

# The History of Church House, Crowcombe



*Photo: Valori Menneer*

**Peter Menneer & Catherine Brew**

# Church House

500 years old ~ Grade 2\* listed ~ a Charity



*Photo: Paul Savage*



*Photo: Paul Savage*



# Crowcombe – a feudal rural community

A small village, located by the Quantock Hills. The Domesday Book of 1086 lists the village as 'Crawcombe'. Believed to come from the Old English words *craw* and *cumb*, meaning 'steep combe'.



The village  
Cross, 14<sup>th</sup> Century



Land owning  
families.



Church of the Holy Ghost.  
Tower 14<sup>th</sup>C. South aisle 16<sup>th</sup>C.

# The Church House story begins



*Crowcombe Church*



*Photo: Catherine Brew*

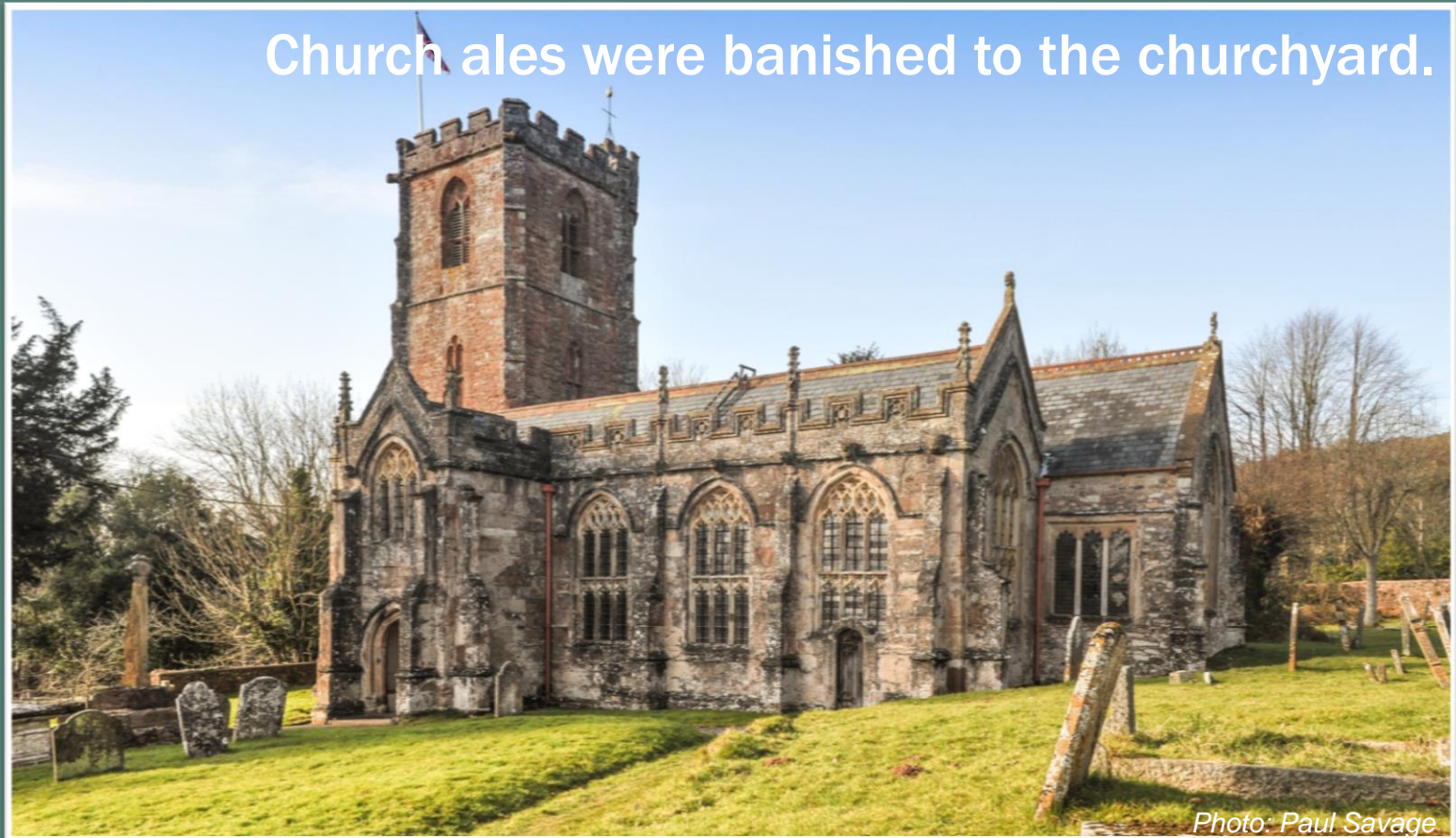
‘Church Ales’  
were held in  
the church  
nave.

- at Whitsuntide
- at church dedication festivals
- at patronal feasts
- to fund church repairs
- as bride ales
- as clerk ales

No pews.

After the Reformation, separation from the Roman Catholic Church and establishment of the Church of England, the Puritan Movement valued purity in worship & doctrine, and personal piety.

Church ales were banished to the churchyard.



*Photo: Paul Savage*

Parishes were then encouraged to build Church Houses.

# What were Church Houses?

Secular buildings created specifically for the purpose of holding community fundraising festivities. Mostly established early 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Managed by the church wardens as a semi public building.

Hundreds were built, especially in Devon and Somerset. An important role in village life.

*“There were no rates for the poor in my grandfather’s time; but for Kington St Michael, the church ale at Whitsuntide did the business.”*

*– John Aubrey, 1714*

53 in Somerset, 21 identified. Only 2 remain intact as community buildings – Crowcombe and Chew Magna.



# Church House, Crowcombe

500 years old  
Grade 2 \* listed  
a Charity

- 1515 – c1660      A community building, principally for holding  
‘church ales’
- c1660 – 1872      Downstairs – home for 3 destitute families  
Upstairs – the Carew charity school
- 1872 – 1907      Redundant, progressively derelict
- 1908              Restoration
- 1908 – present day      A community building again



# The Manor of Crowcombe

**1086** Robert of Mortain given the Manor of Crowcombe by William the Conqueror.

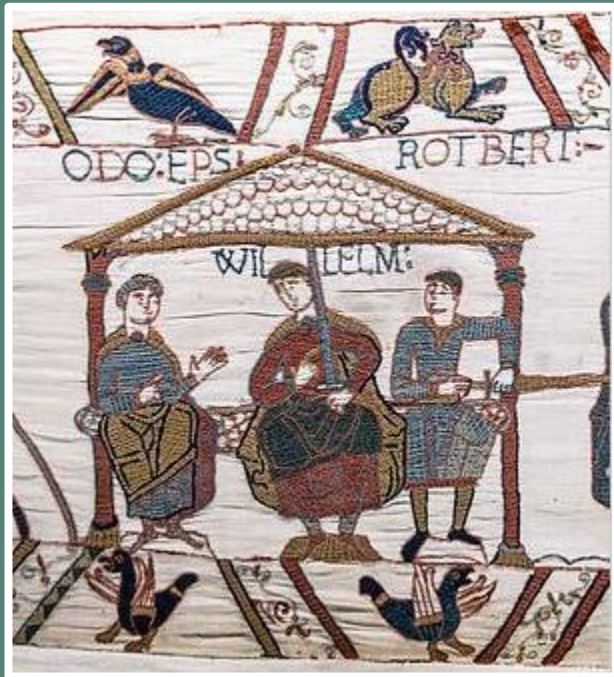


Photo: Bayeux Tapestry

*Rotbert (sic), Count of Mortain (right), sits at the left hand of his half-brother William, Duke of Normandy*



# The Manor of Crowcombe

- 1086** **Robert of Mortain**  
given the Manor of Crowcombe by William the Conqueror.
- 1227** **Godfrey de Craucombe** - Weekly market, a three day fair, a borough
- 1236** **Manor shared between two Crowcombes, Godfrey and Simon**  
Godfrey's share willed to Prioress of Studley  
*Crowcombe-Studley*

# The Manor of Crowcombe

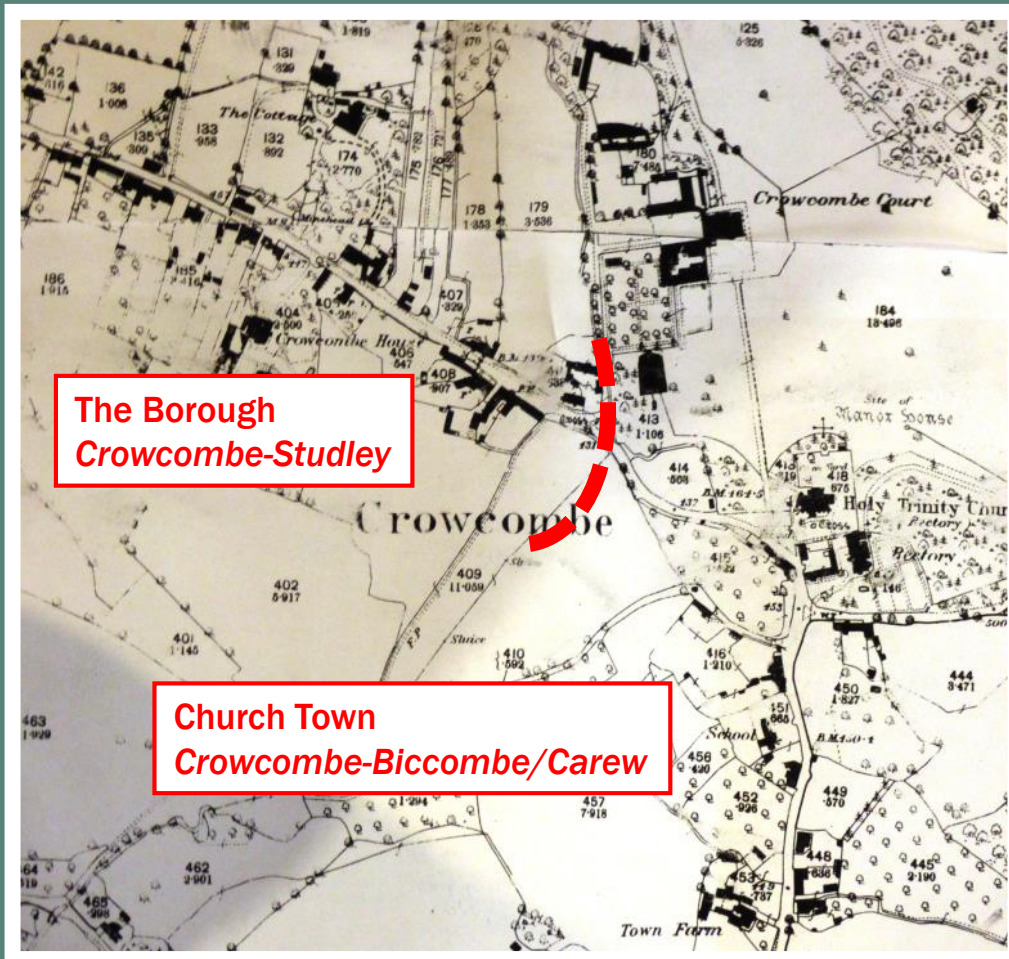
Godfrey's half of the Manor...

