

A Tale of Some Houses

Marion Pratt – May 2024

Excerpts from the Time Line

Thanks to Veronica Mathews

- 1086 – Domesday refers to Sampford Courtenay as “Sanfort”. 4,000 taxable acres with 300 people.
- 1242 – Sampford Courtenay is called “Saunforde”, meaning “sandy ford”, “Curtenay” (later becoming “Courtenay”) also added.
The Courtenay family becoming Earls of Devon in 1335.
- 1274 – It becomes Sampford Courtenay
- 1570 – Kings College acquired the Manor of Sampford Courtenay
- 1809 - SC Manor consists of 4903 acres of which Kings College own 4356 acres.
- 1920 -29 – Kings College sold off a number of properties.

1242 Book of Fees – lists Sampford Courtenay and Honeychurch as part of the Okehampton Honour ...

*(The feudal barony (or Honour) of Okehampton was **the largest medieval fiefdom in the county of Devon**, whose caput (main part) was Okehampton Castle and manor)*

With various sub-manors held for knight's fees.

A knight's fee was a feudal obligation to provide military service to the Crown in the form of a knight with his retainers for 40 days a year.

Historian W G Hoskins(1954) described Sampford Courtenay as

“Cheerful, neat and clean with much whitewashed cob and good thatching.”

Sampford Courtenay now covers a total area of 3,350 hectares (8,275 acres) with a population of around 550.

Original 16th Century houses in Sampford Courtenay.

Devon longhouses were generally constructed between the 14th and 18th centuries. They were typically single-storey with **thatched roofs**, and the reason for their distinctive shape was a practical one: they were **built to house both people and livestock in a shared building**. Families lived in a raised area, with a cross-passage separating them from the cattle in the 'shippon', or cattle shed. Animal waste was removed by means of a sloping floor and gutter which is why longhouses were built on inclines.

Original 16th Century houses in Sampford Courtenay.

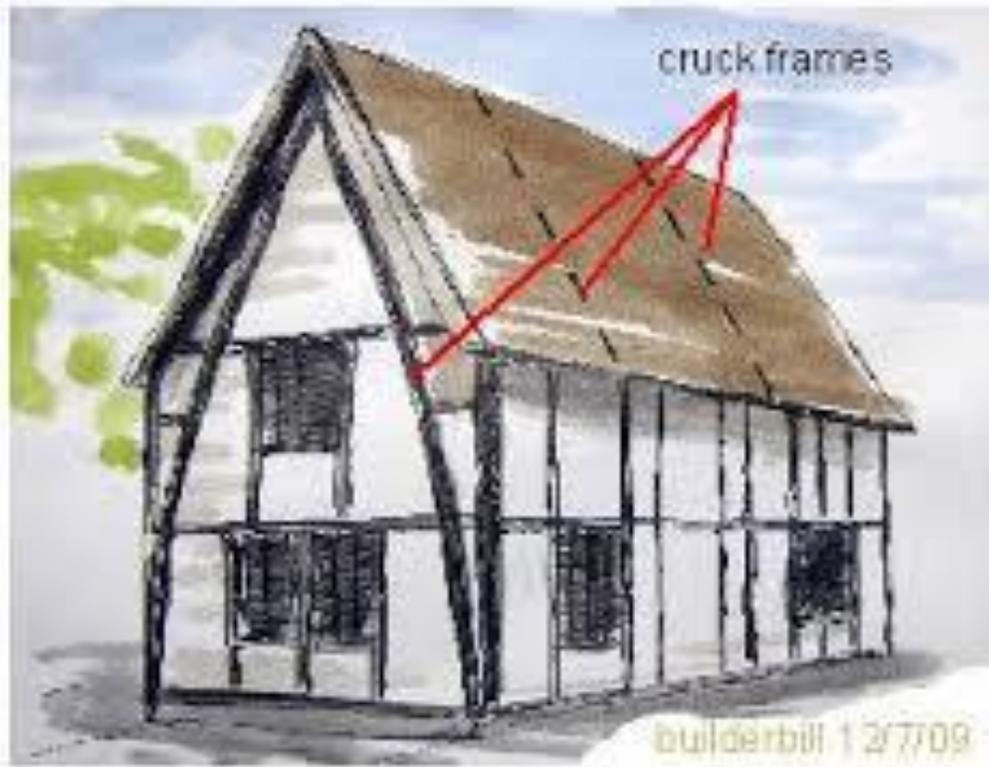
- **Cob Houses**

- Typically, medieval Devon houses are built of ‘**cob**’, **clay and sand, with some straw for a binder**. This can survive from as early as the houses themselves as long as it is protected from damp getting into the tops of the walls – preferably also with stone footings, though some cob houses have the walls built directly on the ground.

- **Thatch**

- The roofs are thatch and, because of the Devon tradition of re-thatching by just replacing the outermost layers, **the original medieval inner thatch itself very often survives intact, blackened with smoke**, but preserving extraordinary snapshots of medieval flora – not only the straw but also all the weeds that grew among the corn in the Devon fields

Cruck House



Cruck buildings, referred to in Medieval documents by the Latin word *furcae* (fork) are built around pairs of timbers (cruck blades) that extend from the ground all the way to the apex of the roof in a single sweep, forming an arch-like truss.





Carpenter's Barn – (originally part of Higher Town)

Showing trees in front of barn and large door/window.

There was also **another large door/opening directly opposite this door** and another door from the field at the right hand end as you look at the picture.

Thus making it's original purpose, I believe, a
THRESHING BARN.

