

STONE-FRAMED WINDOWS IN THE DARSHILL, HAM AND BOWLISH HAMLETS OF SHEPTON MALLET

BACKGROUND

The Darshill and Bowlish Conservation Society, established to manage and improve the post-industrial landscape of the Sheppey valley, were awarded a National Lottery Heritage Grant to extend their work to promote public awareness and knowledge of this locality. A Heritage Project ensued which, in addition to recording and monitoring the biodiversity, set out to research the historical archives, archaeology and architecture and the former families involved in the cloth industry that had operated in the valley since the 15th century. The Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group conducted architectural surveys of selected houses in support of the project.

INTRODUCTION

WINDOWS

The use of stone framing appeared in the architecture of churches and grand houses in the medieval period. The window frame usually had an arched head and below, the individual lights, separated by mullions, were supported by decorative tracery with cusped heads. The arch usually projected from the wall and gave weather protection to the window, often terminating in a decorative feature such as a carved head or geometric shape.

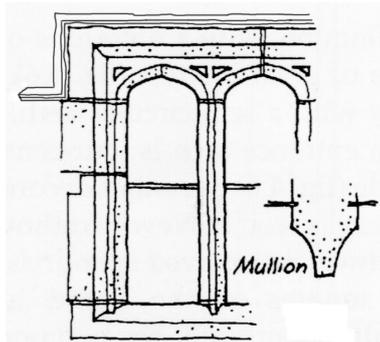


Fig. 1

By the late 15th century domestic windows were usually under square, that is, horizontal, heads and the projecting arch moulding gave way to a hood moulding, or drip mould, again often with decorative terminals (Fig.1). Below, the individual window openings frequently had arched heads with incised spandrels. Eventually the inner arching went out of fashion and by the 16th century windows became fully square-headed. This transition applied to wooden as well as to stone windows.

Windows are made up of a surrounding architrave, or frame, that may have a moulded profile or in later times be a flattened shallow stepped profile. Within the frame is an inner component to which the glazing is attached directly or held in an iron or wooden glazing frame which may open for ventilation. Several of the inner frames may be set within an outer frame and separated by mullions to create two or more lights, as the openings are called.

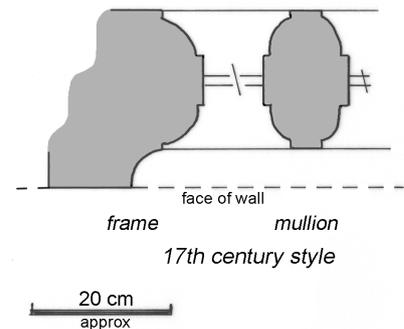


Fig. 2

Whether of timber or stone the window openings lent themselves to decoration. The inner frame was set back from the face of the wall and outer frame; the mullions and frame might be shaped to an ovolo form (Fig. 2) or other selected profile which would be linked to the outer frame with a step and a second profile perhaps of cavetto (hollow) or cyma (S-shape) form and another step. A hood mould would be installed above each window.

This form of window made a re-appearance, often with plain or cavetto mouldings, during the Gothic revival of the late 19th century

From the mid 17th century for about fifty years the transomed window became popular as ceiling heights and window sizes increased. In this tall, usually two- or three-light, window a horizontal member was inserted above the mid height level creating four or six lights; the horizontal and the mullion had a matching profile.

By the end of the 17th century a single hood extending over all the windows and, if necessary, stepping up over the door and down to the original level, replaced the individual hood.

Mullioned windows usually of two- or three-lights continued through the 18th and into the 19th century but the frame and mullions were generally flat fronted. The simplest had only a small bead edge to the window opening (Fig. 3). An added element of decoration was introduced in the form of a raised outer lip to the frame, as shown.

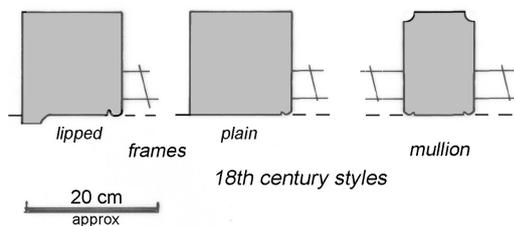


Fig. 3

The mullions or frames might alternatively have a small hollow chamfer internally or externally. By this period hood moulds had all but disappeared.

Buildings with classical façades have architraves surrounding sash windows. The architraves are of similar form, that is, a raised outer lip followed by quadrant or cyma form then two plain surfaces, each element separated by a small step (Fig. 4).

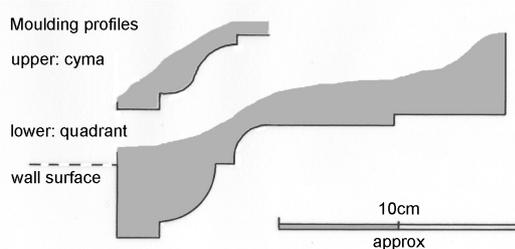


Fig. 4

WALLS

Over the centuries the walls of domestic buildings have decreased in thickness. A house in the 14th century might have masonry walls of 900mm thickness (about 3 feet). By the late 19th century the wall thickness had reduced to about half that value, typically 450mm. This trend is useful in detecting different building phases and relating architectural features with building fashions. However, it is an indicative rather than a diagnostic tool as wall thickness can be influenced by local building practice and circumstances.