*“By his will he gave to the nuns of Studley in Oxfordshire for the sake of his own soul and for the soul of his two wives Alice and Joan all his lands and property in Crowcombe together with the advowson of the parish church”*

# The Manor of Crowcombe

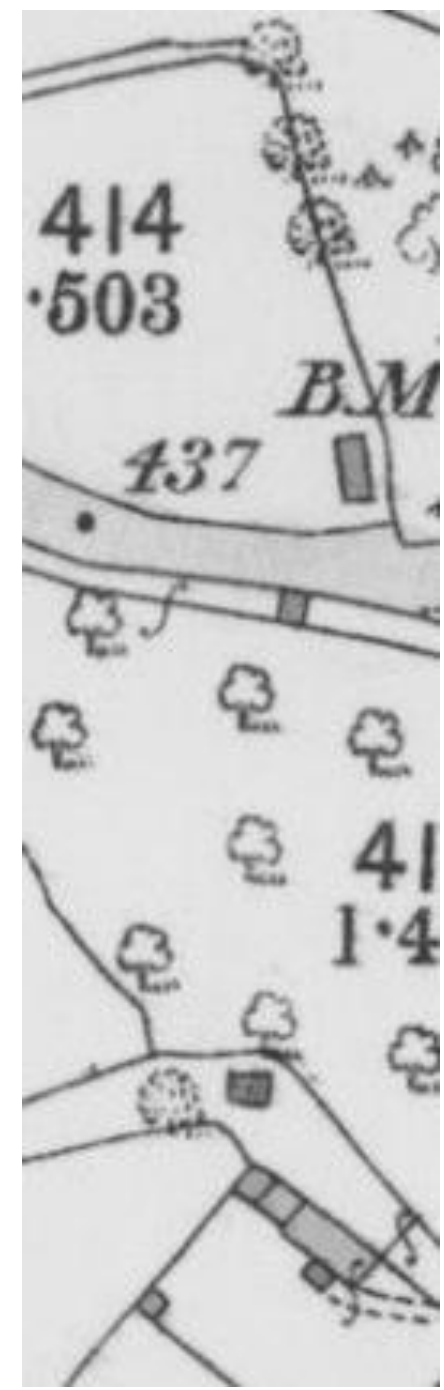
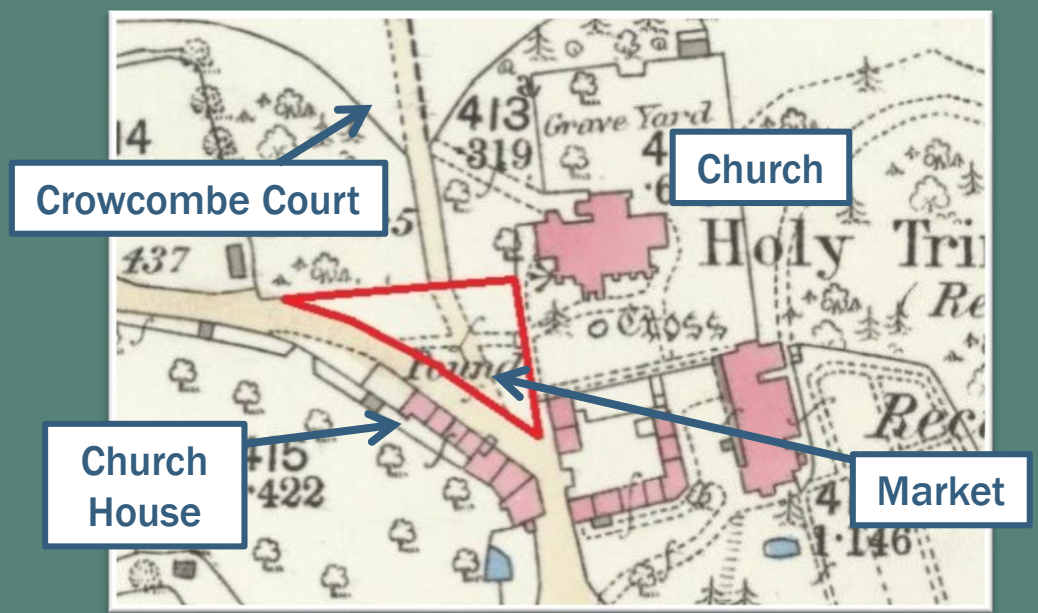
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- 1236** Manor shared between two Crowcombes, Godfrey and Simon  
Godfrey's share willed to Prioress of Studley  
*Crowcombe-Studley*  
Simon's stayed within the family. From time to time no male heir –  
hence: *Crowcombe-Biccombe*  
*Crowcombe-Carew*  
*Trollope*  
*Trollope-Bellew*
- 1894** Estate reunited. Ethel Trollope bought back the *Crowcombe-Studley* half.

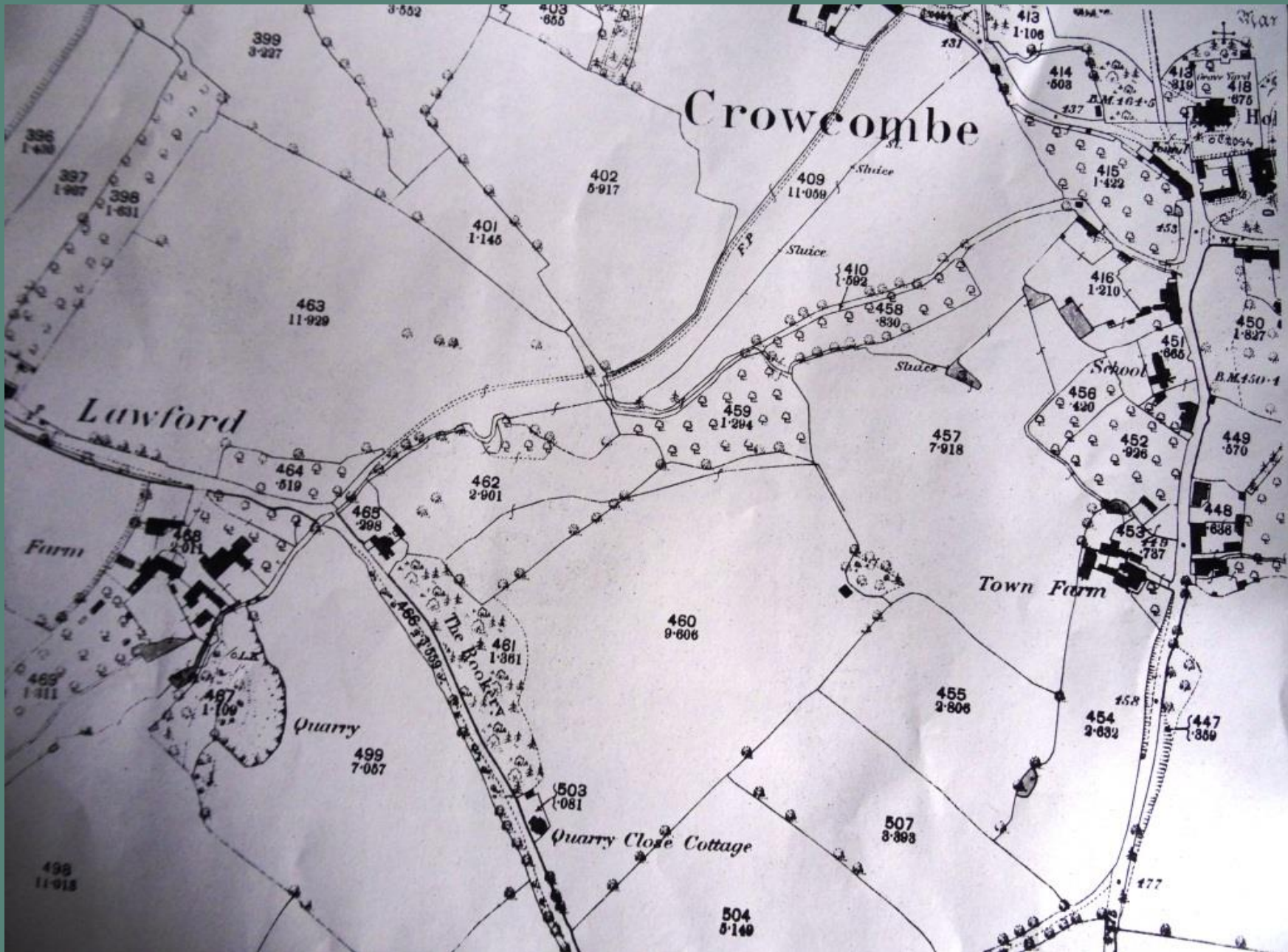
# The Manor of Crowcombe divided into two



# Church House - A gift from the Manors of Crowcombe

of a house and garden for the building of a 'church house' – opposite the Church and where the weekly market was probably held.





# Stone Quarry and Lime Kiln



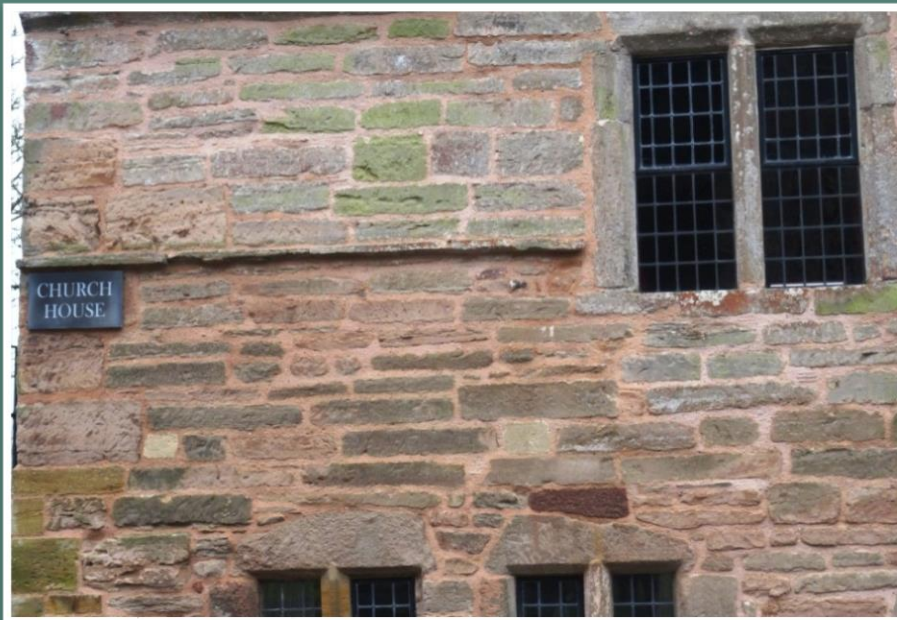
Otter  
Sandstone

*Photo: Valori Menneer*

# The Design of Church House

Upstairs: the community hall

Downstairs: baking bread and  
brewing ale



*Photo: Valori Menneer*



*Photo: Paul Savage*



*Photo: James Weir*

Pentice roof at Church House,  
Widecombe, Devon



# Original use of Church House

## Ground Floor

- Kitchen
- Offices for officials administering:  
the weekly Market (originally on  
Fridays, later changed to Mondays)  
and the annual Fair (31 Oct – 2 Nov)
- Storerooms

## First Floor

- Parish Meetings
- Guild Meetings
- Borough Courts
- Manor Courts
- Church Ales



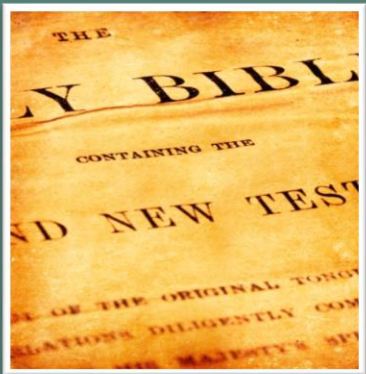
# The Puritan Movement



Early 17<sup>th</sup> Century  
Adoption of stricter religious practices, to 'purify' the Church of England of Roman Catholicism



