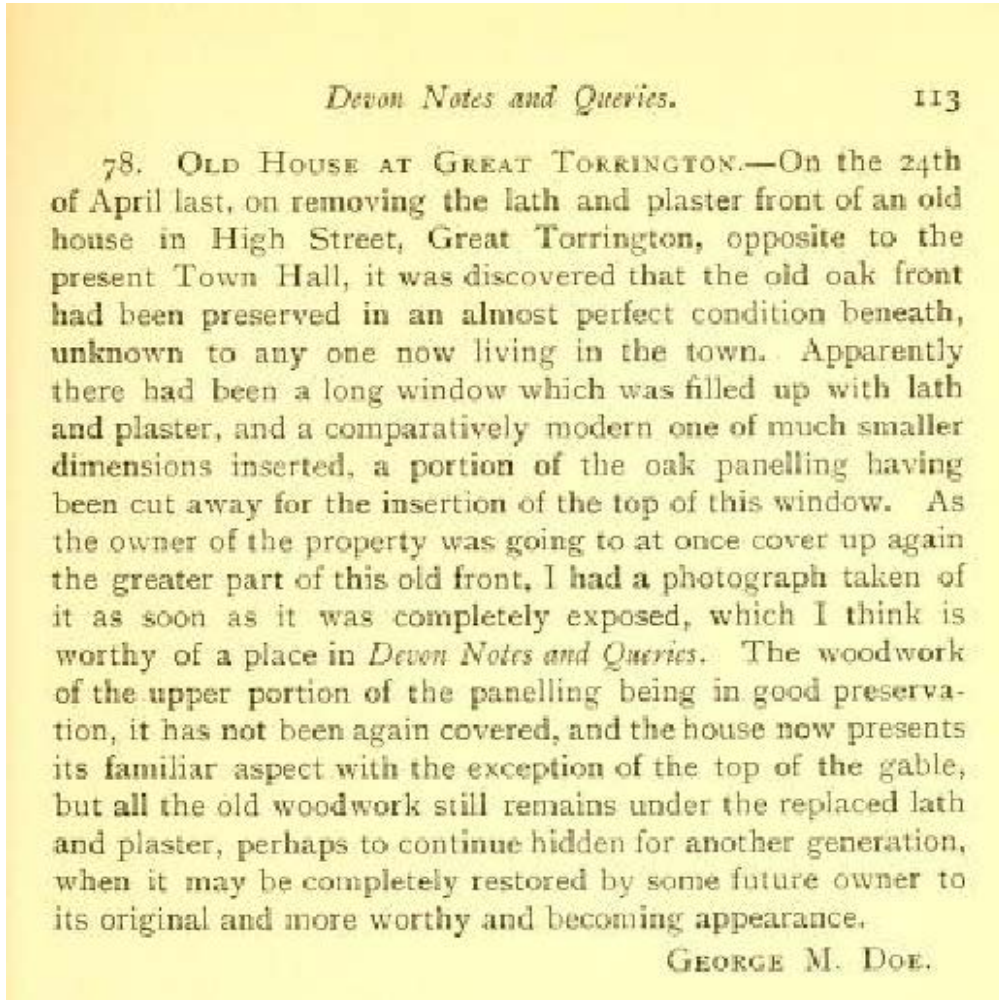
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6.0 Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1: Extract from the Devon Notes and Queries, Vol. 2 1903.



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