A REVIEW OF THE BUILDINGS

This review covers fifteen Listed buildings in the Darshill, Ham and Bowlish tithings which have stone mullioned windows. The purpose of this paper is to examine the consistency of construction with the norms explained in the Introduction.

Windows with 17th century features

A fine example is seen on the north elevation of Bowlish Grange. The window has ovolo moulded mullions and a step moulding to the face of the outer frame. A quadrant stay to the central opening light and the relieving arch in the wall above the window adds to the authenticity of this 17th century window. The window has no hood. The wall here is approximately 600mm thick.

On the west side of the rear wing to Old Bowlish House there are several three-light mullions windows, each with an individual hood; the moulding of the mullions and frames incorporate a cyma element. The same moulding is also found in the two three-light transomed windows of the east wall of the wing and in a two-light transomed window on the north wall of the house, these three windows all having individual hoods.

To the rear of Park Farm House is a detached barn building with stone mullioned windows at first floor level. The window frame has ovolo moulding but the mullions are plain chamfered replacements.

The windows have individual hood moulds and are set in walls 600mm thick. The building is not shown on maps before 1885.

The windows of Old Manor have ovolo mouldings and the windows have individual hoods. However, the mullions are not well matched to the frame and neither they, nor the hood, show the expected level of weathering. The walls of the building are approximately 650mm thick

Studfold Cottage has ovolo-mullioned windows with individual hood moulds above. Wall thicknesses of up to about 1m have been recorded in the building.

On the south side of Ham Manor there are three-light windows with ovolo mouldings and individual hoods. On the north side there are a pair of mullioned windows some 7m apart linked with a continuous hood. This feature is all but obscured by a 2 metre high garden retaining wall only 1.5m away. The house walls are 750-780mm.

The south gable of Cleavers has a symmetrical arrangement of a pair of ovolo mullioned windows at ground floor linked with a continuous hood and a similar feature on the floor above. The matching attic window has an individual hood. This wall is 750mm thick.

Windows with 18th century features

The simplest example of this style of window frame is seen at Little Bowlish. The first floor (mullioned) and attic windows, both now blocked, in the south gable fronting the street have the plain bead edge form and there is no hood mould over either window. The wall is 700mm thick at ground floor level.

A similar window, partially blocked, overlooks the road at The Cottage. That, and the south attic window, have plain bead edge frames in walls of 600mm. However, the door frame below a relieving arch on the west elevation has a lipped and beaded profile and is clearly a later insertion.

At 3 Forum Terrace the window frames facing the street are completely plain except for the ground and first floor windows of No.3. These two windows have hood moulds and the frames beneath have a small cyra moulding. The mullions, which are plain externally have a small hollow chamfer inside, and sit on a sill designed to take moulded mullions. The wall is 600mm thick.

The Stable at Park House has three ground floor window frames and mullions with a small hollow

external chamfer and each has a hood mould. On the upper floor the frames are completely plain. A door set between two of the ground floor windows has a bead edged frame and has been inserted below a timber lintel; brick packing is visible between the timber and the stone frame. The wall thickness is not known.

At Weirside the front upper windows frames are plain and the mullions have bead edges. The attic windows in the gables are also bead edged and all have hood moulds. The door frame is also bead edged. The wall thickness of this house is about 650mm on the ground floor and 500mm above.

The mullioned windows at Bowlish Villa have a beaded inner edge and a raised lip to the outside of the frame. The first floor windows are linked with a continuous hood but the second floor windows have no hood. There was also a continuous hood over the ground floor windows (now replaced with bays) and the door; the door also has the lipped and beaded frame. The ground floor walls are 650mm but the upper walls are 570mm.

At the rear of Bowlish House there are transom windows with the lipped and bead moulded frames. The mullions have a bead on the exterior and a small hollow chamfer inside. These windows are notably plainer than those of the Palladian frontage.

Bowlish House is joined by Old Bowlish House and by Coombe House in having a classical façade, the architrave details to the windows of which have already been mentioned.

EVALUATION

Until the Lottery funded Darshill & Bowlish Heritage Project was commenced in 2018 the only available indication of the ages of the buildings were those set out in the individual house Listings, see Table 1. It should be noted that almost none of the Listings make any reference to internal features and hence the suggested dates can only have been based on external features.