1604  
King James 1 calls Hampton Court Conference



1611  
Publication of the King James Bible,  
written by 47 scholars



# Church House reflects changing times

## DOWNSTAIRS

- Became home for Crowcombe's destitute



## UPSTAIRS

- Carew charity School



# Carew Charity School

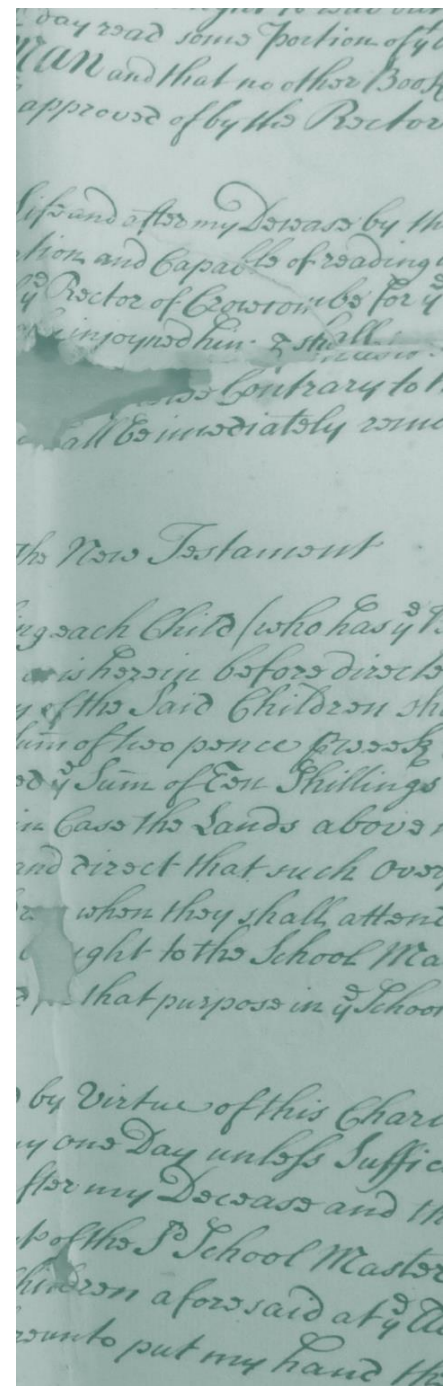
Opened around 1660, funded by legacies from:

- Elizabeth Carew (1669)
- The Rev Dr Henry James, son of a past rector (1716)
- Thomas Carew (1733)

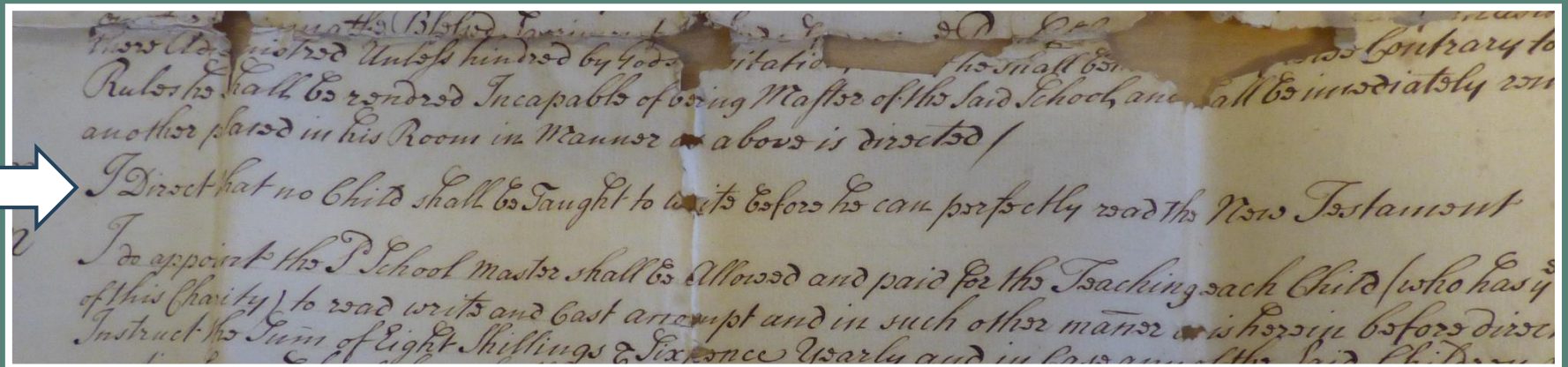
For about 40 children from poor families in Crowcombe and Clatworthy

*“For the education of fforty [sic] Poor children ... of parents bred and educated in and propossing [sic] the protestant religion... who are incapable of education... out of any real or personal estate of their own.”*

**Thomas Carew, 1733**



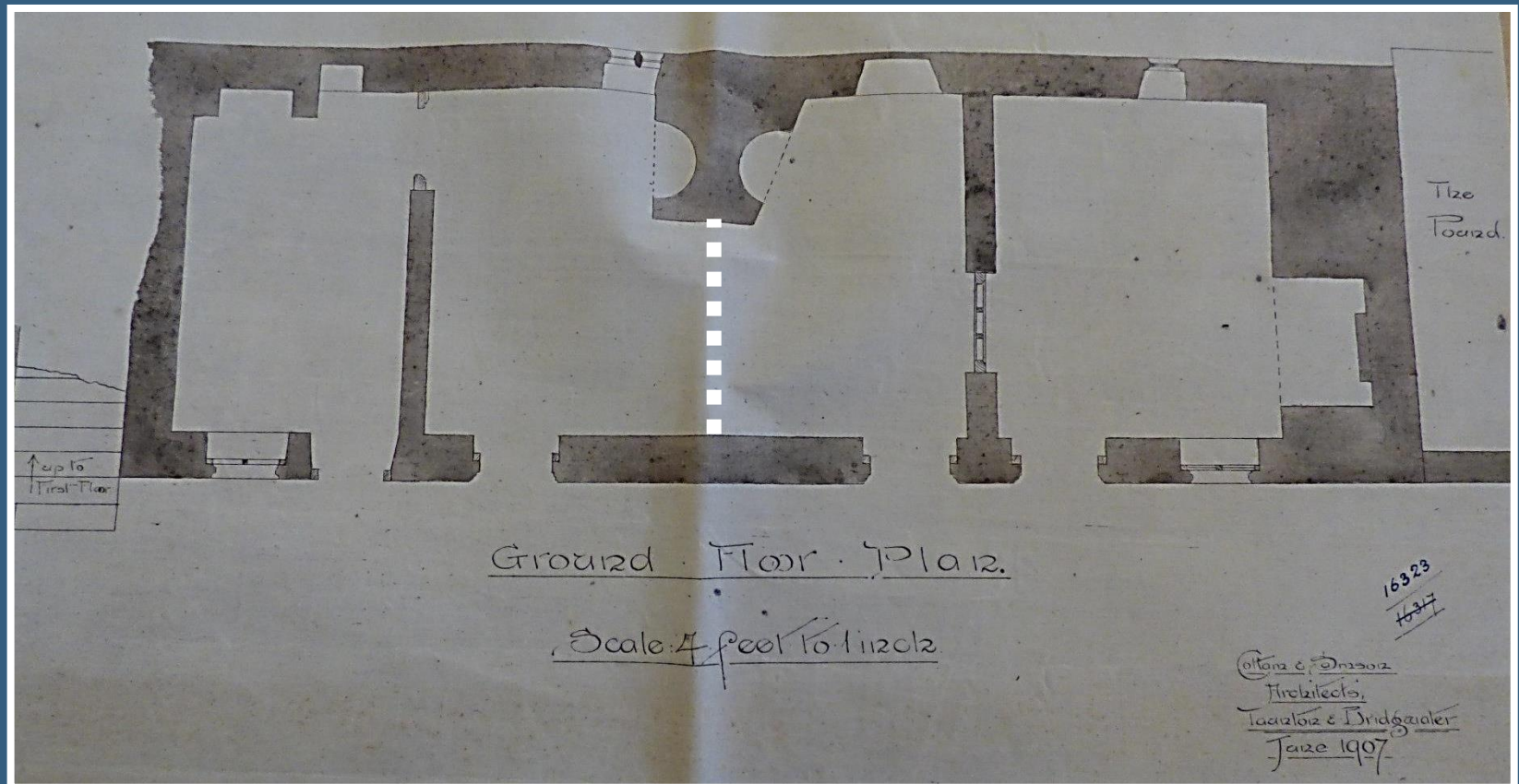
# Carew School Rules



**“I direct that no Child shall be taught to write  
before he can perfectly read the New  
Testament”**

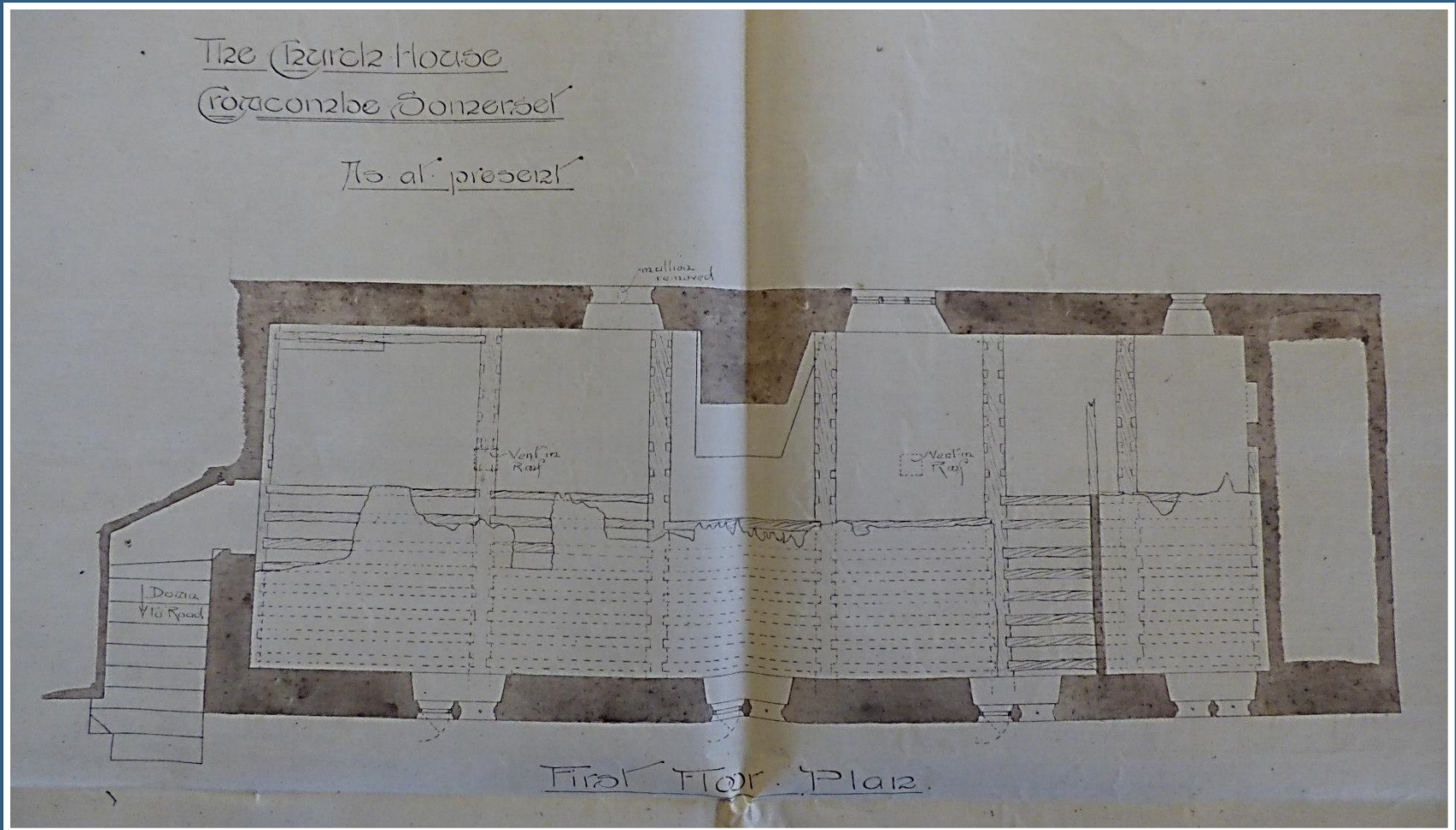
# Church House, the 'Poor House' for two centuries

Downstairs was home to three poor families.