Threshing the corn crop by hand continued to be the predominant way of processing the crop into the 19th century. The sheaves of corn were beaten with a flail to separate the grain from the straw, the latter being stored in the bays either side of the threshing floor. **The grain and chaff (the husks) were then winnowed to separate them by throwing the grain into the air, the through-draft from the opposing doors blowing the chaff away from the grain**



Medieval Houses in Sampford Courtenay

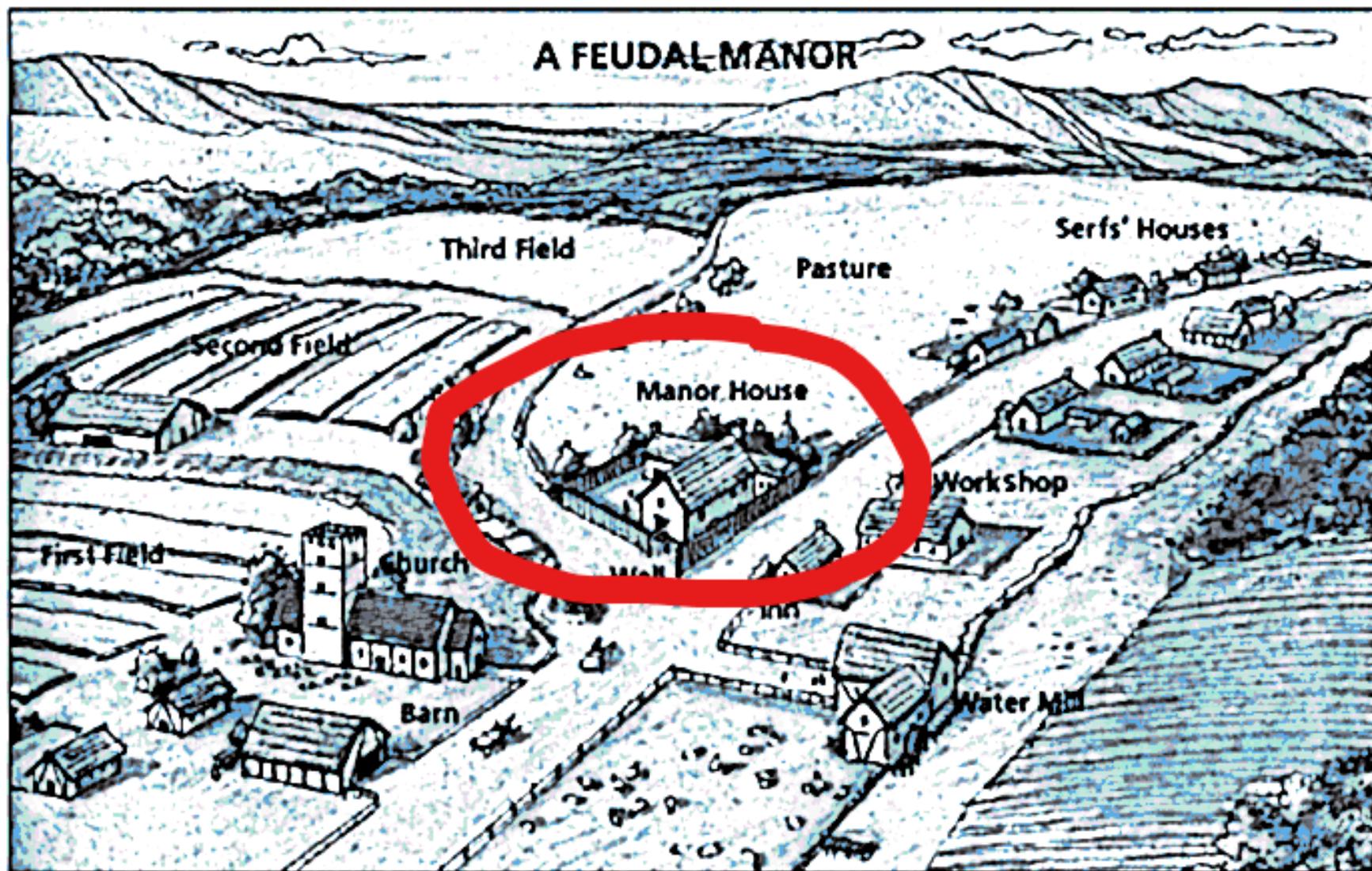
- Were likely to be Cruck houses .. With timbers grown in the local forests.
- Filled in with Cob – made from the local mud and cattle manure.
- Possibly some stone from the local quarries.
- Covered with Thatch – grown in the local fields
- Single Floor, Open Hearth with hole to let smoke out of the roof – leading to evidence of smoke charred beams/thatch in many homes.
- Designed for a purpose Threshing Barn, Forge etc

Who are you calling a peasant?

- The term 'peasant' suggests poverty, ignorance, missing teeth, and poor personal hygiene: Baldrick stuff, all threadbare rags, hunched shoulders, and a life shared with pigs in a squalid hovel barely adequate to keep out the bitter winter wind. **In fact, all that 'peasant' really means is that you live mainly off the produce of your own labour.**
- Peasant landholdings doubled in size in the period 1380 to 1540, enabling peasants to produce a surplus for sale in local markets. Many peasants were also able to supplement their income from pursuing such occupations as mining or fishing, or working as artisans or traders.