The Listings of these fifteen properties were formally recorded in three separate periods, six in 1952, one in 1974 and the remainder in 1984, the years reflecting the revision dates of the List.

| House | Listing Summary | Walls | Suggested Date (SVBRG) |
|-------------------|---|------------|--|
| Coombe House | House, circa 1820 | 700 mm | Mid 18 th , upgraded early 19 th cent. |
| Cleever's | 17 th century, restored mid 20 th cent. | 750 mm | Late 16 th /early 17 th cent. |
| Ham Manor | Circa 1600, restored c.1920 | 780 mm | Mid 17 th cent. |
| Old Bowlsh House | 17 th century, remodelled circa 1720 | 800 mm | Mid 17 th cent. - on older base? |
| Bowlsh House | House dated 1732 (on rainhead) | 650/700 mm | 1732 |
| Park Farm House | c.1700 | 600 mm | Late 18 th cent. |
| Park House Stable | c.1650, later alteration | n.d. | Probably 18 th cent. |
| Weirside | c.1650 | 650 mm | Early 18 th cent. |
| Old Manor | c.1550, modified C17 and mid 20 th | 650 mm | Early 17 th cent. |
| Studfold Cottage | c.1650 | <1000 mm | Early 17 th cent. |
| The Cottage | 17 th century | 600 mm | Mid 18 th cent. |
| Bowlsh Villa | c.1700 | 650/570 mm | Mid 18 th cent. |
| Bowlsh Grange | c.1700 | 600 mm | Mid 17 th cent. |
| Little Bowlsh | c.1700 refronted c.1800 | 700 mm | Early 17 th cent. |
| Forum Terrace | c.1800 | 600 mm | Late 18 th cent. |

Table 1: A summary of the dating results. The houses are in date order of Listing.

The “*Dating of the smaller Somerset houses from external appearance*” is discussed comprehensively in a paper of that title by Cmdr. EHD Williams and R Gilson that was published in SANHS Proceedings Vol.120, 1976. This paper brought together the results of years of study in Somerset and provides guidance and advice to those concerned with dating and understanding older buildings.

Notwithstanding the descriptions and illustrations to be found in Williams and Gilson’s paper it is suggested that even they would have had difficulties in this locality, principally because of the use and re-use and adaptation of buildings. The history of the area revolves around the repeated growth and decline of the textile industry from the 15th century onwards.

A hoped-for pattern of dateable window features did not materialise in this study. However there are small groupings that can be identified and these are set out below.

Shaped Mullions (ovolo, cyma etc). At Bowlsh Grange the mullioned window has no hood mould but mullioned windows under single hoods can be seen at Old Bowlsh House,

Studfold Cottage, Old Manor and the barn behind Park Farmhouse. Similarly moulded windows below long hoods are to be found at Cleever's and at Ham Manor.

Rectangular mullions. Lipped window framing with the attendant bead to the frame and to the rectangular mullion is found at Bowlsh Villa (where it is situated under a long hood) and at Bowlsh House where it appears in transomed windows that have no hood.

Another group comprising Weirside, The Cottage, 3 Forum Terrace and The Stable at Park House all have plain framing, i.e. with no raised outer lip, but they all have single hood moulds. The simplest arrangement is at Little Bowlsh that has the plain frame and has no hood.

The apparently anachronistic assembly of 17th century hood moulds over windows of the 18th century styles was thought at one stage to indicate the replacement of the 17th century moulded mullion windows by the later style rectangular windows but there is no evidence of such activity, either within the window elements or in the surrounding masonry.

It must be concluded therefore that this assemblage, born perhaps of a mixture of cost saving and contemporary fashion, is a local peculiarity. Its presence on a number of houses has created a local style.

The wall thicknesses of the houses examined do not consistently demonstrate the general shift to thinner walls over time. This phenomenon is not uncommon and arises perhaps from either of two circumstances. Firstly, that the walls are constructed directly on older footings and the original thickness is maintained. This is often the case when buildings are adapted. Secondly, the local builders continue to build walls thicker than the general trend because they see no reason to make them thinner.

The dates suggested by SVBRG for the buildings are deduced from the interior as well as the

exterior details. Many of the properties were extensively modified and/or refurbished at the end of the 18th or beginning of the 19th century although two exceptions are noted, namely Bowlsh House, a house newly built in 1732 and Cleavers where, in the 1940s, adjoining farm buildings were incorporated with the 17th century house. The greatest dating discrepancy between the Listing and this study is at Old Manor where a 16th century door frame had been reused, but generally there is broad agreement. Most of these houses seem to have their origins in the 17th or 18th centuries, some, even the earliest ones, being converted at least in part from former industrial buildings to domestic use.

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September 2020

Information sources:

Darshill and Bowlsh Conservation Society; www.darshillandbowlshconservationsociety.org.uk/

Traditional Houses of Somerset; Jane Penoyre and others. ISBN 978-0-86183-407-5

Period House Fixtures & Fittings 1300-1900; Linda Hall. ISBN 978-1-85306-742-6

Dating of the smaller Somerset houses from external appearance; Cmdr EHD Williams and R Gilson; Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, Proceedings Vol.120, 1976