Source: Somerset Heritage Centre

# Church House, the 'Poor House' for two centuries





*'2/- laid out for the sheaves of wood in the cold weather for the Church House people' (1695)*

*'Paid Elizabeth Poole for cleansing out of the Church House after Sarah Pine died' (1700)*

*'Ordered that John & Sarah Coles be permitted to live in the western part of the Church House' (1768)*

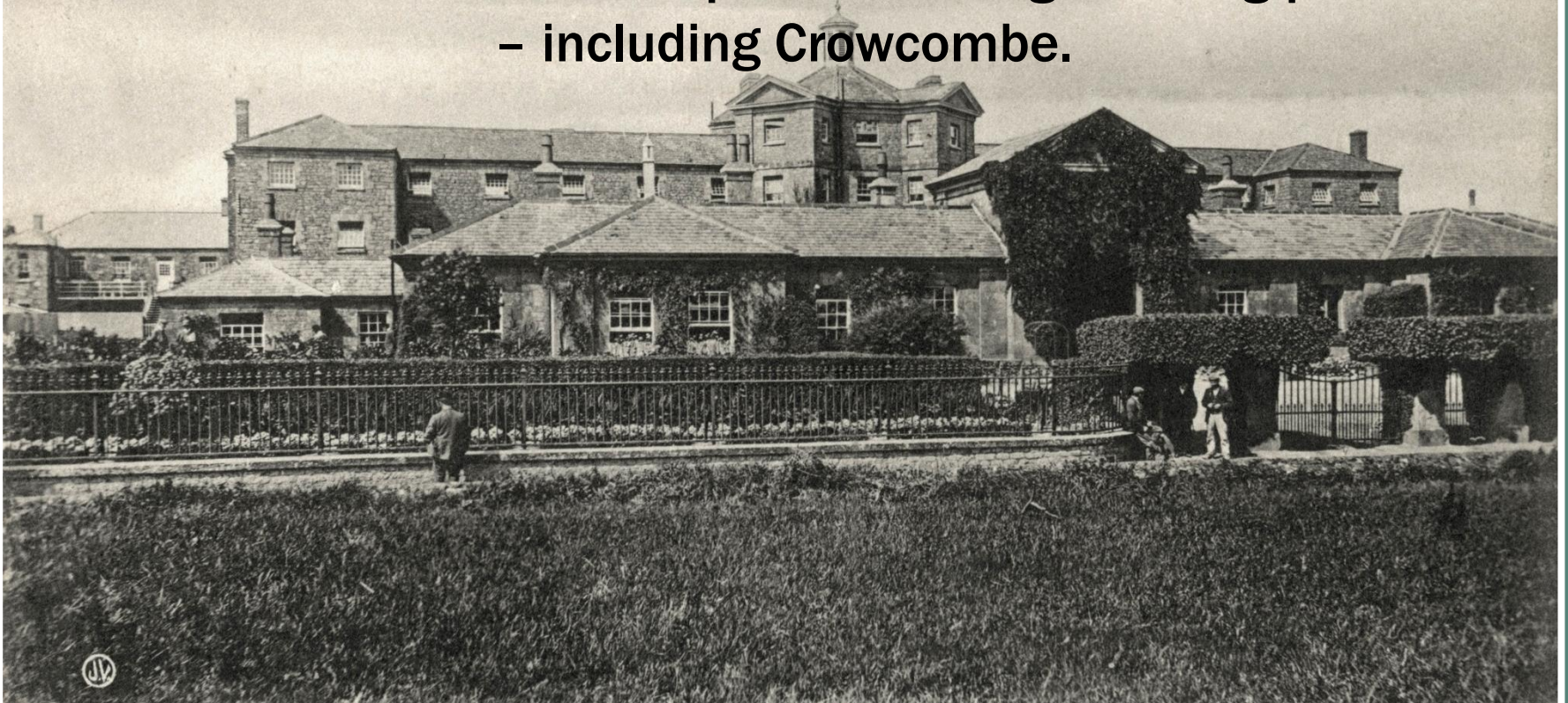
Plus two adjacent thatched cottages for six additional poor people

The Churchwardens and Vestry administered and managed the combined 'Poor House'



# Williton Workhouse

Opened 1838, arising from 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act.  
It accommodated the Paupers from neighbouring parishes  
– including Crowcombe.



# Adjacent Cottages

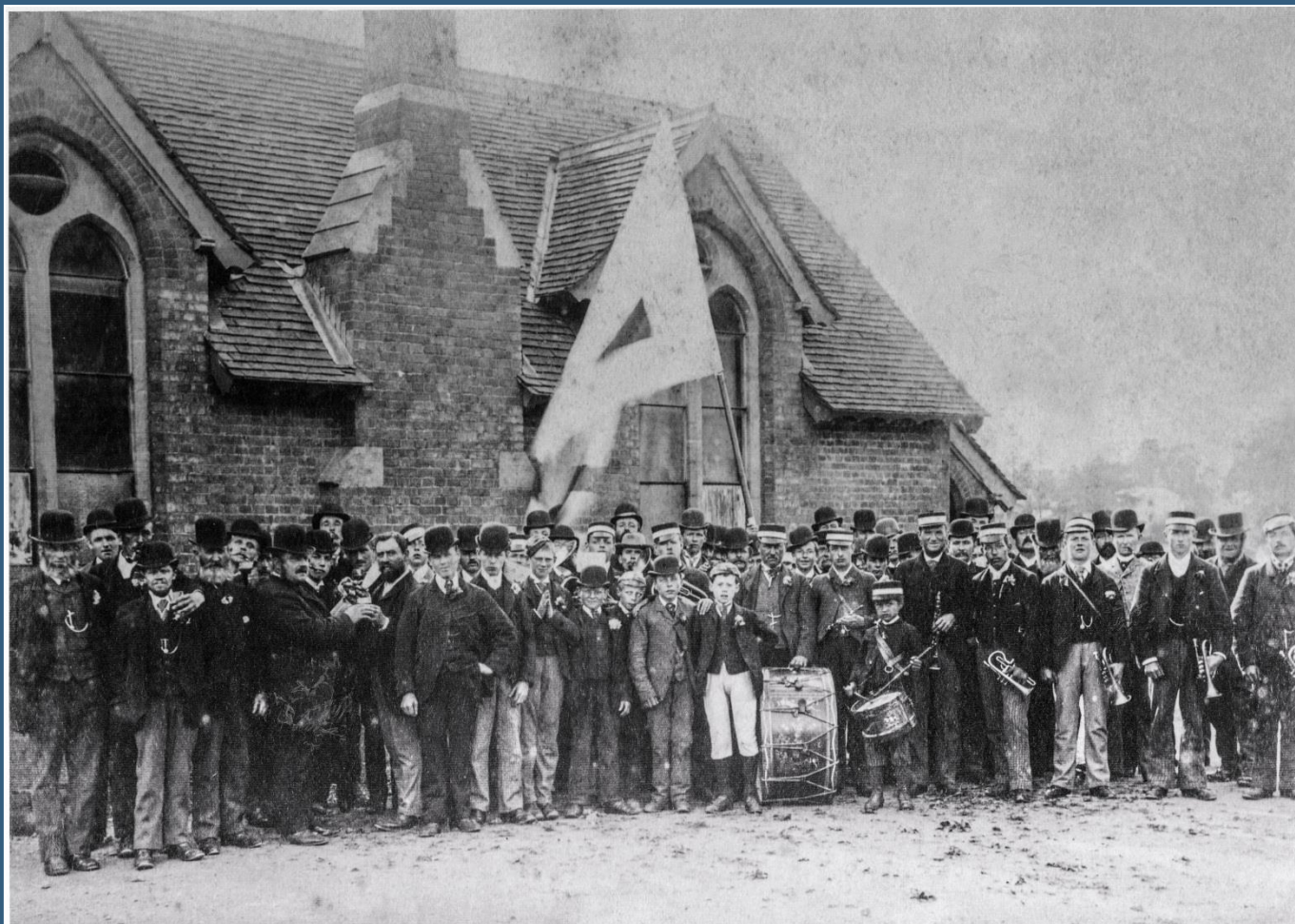
Sold 1849

Remaining three occupants moved to Church House



# Crowcombe Village School

Opened 1872



# The Decline of Church House



Made redundant by the opening of:  
**Williton Workhouse in 1838**  
**Crowcombe Village School in 1872**



No regular income to pay for roof repairs needed in 1876

Whose responsibility is it to maintain the building?

# Who Owns Church House?

Vestry Meeting resolve to write (1878):

*'to Mr Easton (representing the Carew estate) and Mr Wills (representing Sir RB Harvey) to ascertain whether they laid any claim to the said Church House, on behalf of their respective clients.'*

The Manors claim ownership and

*'object to any sale or disposition of such property by the Parish.'*

*Crowcombe Vestry*  
" At a Vestry  
1841 pursuant to  
purpose of taking  
the Union relative  
Resolved on com  
Board of Guardian  
trices for the pres  
tio it was taken  
archwardens the  
use over the sc  
but it is to prop  
for. "

# Vestry tempted to hand over Church House (1876)

Motion put to the Vestry:

*'that the Parish do not repair the Church Houses, but that they be given up to the manors of Crowcombe Studley and Crowcombe Biccombe'*

Cooler heads win the day with an amendment:

*'that further consideration of the Church House property and any repairs thereto be adjourned for further consideration.'*

In practice no repairs were commissioned for the next 30 years.





By 1907  
Church  
House is  
a ruin

Roof  
open to  
the sky

Upper floor  
had  
collapsed



# The Rev Henry Christian Young

Appointed Rector of Crowcombe  
in 1901

A bachelor living with his mother,  
sisters and a brother at  
Crowcombe House

Determined to save and restore  
Church House

Could Church House become a  
charity?



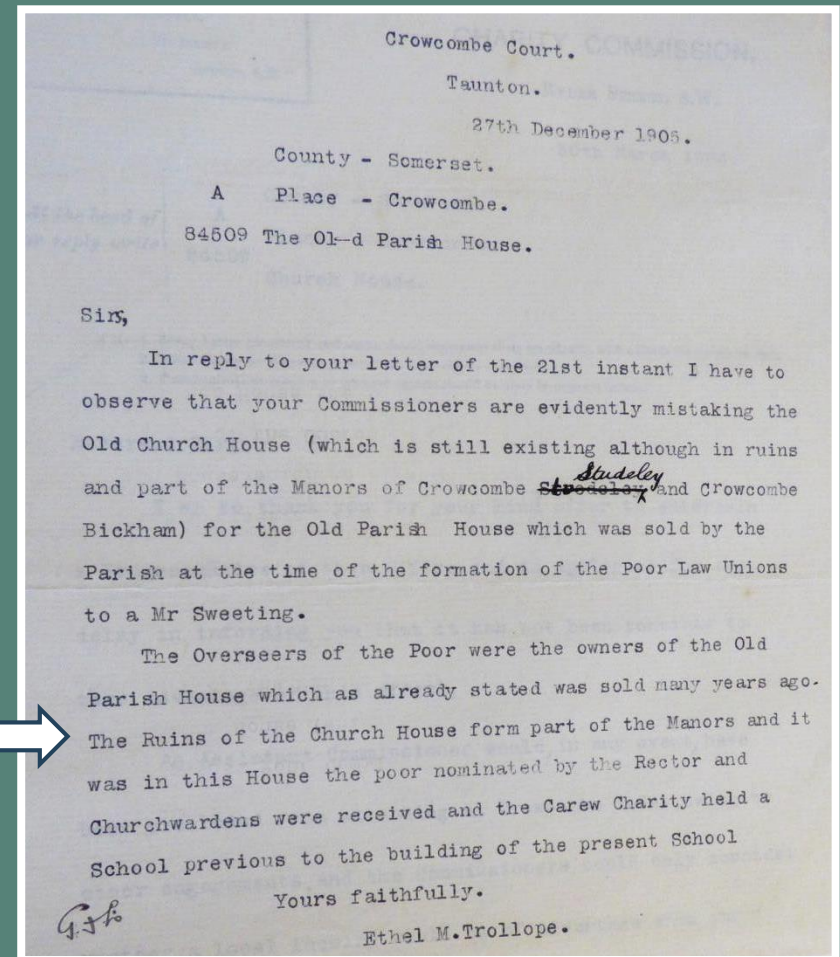


# The Charity Commission investigates (1905)

Does Mrs Ethel Trollope claim ownership?