The “Sub” Manor of Sampford Courtenay

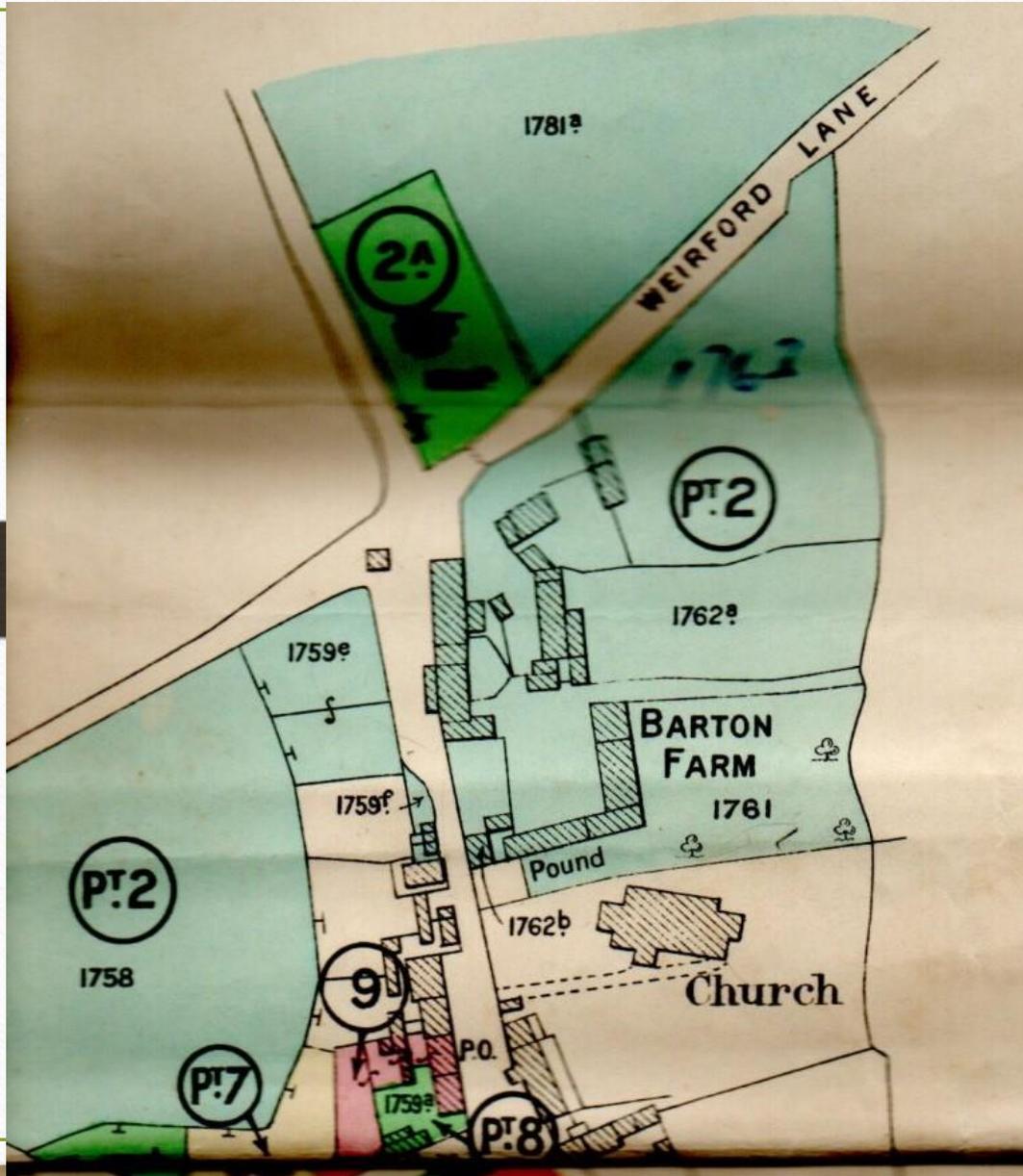
- As stated at the beginning Okehampton Honour was divided into several “sub” manors.
- Sampford Courtenay being one such “sub” manor.
- Centred around the main, central, farmstead and manor house – The Barton.
- With other farms, houses both large and small to house the necessary workers in the parish and their livestock.



Source: Michael B. Petrovich et al., *People in Time and Place: World Cultures*, Silver, Burdett & Ginn, 1991

The Barton

1929 Map from King's College
Sale Catalogue
showing the extent of the
Barton Farm Buildings before they
were sold off in 2004 after both the
Coates brothers had died.