She does.

*'The ruins of the Church House form part of the Manors and it was in this House the poor nominated by the Rector and Churchwardens were received and the Carew Charity held a School'*



# Mr Young undertakes a major investigation of parish records (1906)

The Manors had made a gift of Church House to the Parish.

For centuries the Churchwardens had administered Church House

He concluded:

*'The above evidence.... is too strong to be overcome by the mere statement by the present Lady of the Manor, which statement up to the present has never been supported by any evidence whatever....*

*If the Lord of the Manor had evidence in support of his claim, why has he not made good his claim, instead of allowing the building to become a perpetual eyesore, exactly opposite the entrance to his house?'*

# Mrs Trollope concedes (1907)

The Charity Commission reported back:

*'Mrs Trollope does not intend to proceed further with her claim to the ownership of Church House.'*

27th Decem  
y - Somerset.  
e - Crowcombe.  
d Parish House.  
  
ur letter of the 21st  
ommissioners are evide  
hich is still existing  
ors of Crowcombe ~~Sto~~  
d Parish House which  
of the formation of t  
  
f the Poor were the o  
as already stated was  
urch House form part  
he poor nominated by  
received and the Care  
the building of the p  
s faithfully.  
Ethel M. Trollope.

# Church House established as a Charity (1907)

## 5 Trustees:

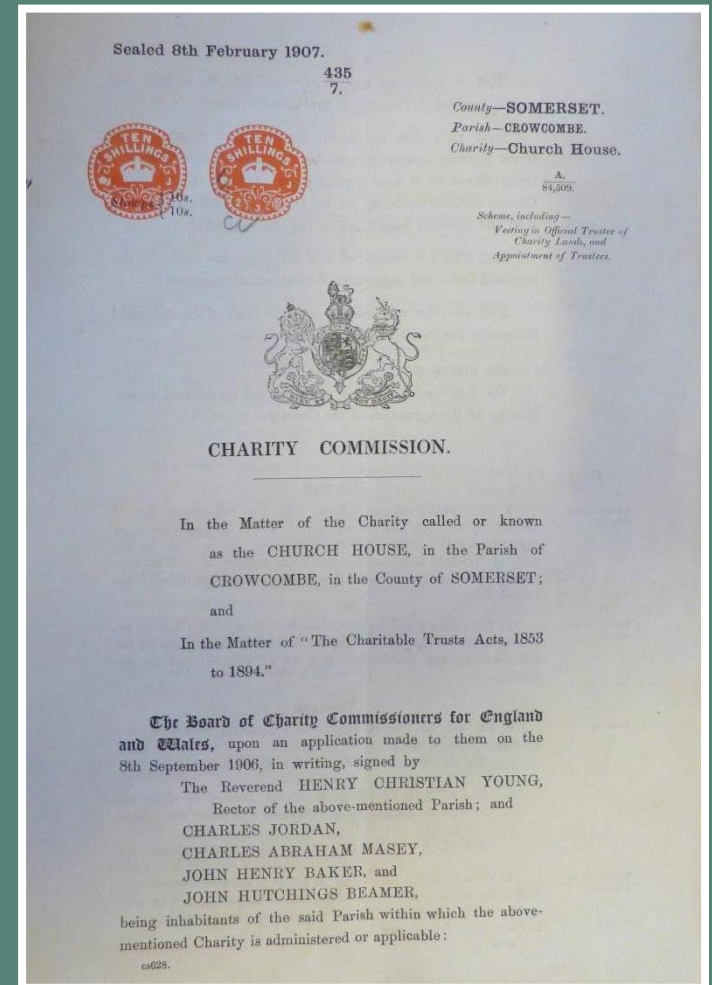
*'The Rector and Churchwardens  
of the Parish of Crowcombe*

*The Rural Dean for Crowcombe*

*The Archdeacon of Taunton'*

Statutes require that the building be  
used for:

*'parochial purposes in  
connexion with the Church of  
England as the Trustees from  
time to time think proper'*



Source: Somerset Heritage Centre

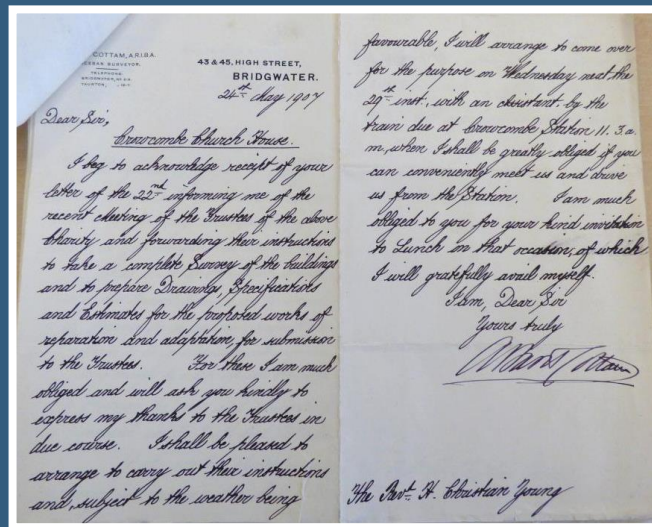
# Appointment of Architect

Mr A Basil Cottam gives an initial opinion  
*'It is extremely dilapidated and rapidly becoming ruinous. Prompt action should be taken if it is to be saved from serious structural failure'*

Likely cost:  
at least £500  
=  
c£50,000 in today's  
money



# Mr Cottam is commissioned



Source: Somerset Heritage Centre

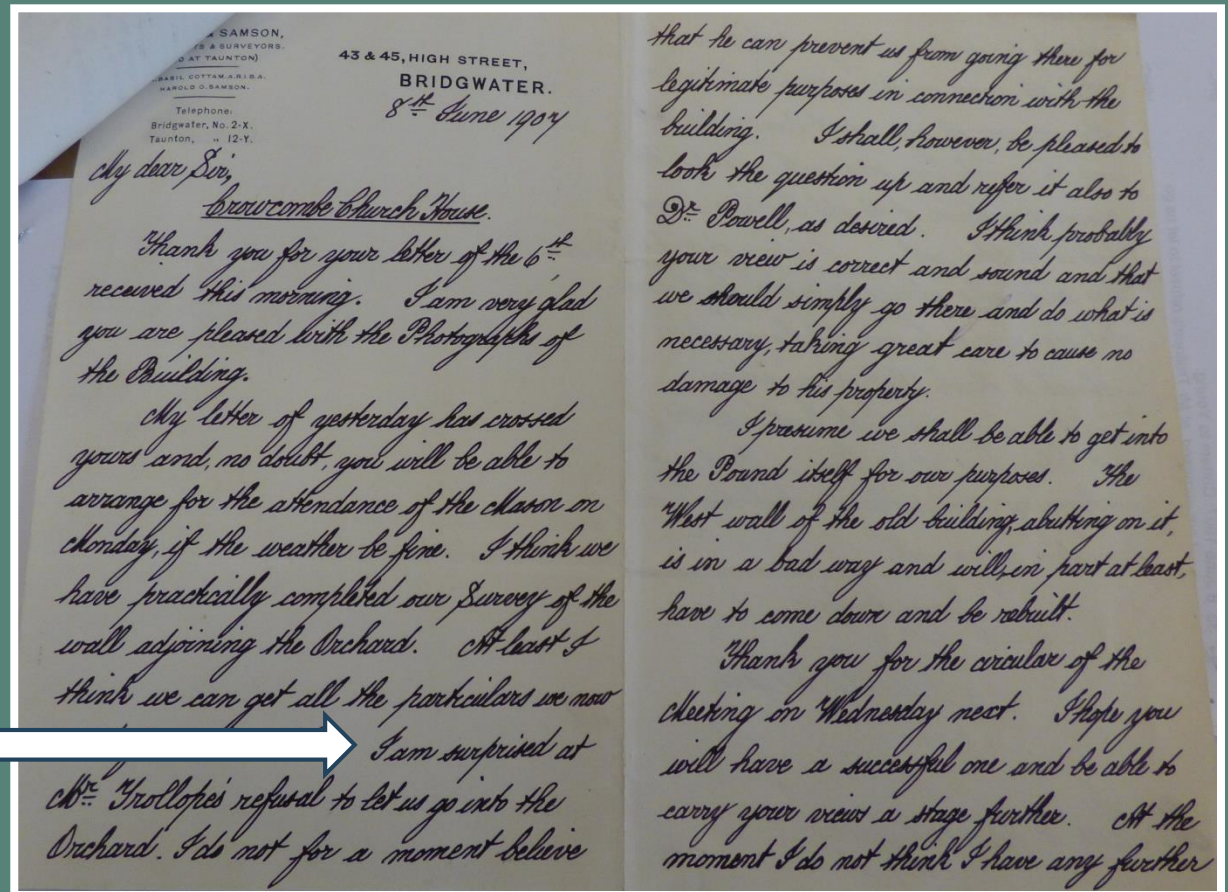
**'Subject to the weather being favourable, I will arrange to come over for the purpose on Wednesday next the 29th inst, with an assistant, by the train due at Crowcombe Station at 11.03am, when I shall be greatly obliged if you can conveniently meet us and drive us from the Station. I am much obliged for your kind invitation to Lunch on that occasion, of which I will gratefully avail myself. I am, Dear Sir, yours truly.....'**

**Invited to:**

- Do survey of building
- Draw up specification for restoration
- Prepare cost estimates
- ... and to stay to lunch

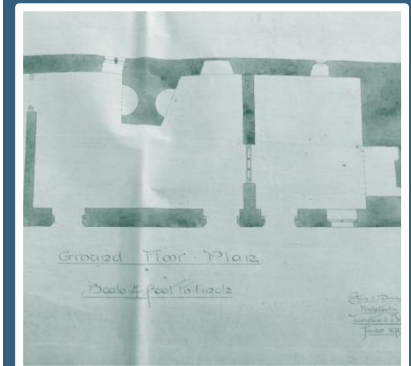
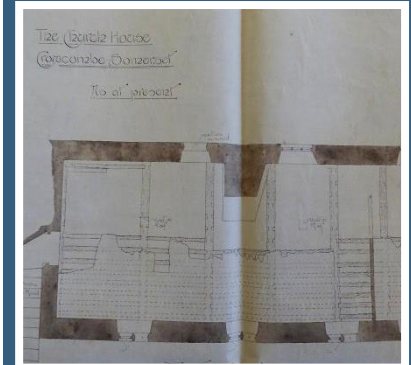
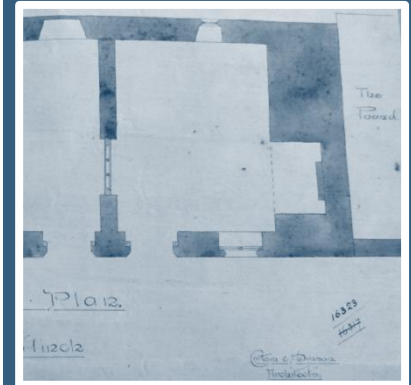
# Mr Trollope presented logistical problems for Mr Cottam

'I am surprised at Mr Trollope's refusal to let us go into the orchard. I do not for a moment believe that he can prevent us from going there for legitimate purposes.'



# Mr Cottam's Specification

- Re-roof with original slates where possible
- New gallery floor
- Re-construct central chimney on South wall to heat Games Room & Gallery
- Enlarge Reading Room
- Replace two external doors with windows
- West wall is the main problem

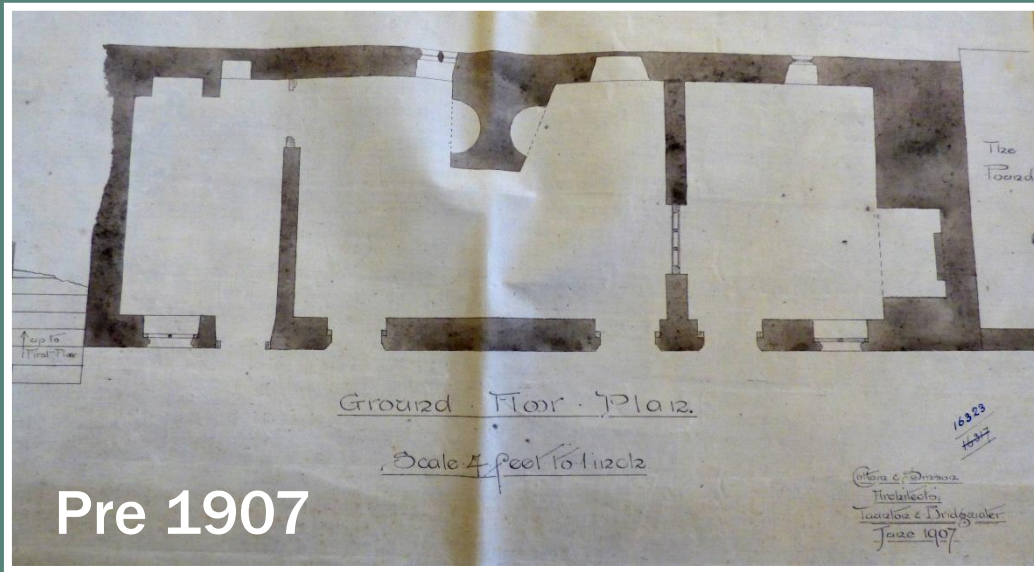




# The West Wall

*'The West wall is very shaky, has settled and cracked and, having been a deal pulled about, is decidedly unsatisfactory. It is also of great thickness. I am inclined to advise that it be largely taken down.....'*

# Ground Floor Plan - Old vs New



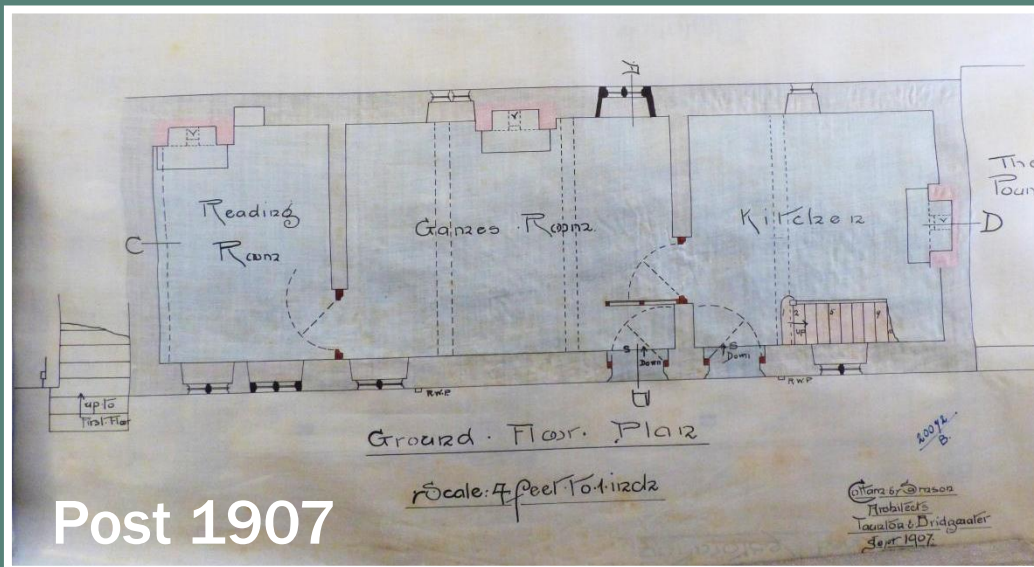
Pre 1907

Source: Somerset Heritage Centre

New Cost Estimate

£550

= £55,000 in today's money



Post 1907

# Fund Raising

*'To raise by subscriptions the sum of £550 to restore the ancient Church House, and to adapt it for the purposes of a Parish Room and a Men's Institute'*

Subscriber list  
in due course  
published -  
including their  
individual gifts  
led by Rev H C  
Young's £50  
and his  
mother's £20

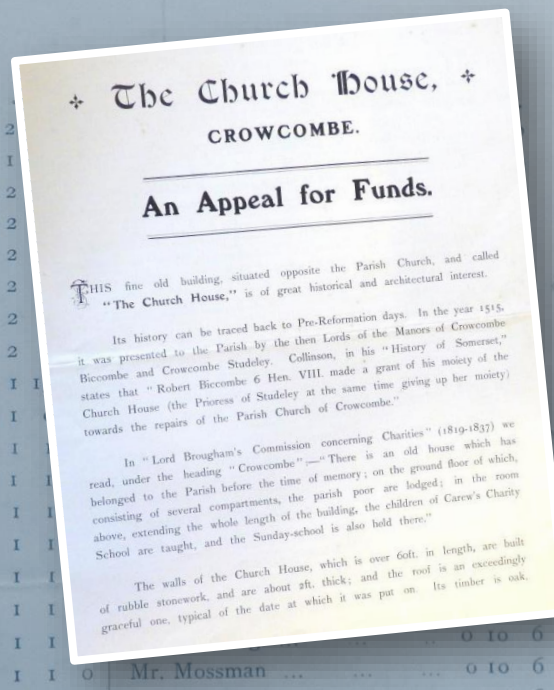
The published  
list includes  
**110 subscribers**

Subscriptions  
ranging from  
**10/- to**  
**Mr Young's £50.**

**= £50 & £5,000**  
respectively  
today

## • LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS. •

		£	s.	d.		
Rev. H. C. Young	...	50	0	0	The Rev. W. B. Wood	...
Mrs. Young	...	20	0	0	Miss Wood	...
Misses Young	...	7	10	0	Miss Weston	...
B. M. Young, Esq.	...	5	5	0	Mr. F. Strong	...
Mrs. Coventry Carew	...	10	0	0	T. Starkey, Esq.	...
Miss Carew	...	3	0	0	Miss Maxwell	...
Misses Boscawen	...	10	0	0	Miss Rodd	...
Lieut.-Colonel Boles	...	5	5	0	Mr. John Knott	...
Mrs. Boles	...	5	5	0	Misses Tremayne	...
The Archdeacon of Taunton	...	5	0	0	Mr. A. Knott	...
Rev. W. Greswell	...	5	0	0	R. Poole Hooper, Esq.	...
Mrs. Greswell	...	1	0	0	Mrs. C. Jennings	...
W. Broadmead, Esq.	...	5	0	0	Mr. J. Beamer	...
O. T. Sadler, Esq.	...	5	0	0	Mrs. Sweeting	...
H. Sadler, Esq.	...	5	0	0	J. Brown, Esq.	...
V. L. Ardagh, Esq., M.D.	...	5	0	0	The Rev. Dr. Powell	...
R. F. W. Hill, Esq.	...	5	0	0	Mr. G. Rich	...
C. W. Rowcliffe, Esq.	...	5	0	0	Mrs. Grimwade	...
					Mr. Mossman	...



# Subscribers included many names familiar to present day Crowcombe

Mr GH Brewer

Lt Col Boles

Miss Carew

Mr C Herniman

Mr F. Strong

and 13 Clergy including:

Very Rev Dean of Wells

Archdeacon of Taunton

Rev Dr Powell, Rural Dean

Rev H Christian Young himself

Rev W Greswell, Rector of Dodington

Rev CS Dupuis

◊ LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS. ◊

£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.	
Rev. H. C. Young	5	0	0	The Rev. W. B. Wood	2	2	0	Mr. A. Starkey...	1	0	0
Mrs. Young	20	0	0	Miss Wood	1	0	0	Miss Mary Starkey	1	0	0
Misses Young	7	10	0	Miss Weston	2	0	0	Mr. Curtis	1	0	0
B. M. Young, Esq.	5	5	0	Mr. F. Strong	2	0	0	Mr. F. Case	1	0	0
Mrs. Coventry Carew	10	0	0	T. Starkey, Esq.	2	0	0	Mr. Hill...	1	0	0
Miss Carew	3	0	0	Miss Maxwell	2	0	0	Mr. H. Smith	1	0	0
Misses Boscawen	10	0	0	Miss Rodd	2	0	0	Mr. E. Milton	1	0	0
Lieut.-Colonel Boles	5	5	0	Mr. John Knott	2	0	0	Mr. J. T. Sharp	1	0	0
Mrs. Boles	5	5	0	Misses Tremayne	1	15	0	Mr. F. Dixon	1	0	0
The Archdeacon of Taunton	5	0	0	Mr. A. Knott	1	0	0	Mr. C. Herniman	1	0	0
Rev. W. Greswell	5	0	0	R. Poole Hooper, Esq.	1	1	0	Miss L. Routley	1	0	0
Mrs. Greswell	1	0	0	Mrs. C. Jennings	1	1	0	Miss E. Routley	1	0	0
W. Broadmead, Esq.	5	0	0	Mr. J. Beamer	1	1	0	Mrs. Spence	1	0	0
O. T. Sadler, Esq.	5	0	0	Mrs. Sweeting	1	1	0	Miss Boyle	1	0	0
H. Sadler, Esq.	5	0	0	J. Brown, Esq.	1	1	0	Miss Ardagh	1	0	0
V. L. Ardagh, Esq., M.D.	5	0	0	The Rev. Dr. Powell	1	1	0	Anonymous	0	10	6
R. F. W. Hill, Esq.	5	0	0	Mr. G. Rich	1	1	0	Miss Gosling	0	10	6
C. W. Rowcliffe, Esq.	5	0	0	Mrs. Grimwade	1	1	0	Mr. Mossman	0	10	6
Mr. George Randle	5	5	0	Rev. P. Broadmead	1	1	0	S. Leeke, Esq.	0	10	6
Mr. C. Masey	5	0	0	Mr. Geo. Cover	1	1	0	Mr. E. Meade	0	10	6
Mr. C. Jordan	5	0	0	Rev. E. H. Sweet-Escott	1	1	0	Mrs. Holland	0	10	6
Rev. C. S. Dupuis	4	0	0	Rev. Preb. Hancock	1	1	0	Mr. M. Jordan	0	10	0
Mrs. Dupuis	1	0	0	Mrs. Standing	1	1	0	Mr. Parsons	0	10	0
Anonymous	5	0	0	Mr. and Mrs. Stone	1	1	0	Mr. J. Griffith	0	10	0
G. B. Batchelor, Esq.	3	3	0	Mr. W. Paine	1	1	0	Mr. J. H. Baker	0	10	0
Mrs. C. Roberts	3	3	0	T. Young, Esq.	1	1	0				