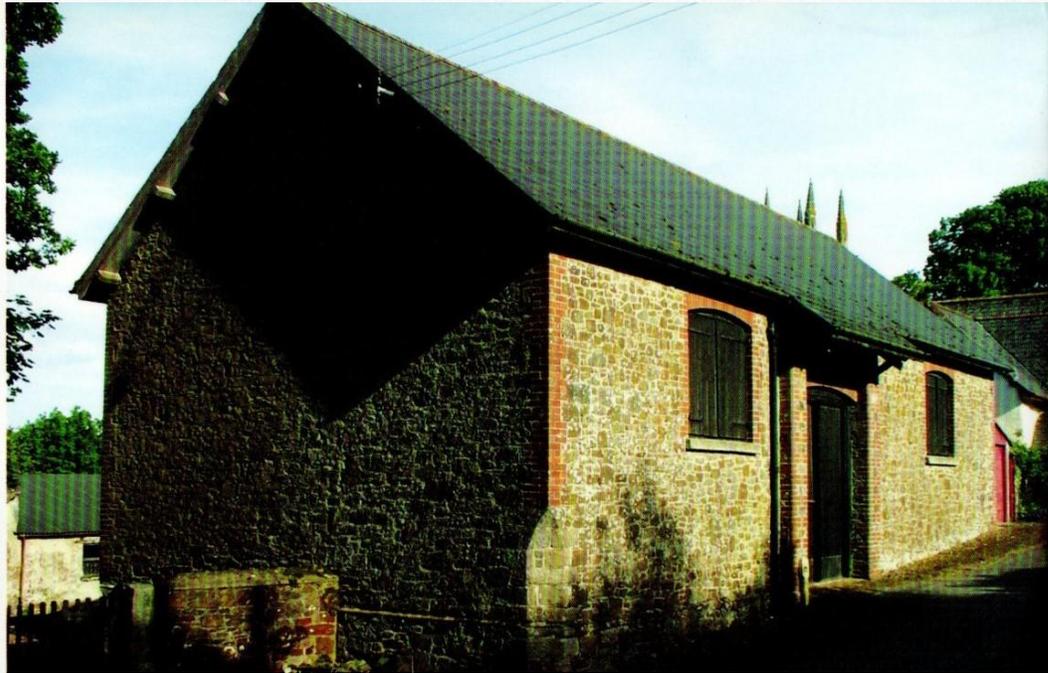


The Barton

Coates Sale of 2004



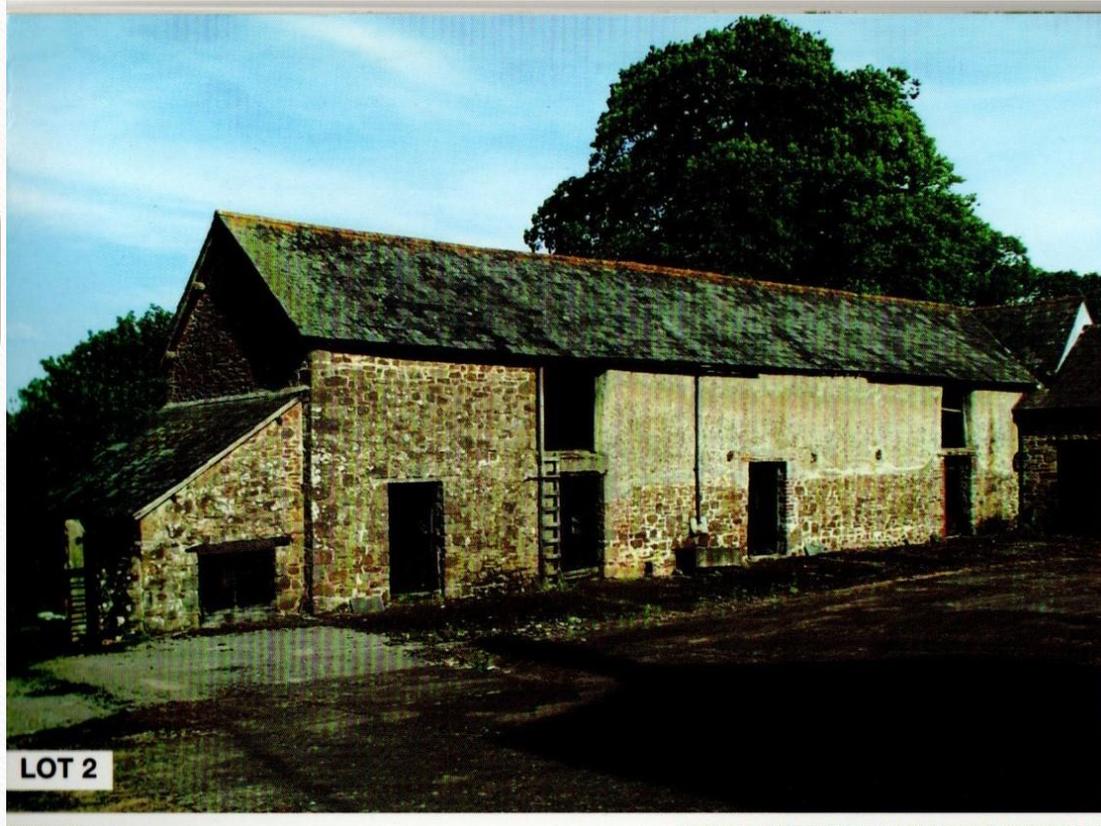
Then and Now – The Granary



Then and Now – The Linhay



Then and Now – Orchard Barn



Then and Now – Pound Barn



The Pound

Originally used to store stray animals roaming the village.



Barton Cottage



Was this a cottage in Tudor times?

Or was it a pig- sty?

More investigation required.

“The Barton” – derived from bere-ton meaning barley town was originally the lord’s demesne farm.

- 1930’s & 40’s – The Barton grew 3-6 acres of **Swede**, 3-4 acres of **mangolds**, and 1 -2 acres of **potatoes**, mainly for animal feed – but surplus was sold locally.
- Sheep dipping took place at the Barton and Hole Down Farm in Exbourne
- 1936 – the Coates family had **7 shire cart horses** to work the farm – they did not acquire **a tractor until WW11**.
- They also acquired a **Hornsby stationary engine** for operating machinery in the threshing barn – a thresher, a reed comber, a winnowing machine, a chaff cutter, a kibbler (for breaking down the maize) a cornmill and a saw bench.

Between 1920- 1929 King’s College sold off a lot of the land – The Barton, with 316 acres and 5 cottages sold for £5,600.

Higher Town Farm –



Early 16th Century Farmhouse –
according to [Historic England](#)

- 1820's came into the Horn Family
maternal line possibly in the name of
Dart
- 18th Dec 1944 – sold by King's
College to Leonard & Maurice Horn

This shows

- Main house thatched
- Cow shippens thatched
- Door into small lounge where foot
scrape now stands on cobbles.
- No wall protecting cobbled path.

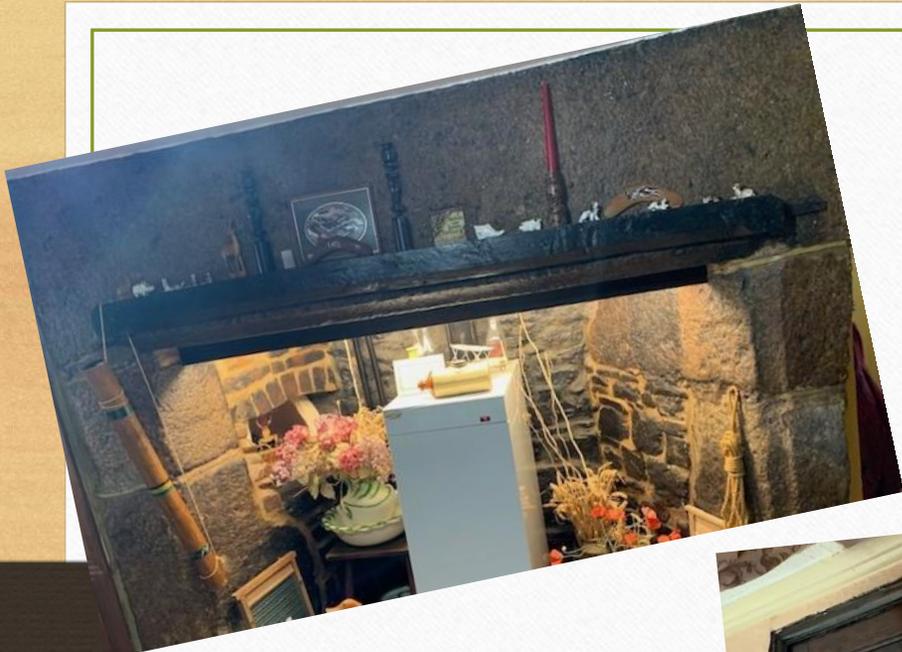
1898 – Painting (thank you to the Horn family)



Higher Town

- Originally single storey – **roof trusses blackened where smoke escaped.**
- Open cobbled passage through the middle for cattle access to yard.
- Bottom end of building used for cattle with tallet for hay/straw above.

- Current kitchen (once dairy with slate cooling shelf) has **hooks in ceiling** for hanging meat.
- Current dining room – more hooks in ceiling, large fire place with **bread oven** & granite lintel
- Small lounge – Another fireplace in the corner, with bread oven.
- Family lounge – Grand fireplace with **granite lintel**; **bible cupboards and carved benches** – reportedly obtained at one time from the Church.