Source: Somerset Heritage Centre

# Mr Trollope continued to present problems

*'Mr Trollope turned my assistant out of the Pound yesterday. I suppose he had a right to do so. It will be very awkward if he keeps us away from this side of the building'*

*.... viz the shaky West wall*

*has a right to do so.  
It will be very awkward  
if he keeps us away  
from this side of the building  
Yours very truly  
Albert Trollope*



# The Shaky West Wall

*'The further we look into this part,  
the worse it appears.'*

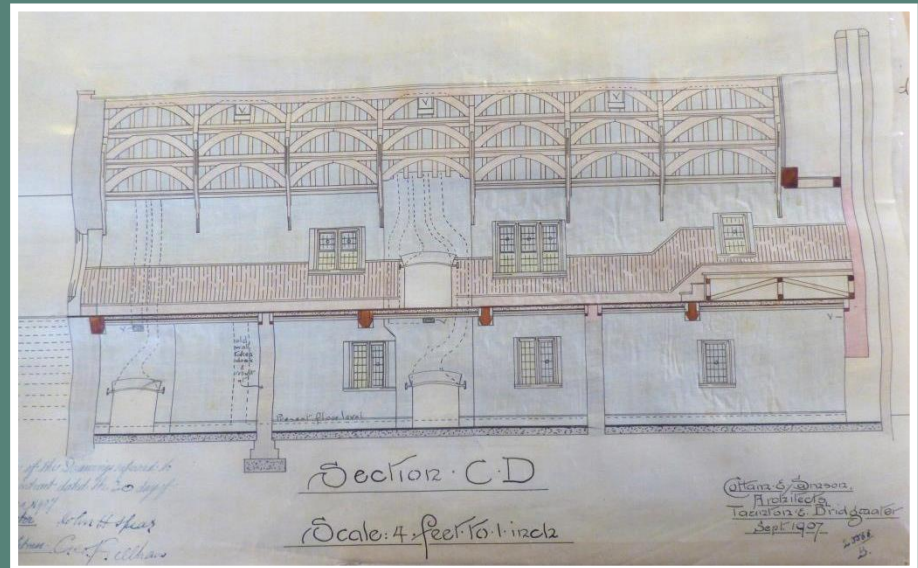
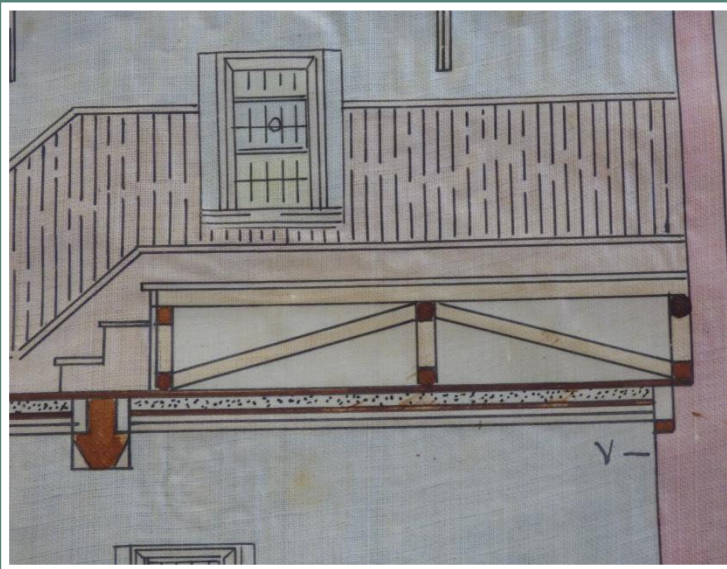
*I have taken a record of the  
individual stones to guide us in  
restoring it, and now ordering Spear  
(the builder) to take down the  
shaky parts, numbering the stones  
as he does so, and to  
re-erect it all as before'*



# Additionally for Upstairs

A removable platform for stage performances and concerts

*'to be made of trestles, on which  
rather heavy planks of, say,  
9" x 2½" should be laid'*

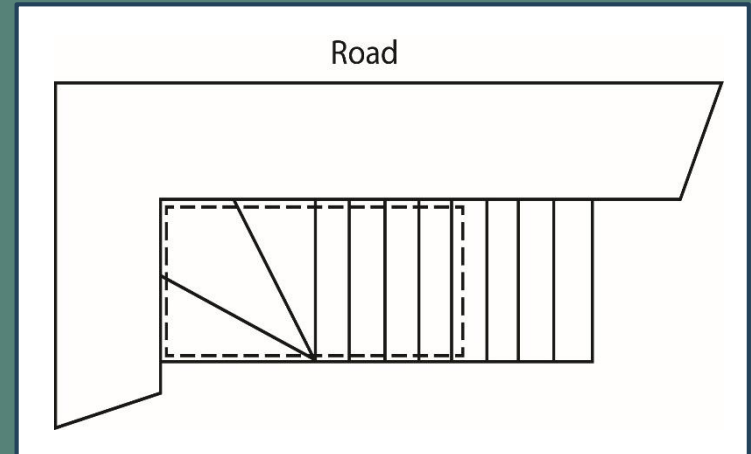


# An Internal Staircase

For the first time an internal staircase to connect the ground floor with upstairs, but

*I suggest that the principal approach to the Hall should (continue to) be up the existing ancient flight of steps at the east end and through the doorway which already stands in position there'*

Hence (?), internal stairway not user friendly





# The Final Invoice

**£550**  
precisely as  
estimated by Mr  
Cottam at outset

and .... inclusive of

**Securing and casing of west wall**

**Providing and setting furnace**

**Carrying up additional flue**

**A kitchen range**

**Connecting Church House to the water mains**



# The Final Invoice

continued

and

*'Supplying and fixing rainwater gutter to South wall.... and drain under building to road and connection to sewer'*

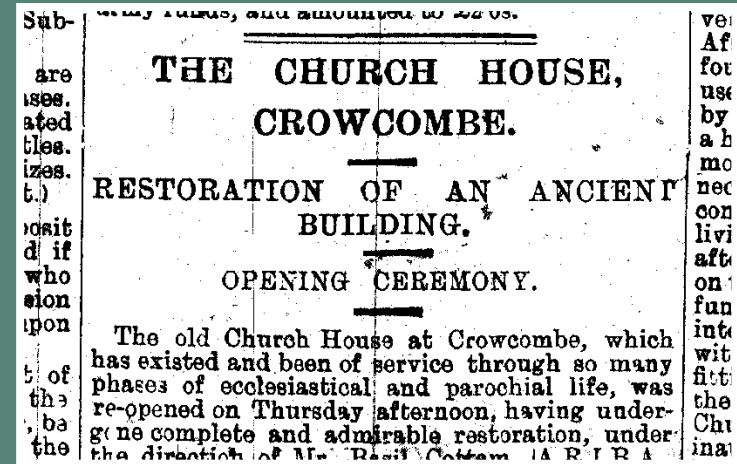
since Mr Trollope would not have permitted a soakaway in his orchard...



# Grand Re-Opening - September 1908

Fully reported in Somerset Gazette and West Somerset Free Press

- Evensong in the Church & sermon
- Speeches, explanation of Trustee structure, formal re-opening by the Hon Mrs Ethel Trollope
- Concert, village party, dancing into the small hours



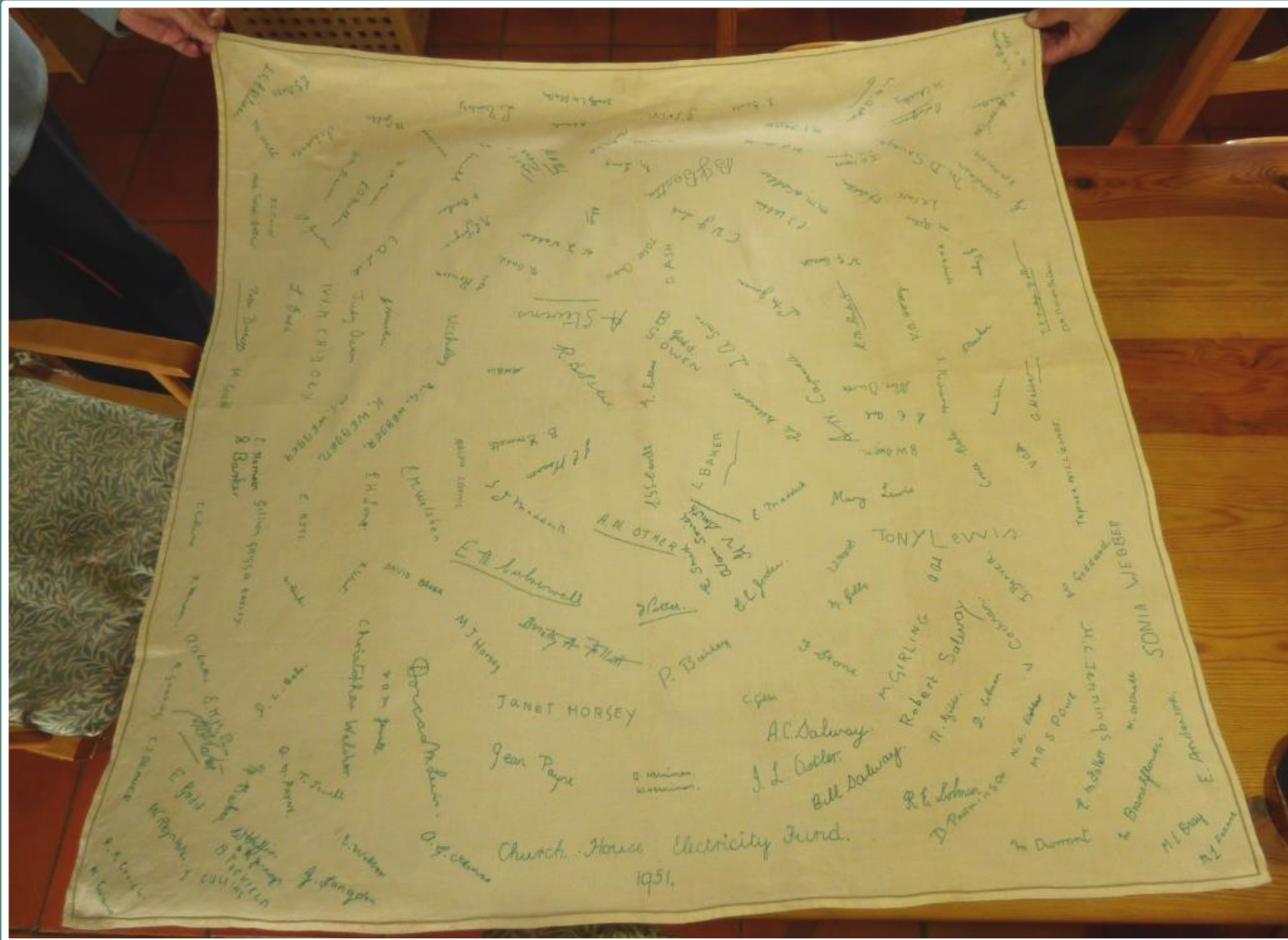
Source: Somerset Heritage Centre

*'Not in his wildest dreams could her ancestor, Godfrey de Crowcombe, ever have thought that the parish church house would be put to use in the twentieth century'*

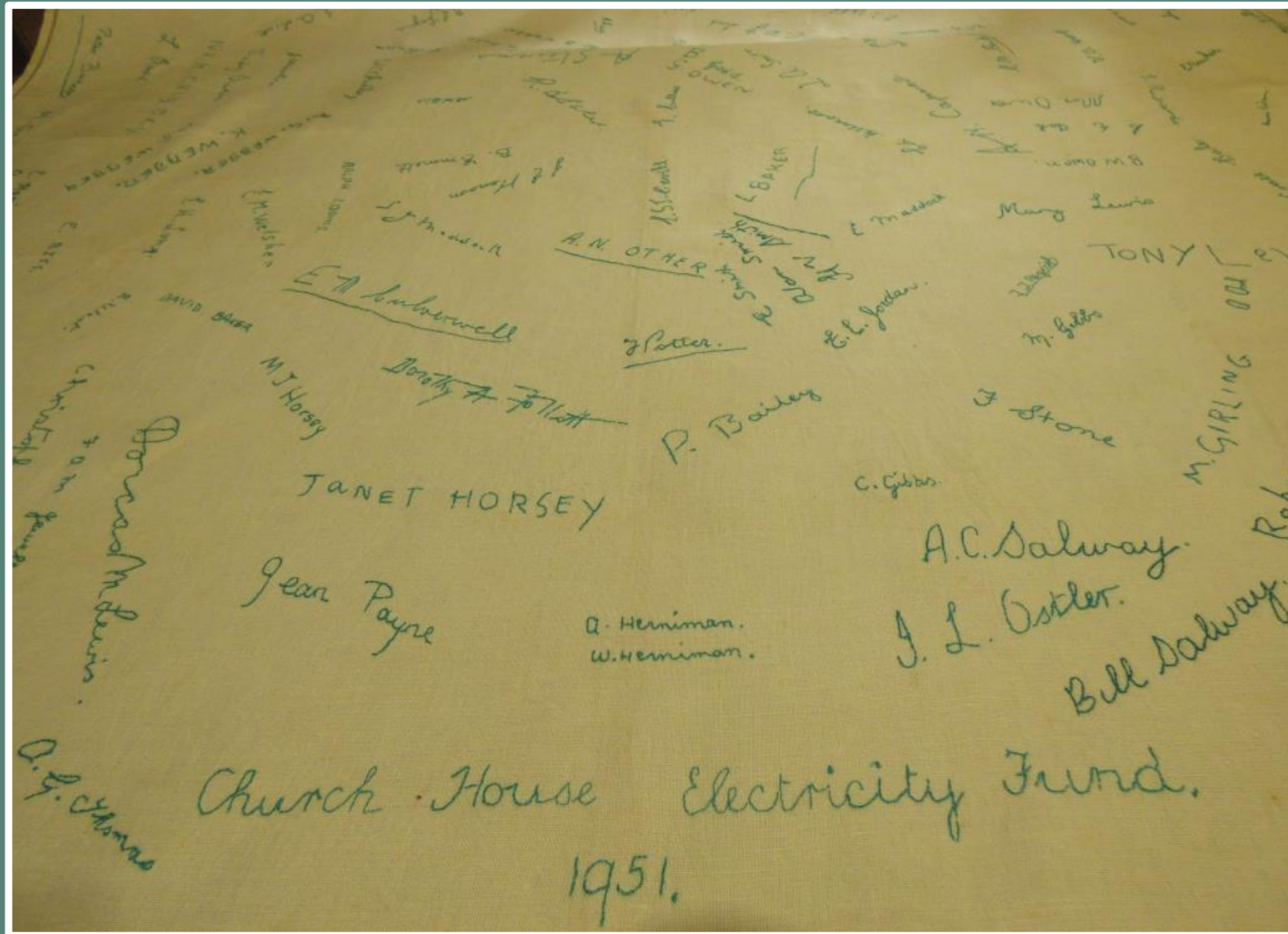
# From 1908 Restoration to Present Day

- 1914** Recruitment of Volunteers to join the Somerset Light Infantry Regiment.
- 1935** Ending of the 4d pa Lord's Rent to each of the two Manors, by payment of 20 years' rental =  $13/4$  = about £35 in today's money.
- 1940 – 1944** Requisitioned as canteen for soldiers manning the searchlights on Quantock Hills, billeted at Crowcombe Court.
- 1951** Electricity installed.

# 1951 ELECTRICITY FUND RAISING



# 1951 ELECTRICITY FUND RAISING CONTINUED.



# 1951 ELECTRICITY FUND RAISING CONTINUED.

B. Brinkley  
 S. J. M. ...  
 RALPH LOOMIS.  
 E.M. Welshe  
 DAVID BAUER  
 M.J. Horsey  
 TONET HORSEY  
 WEPPER.  
 E.H. Long.  
 R. West.

CARLING  
 TONY L  
 A.N. Capwell.  
 B.W. Owen  
 Mrs. Owen  
 Grace Bale.  
 K.M. ...  
 Vash

W.C. ...  
 Hensson.  
 R. Gadd.  
 W. J. Webber.  
 P. ...

E. Backer.  
 T. F. Trollope - Bellew  
 D.M. Trollope-Bellew.

PRIDDRIDGE  
 D.I. Walker

Mary Lewis  
 TONY LEWIS  
 B.W. Owen  
 Grace Bale.  
 Vash

# From 1908 Restoration to Present Day

- 1914** Recruitment of Volunteers to join the Somerset Light Infantry Regiment.
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- 1951** Electricity installed.
- 1959** WC built and WC & Kitchen connected to main sewage.



# From 1908 Restoration to Present Day

continued...

1963

Road widening

Demolition of adjacent Cottages

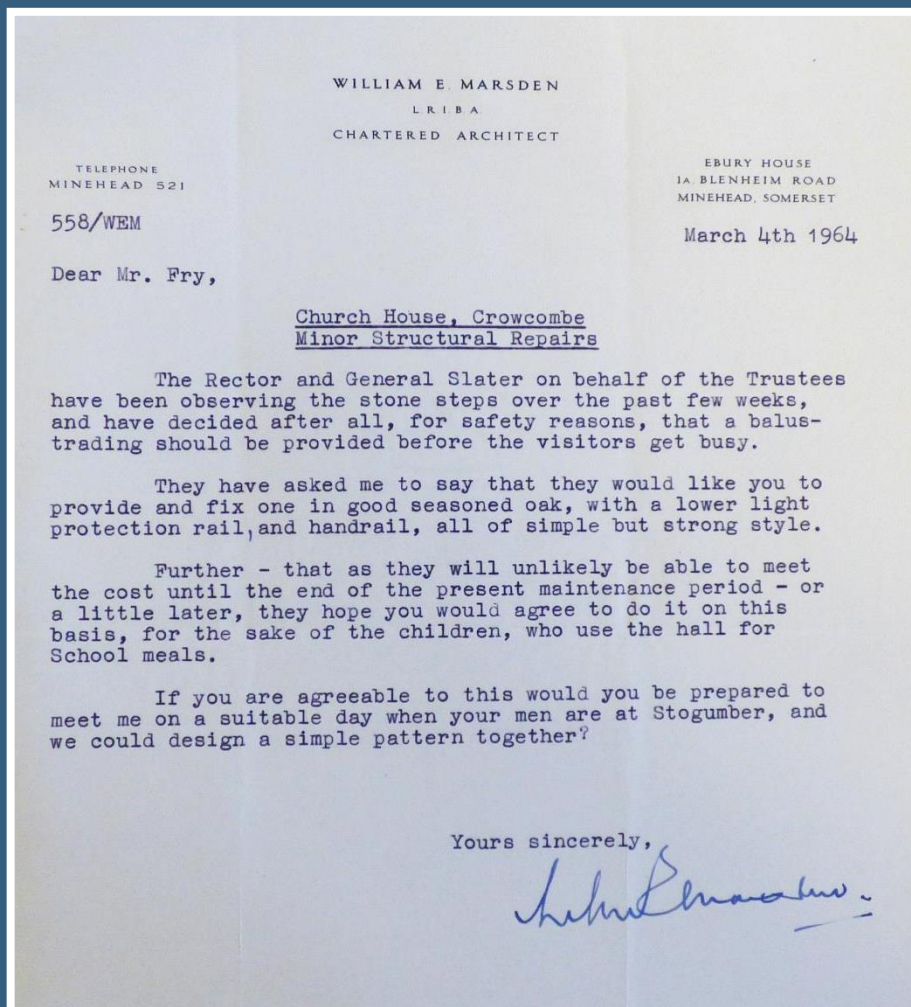
Building of Car Park

Structural work to Church House East wall & steps



# Blackmailing the builder (1963)

## To fund the balustrading of the external steps



Source: Somerset Heritage Centre

*'As they (the Trustees) will unlikely be able to meet the cost until the end of the present maintenance period - or a little later, they hope you would agree to do it on this basis, for the sake of the children who use the hall for school meals'*

# From 1908 Restoration to Present Day

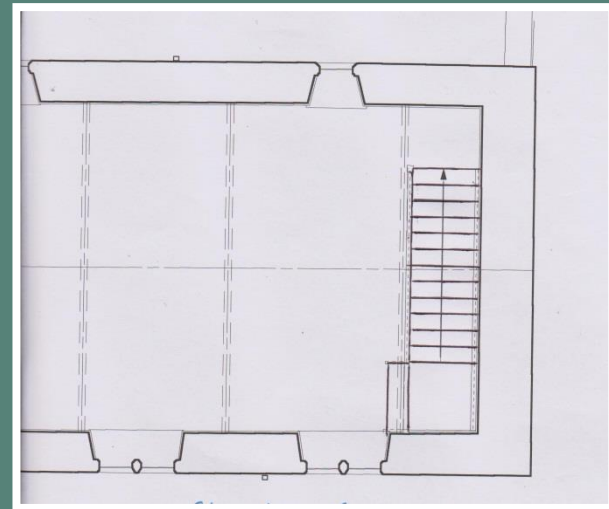
continued...

**1981**

**New road-side roof slating**

**1995**

**New internal staircase**



# From 1908 Restoration to Present Day

continued...

**1999** Ownership of Pound transferred from Trollope-Bellew estate to Church House

**2000** New rear roof slating

**2007** £80,000 internal refurbishment  
Two WCs, including one for disabled  
Oil central heating  
New lighting including lighting for art exhibitions  
Furnishing of Servery

**2016** £64,000 external renovation  
100% lime mortar re-pointing  
Parapet flashings & stone coping  
Stitching 'shaky' West wall  
New guttering & downpipes



*Photo: Paul Savage*



Photos: Paul Savage

# Funding of 2016 External Renovation

**£25,000 raised from the Village through:**

**Donations**

**Primrose Ball held at Crowcombe Court  
Open gardens Event**

**Balance from Grants received from:**

**The Pilgrims Trust  
Heritage Lottery Fund  
Garfield Weston Foundation  
Foyle Foundation**

**Prince of Wales's Charitable Foundation**

# Additional Grant from Heritage Lottery Fund

History Panel in Car Park

Archive research at Somerset Heritage Centre

New Notice Board

New historical Leaflet

New website

Menner & Brew's *History of Church House*

PowerPoint talk on Church House for schools & history societies

A village party to celebrate completion of the restoration project

# Church House available for hire

Family Parties  
Wedding Receptions  
Club Meetings  
Art Exhibitions

at very affordable prices,  
available from

Booking Secretary: 01984 618688  
[www.churchhousecrowcombe.org.uk](http://www.churchhousecrowcombe.org.uk)



*Photo: Paul Savage*



*Photo: Catherine Brew*



# *Church House, Crowcombe - a History*



*Church House, Crowcombe  
- a history*

Peter Menneer and Catherine Brew

***Church House,  
Crowcombe - a History***  
**£5**

**Authors:**

**Peter Menneer**  
(chairman of management committee)

**Catherine Brew**  
(Red Plait Interpretation LLP, Portland)

**Available from:**

**Crowcombe Community Shop**  
and online at  
**[www.churchhousecrowcombe.org.uk](http://www.churchhousecrowcombe.org.uk)**

**Proceeds to Church House**