1960's Aerial Photo



- Carpenter's Barn still part of Farmstead.
- Cows in the yard and shippons now corrugated and Farm concrete slated.
- No Hoofprints Bungalow or Churchward behind the farm.
- Barn and workshops next to 1 Part Harvey's belonging to "Paddon" family – now Little Harvey's Barn.



1980's Aerial Photo



- April 1983 - Pratt's bought the farm from the Horns.
- Carpenter's Barn still part of the farm.
- Farm Kitchen, hayloft, and dilapidated cob outbuildings were converted to a Self-Catering end of the house.
- Carpenter's Barn was sold to the Yeo's who did most of the conversion themselves. Including John, sitting on a ladder to apply the [pargeting](#) designs on the front of the house



Carpenter's Barn 1980's showing Pargeting.



2000 Aerial Photo





- This shows development of garages and carparking for Part Harvey's cottages and Hoofprints etc.
- There is also an extension (next to green tarpaulin) of 4 Part Harvey's (Hugh Franklin)

2016 – Katie & Chris's Wedding





1935 – Commemorative Tree for George V's
Silver Jubilee

Trecott

Trecott (Trycote , Devonshire pronunciation) (*the cottages by the tree*) is one of the several 'hamlets' of Sampford Courtenay Parish and is thought to have developed as a group of pre-Saxon/Celtic Devonian homesteads rather than a village settlement, which evolved much later.





The walls are very thick, as can be seen particularly at the window and door openings, and were made by mixing mud with straw, which was built up in sections and trampled down to harden.

This gives rise to the characteristic 'lumpy' walls, which lean at odd angles

The oldest part is the dining room/bedroom 4 region with its inglenook fireplace, magnificent granite chimney and bread oven (the 'bulge' in the external wall). It was probably the only living area at the time, becoming the kitchen in later years, where Phil Reddaway remembered buying the best milk and clotted cream in the village, from the big kitchen table in the middle of the room.



There is a cross passage beyond the dining room, through which both people and animals once entered the building. The lower part of the house, demolished some time between 1900 and 1929 and rebuilt in the early 1990's, is thought to have originally housed the animals.

Outside, the lincay by the front door became the pump house, The pump has been re-sited and the bread oven for the sitting room was removed to make room for the huge granite trough, also re-sited in the garden



The first mention of Trecott in Stephanie Pouya's book on Sampford Courtenay is from the Assize of 1296. The Manor of Sampford Courtenay was acquired by King's College, Cambridge in 1570 and Thomas Ellys was a tenant of indenture at Lower Tricott.

Kings College sold it by auction as Lot 19 on 18th July 1929 as an excellent mixed Red Land Farm of 61 acres 1 rod and 16 poles.

It was bought by representatives of the late Mrs Mary F Jones –May, Nellie and possibly Bungy or Tom for £550 the money being loaned from Mr Weeks of Hatherleigh.

Hillcrest



Hillcrest which is located on the South side of the village was formerly recorded as either “Mount Pleasant” or “Mount Joy” in records from the 1940’s. However it is referred to in earlier records as “Orchard Cottage of South Town Farm”

The original section of Hillcrest is believed to have been built in 1600 however the oak beams in the original part of the house are thought to be even older having been previously used in a Shippon barn. These oak beams are so hard that it is almost impossible to drive nail into them

In common with many houses in Sampford Courtenay the original house was built in traditional “Devon” cob with oak beams and a thatched roof, remains of the thatch can still be seen in the loft.

The original cottage would have been one ground floor room with one room above. The ground floor room now the lounge has a deep inglenook fireplace with the original clome or bread oven.

Maureen Horne informed us that when she was a little girl her Aunt lived in the house and at that time there was still a well in this room. Although now capped as you walk across the lounge a hollow noise can be heard.

Just beyond the fence is a small shed building now housing sheep and livestock, but back in the day this was in fact where the **Postman rested his horse.**



Southey – King's College Sale 1939

SOLD

LOT 1.

All that Compact, Freehold Holding

known as

“SOUTHEY”

situated in the Parish of Sampford Courtenay (only a few hundred yards from the Village) and containing about

82 ACRES

of Excellent Pasture Land, Rough Grazings and undergrowth. Together with a good Range of Buildings which are ample for the holding. The property is partly bounded by a stream and there is a good well in the farmyard.

Southey Farm – before and after.



BARN CONVERSIONS IN THE 1970'S

Tim and Gillian Townsend-Green bought the farm in 1970. They bought it for the land and not for the accommodation: this was a wooden building with a tin roof erected temporarily in the 1940s

They lived in this building (temporarily) for 10 years. Tim built an extension to it – again with help from people in the village – and pondered where to build. Of course the planners were not happy with anything. They suddenly thought that the hay barn would make a good house and applied for planning permission. Meanwhile Tim started work on it, working weekends and after work. He always said that **if he had known how long it would take he would never have started**. The family moved in in 1980/81 and shortly afterwards actually got planning permission, having had to go through various hoops

South Town Farm



South Town Farm

- In 1809 James Snell owned the copyhold of **South Town**; by 1837 William Sanders was the tenant.
- George Sanders Sen and Jun farmed South Town from around 1850 until 1909, followed by John Harris.
- Fred Taylor bought the farm from King's College in 1928. Details of the Sale can be downloaded from the Website here <https://www.sampfordcourtenay-pc.gov.uk/history-sampford-courtenay>

Anecdotes from the current owners of Southtown Farm

- The local witch Florie lived at Southtown and there are witches circular marks carved in the beams over the windows
- “Witches’ marks - ritual protection symbols or apotropaic marks - have been found in many historic places, from medieval churches and houses, to barns, and caves”.





Martin's Close

MR James wrote “Martins Close” based there and the New Inn.

“Martin’s Close” by M. R. James is an early 20th-century ghost story told by an unnamed narrator who, whilst visiting Devon, investigates this remarkable case and explores the unresolved tensions between what we trust to be certain and what we do not.

Read the story [here](#)





Fir Cottage

Has a “Coffin Hole” !

Many a cottage stairwell was too narrow for a coffin so some featured a trap door between floors called a ‘coffin hatch’, (or sometimes a ‘coffin drop’, for obvious reasons). This allowed the dearly departed to be laid out at the end of a bed in their Sunday best for the procession of mourners who came round for tea and sympathy.

And it provided a more dignified exit to the graveyard. Much better than bouncing the body down the stairs.



And what was the origin of this building?

Was it for human habitation or livestock?

Honeychurch Church or “Huna’s” Church as
mentioned in the Domesday Book



The name probably comes from a **Saxon lad, Huna**, whose estate was the whole parish, and he built the first church.

The Normans rebuilt it, the nave and chancel are still Norman work, likely enough on the old Saxon footprint. The tower was added in the 1400s along with various windows added, the porch maybe a century later, the iron church gate in the 1900s.

There are **two old quarries in this parish**, marked on old maps, where the stone likely came from, and the tower uses clay mortar, dug from the soil of the surrounding fields; the earlier nave and chancel almost surely do the same.

The granite door and window surrounds come from nearby Dartmoor, where farming folk from hereabouts would have taken their cattle and sheep for summer pasturing possibly since the Iron Age if not before, and the render whilst new is as it would have been back in the day.

*God save the church, our Queen and
nation*

*A Queen Elizabeth I coat of arms painted
on the wall*



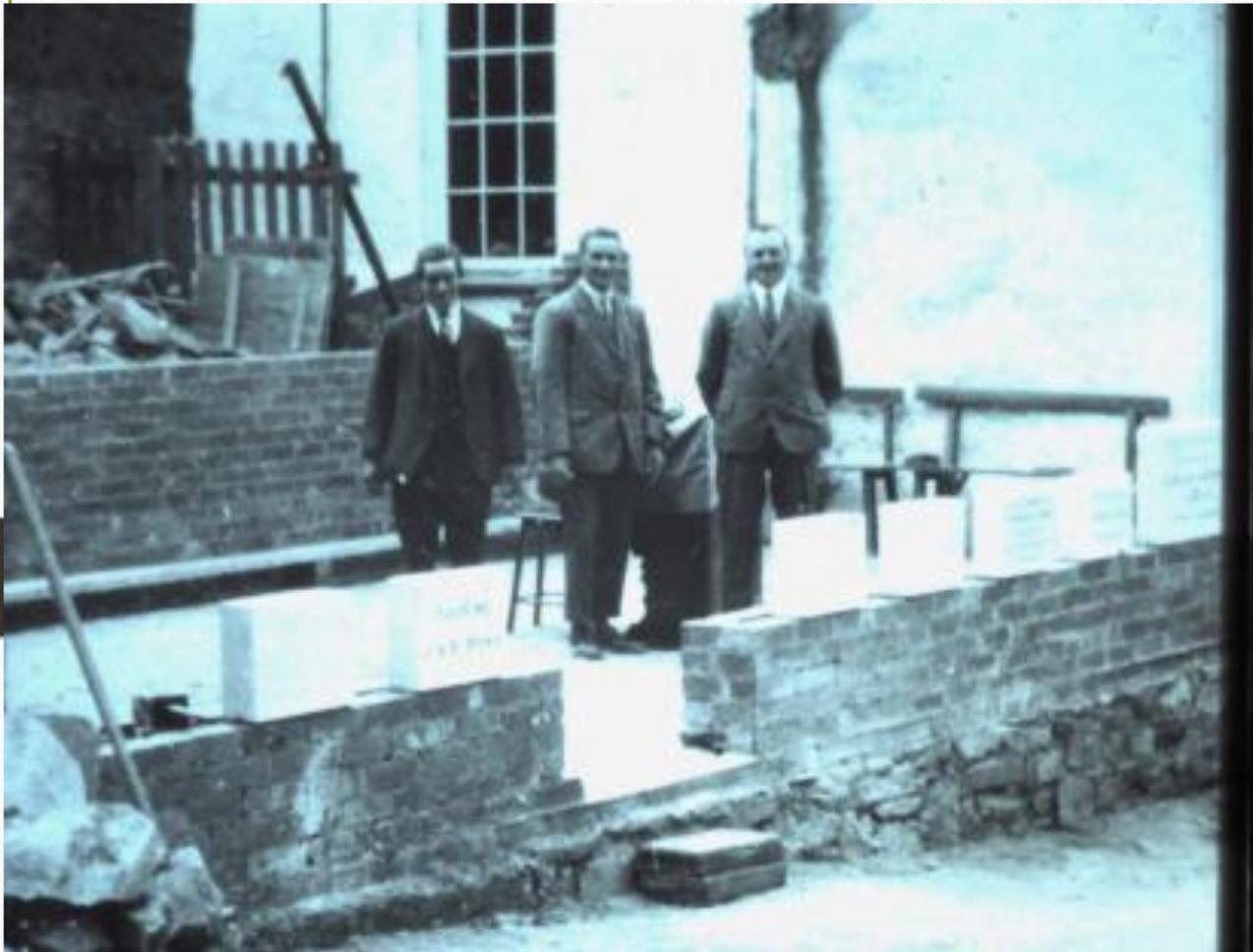
Methodist Chapel





The Sampford Courtenay Bible Christians initially met in the upstairs room of the small building, which became a single storey garage, adjacent to Alberries Cottages in the square.

An outside staircase gave access to the upper floor.



In 1876 Robert Hawkins senior, of Beerhill, who had purchased the cottages from King's College, gave a small plot of land nearby for the construction of a chapel.

The cornerstone was laid on 3 April 1876 and the chapel opened on 8th March 1877.

- At the opening celebration 160 visitors and friends sat down to tea and at the evening meeting the chapel was so crowded that many could not get in.
- When the new chapel was opened, the old meeting room was used as a Sunday School.

2014 – Falling congregations and death of several stalwart members of the congregation led to the closure of the chapel and its sale for development into dwellings.

- 2021 – Following pictures show how the Sunday School and Chapel have been converted into two dwellings.



Church Rooms



The Church Rooms have played many roles:-

- Built around 1500
- The Lord of the Manor's **brewhouse**
- Used as a **Court room** by the Courtenays and then King's College.
- 1615 – it was sublet to “*Stephen Heathman, **tailor** and Gertrude his wife.*”
- 1676 – 1698 – Roger & William Heathman made clothes for the poor.
- 1739 – It became the **Poor House** for the parish.
- 1786 – 1837 – the upper room was used as a **school room**.
- Latter part of 19th Century – one of the rooms was used as a **Sunday School**.
- 1880 – there is reference to it being a “**reading –room**” where parishioners could access newspapers and books.
- 20th Century – **Parish Council meetings** were held there
- **Young Men's Club** – billiards, darts, dominoes and cards & a wireless set that ran off an accumulator.
- The Church Rooms also hosted - Whist drives, Annual Hunt Balls, New Year's Eve Socials,
- Harvest Suppers
- Brownies.

1895 – A Letter from the Bursar of King’s College to Revd Little indicated that the College kept the premises in structural repair, but added :-

“As the only return we get is 5s a year from the School Board and the very occasional use of the Court Room It is open to question whether we can afford to go further than this.

The parishioners should show some interest in having the rooms made cheerful and habitable for clubs and school purposes.”

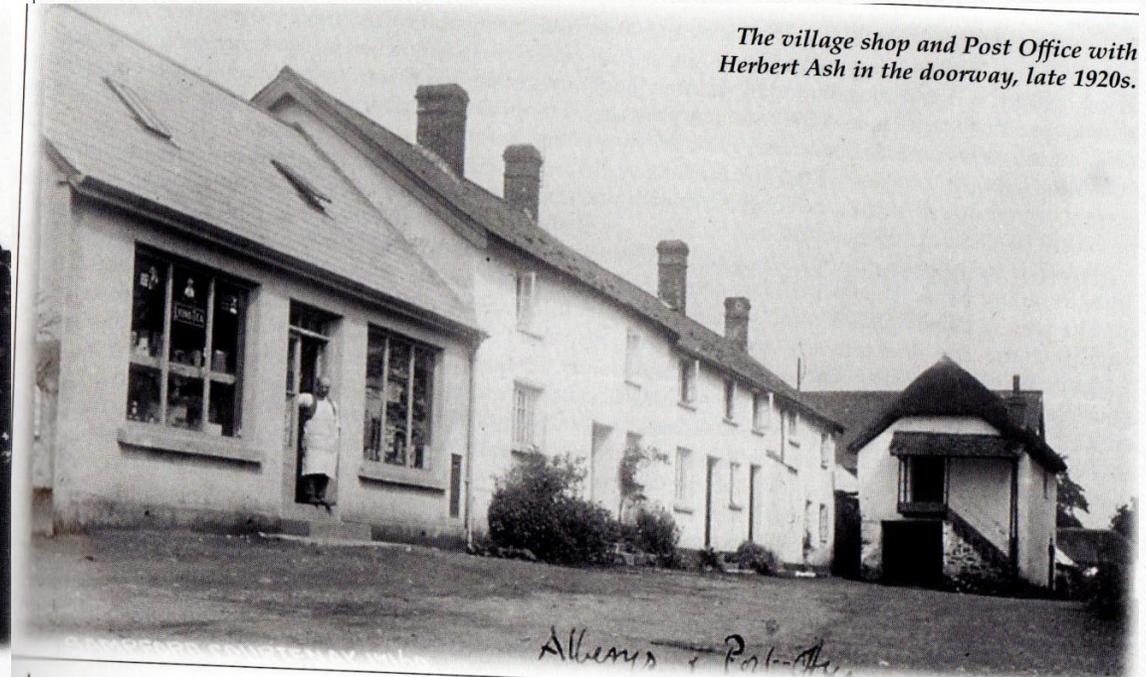
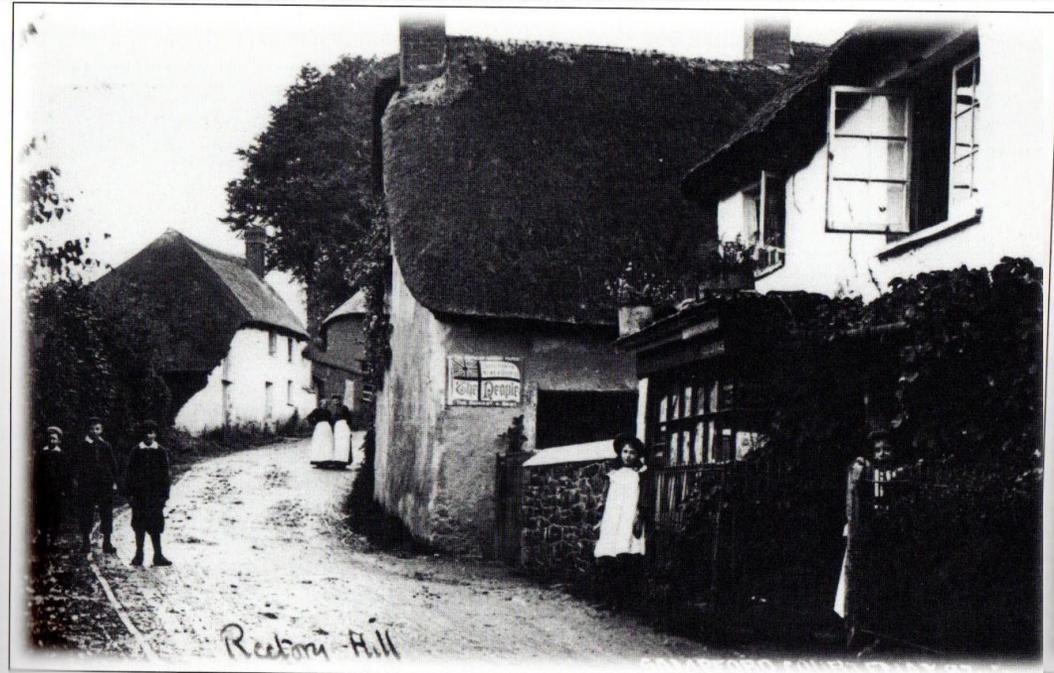
Other Trades in the Parish

- Thomas Stonman was a **maltser** in Honeychurch
- Heathmans' ran a **tailoring** business from the Church Room
- Records show that many of the poor were set to work **spinning and weaving**, and occasionally **maintaining the local roads**.
- Many women could have been **outworkers for the woolen Mill** in North Tawton.
- King's College had it's own **Timber Yard** at the bottom of Green Hill (now Morris's)
- There was a "**pound house**" (for **pressing apples**) opposite Harvey's in Town.
- During 1877 – 1878 – there was a rival **Dame's School**, run by a Mrs Ellis.
- **Shoemakers** – are listed as Thomas Brook (Shores), William Reed (Rectory Hill) Thomas Piper (Alberries) and John Bowden (Sampford Chapple)
- Samuel Knight (1 Part Harveys) until 1923. Aided by his grandson, Harold Cornelius, who many remember from his shoe shop in Fore St – North Tawton.
- **Blacksmiths** – at "Old Forge" on Rectory Hill, and at "Harveys" – this moved down to Forge Cottage in the early 1800's.



- There was an **Abattoir** in the yard at Sampford Station.
- 1820'2 – 1880's – Robert & John Folland were **stonemasons**.
- 1880's – 1890's – was the last resident **thatcher** in the parish.
- Two members of the Sanders family are described as **“veterinary surgeons, cattle doctors or farriers”**.
- **Butchers** shops at the bottom of Rectory Hill, Alberries, and Martinmas.
- **Fellmonger** – dealer in hides or a whip and thong maker.
- 1920 – John Ward operated as **college carpenter & steward** from (Little) Carpenter's Barn
- 1852 – **General Shop and Post Office** at bottom of Rectory Hill between the Old Forge and Fairview.
With a sub-post office at Sampford Station.
1925 – a new Post Office was opened in the Square.
- **General Grocery Shops** – at Little Hilly and Green Cottages
- **A Café and Petrol Station** at Sampford Station

Post Office Old & New...



Public Houses

There were at various times 5 public houses in the parish.

- The Courtenay Arms – (Albury – closed 1891)
- The Chapple Inn – (included a malthouse – closed 1930)
- The Courtenay Railway Hotel – (they used to sell liquor to the navvies when they were making the railway.) – Closed 1970's when the Railway closed.
- The New Inn
- The Countryman

Other interesting anecdotes

- Ty Unnos

Ty unnos is a Welsh term that translates to English as; **house** in one-night.

It refers to folklore, with some evidence of **practice** around the 1600's in **Wales**, as well as in **England** of rights associated with **constructing** a **house** between sunset and sunrise.

It was believed that, if a person could **build** a **house** in one single night on **common land**, have the **hearth fire** lit in the morning, with **smoke** coming from the **chimney**, they could **claim** the **freehold** of that **land** to live on.

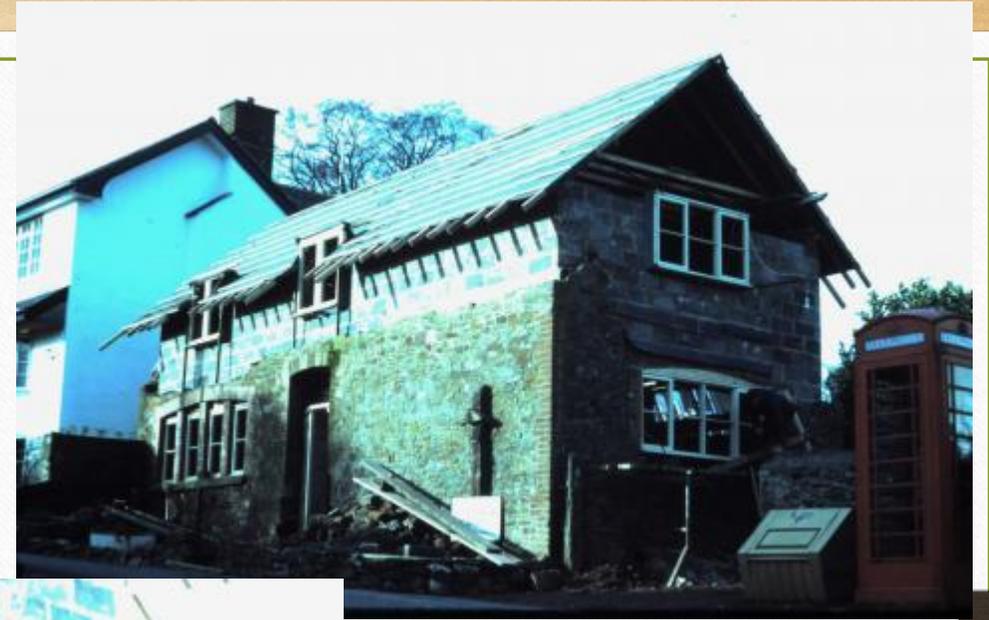
Variations include that they could live on the **land** for one year and that they could **claim land** around the one night **house** to the equivalent distance that they could throw an axe.

The term originates from a time when there was increasing **pressure** on **land** from **land enclosure**, **ownership** and **taxation** coupled with **rural housing shortages**.

Some more “Then” and “Now”
photos

Forge House





Part Woods



Bus Shelter



New Inn





Footbridge



Rectory Hill



According to Historic England – the following buildings are considered 16th Century or earlier.

- The Barton
- St Andrew's Church
- Higher Town
- Middle Town
- Yond Hill
- Lower Trecott
- Frankland Farm - Honeychurch

There are definitely more Tudor buildings, and others of interest within the parish that deserve more research.

The Sampford Courtenay Time Travel Group

Sampford Courtenay Village Hall - Fri - October 4th.



- Inaugural meeting of this local group to delve deeper into the history of our locality looking at the **People** who may have lived in your house in previous generations; **Place** - just how did Sampford Courtenay and Honeychurch develop over the years; and **Purpose** - what led to the changes over the years.
- Ideal for anyone who wants to find out about their own house or property and where to look for information about who has lived there over the years. Even if your house is relatively "new" then join us to find out about what life here might have been like in past generations.
- A specific example of how research has helped to gain an understanding of one particular property will be shared at this event which will, hopefully, lead to the group working out what sort of activities we'd like to do in the future.

Finally, “Thank You”

To everyone who sent me the interesting history of their homes in the Parish. Plus, acknowledgement of all the research by Stephanie Pouya in her “Book of Sampford Courtenay and Honeychurch”.

I am collecting anything and everything and placing it together with this Presentation on our Website to enable future generations to understand more about the lovely village in which they live.

Thank you.