



Historic England

Domestic 1: Vernacular Houses

Listing Selection Guide



Summary

Historic England's twenty listing selection guides help to define which historic buildings are likely to meet the relevant tests for national designation and be included on the National Heritage List for England. Listing has been in place since 1947 and operates under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. If a building is felt to meet the necessary standards, it is added to the List. This decision is taken by the Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). These selection guides were originally produced by English Heritage in 2011: slightly revised versions are now being published by its successor body, Historic England.

The DCMS' *Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings* set out the over-arching criteria of special architectural or historic interest required for listing and the guides provide more detail of relevant considerations for determining such interest for particular building types. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/principles-of-selection-for-listing-buildings>.

Each guide falls into two halves. The first defines the types of structures included in it, before going on to give a brisk overview of their characteristics and how these developed through time, with notice of the main architects and representative examples of buildings. The second half of the guide sets out the particular tests in terms of its architectural or historic interest a building has to meet if it is to be listed. A select bibliography gives suggestions for further reading.

This guide, one of four on different types of Domestic Buildings, covers vernacular houses, that is dwellings erected mainly before the Victorian period when increasing standardisation of materials and design became widespread. The other three Domestic Buildings selection guides cover Town Houses, Suburban and country houses, and Modern houses and housing.

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Front cover

Saffron Walden, Essex. The town has many substantial timber-framed buildings (some listed at a higher grade) reflecting the prosperity

the wool and saffron trades brought between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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Introduction

Vernacular houses, by which are meant houses built in the main from locally available materials that reflect custom and tradition more than mainstream architectural fashions, are a conspicuous and much-loved component of the English landscape, both rural and urban. They are also essential ingredients of local distinctiveness. They are irreplaceable documents of the past lives of our forebears who in the main left relatively few other direct traces, and provide important evidence for a range of historic building traditions.

There is no hard-and-fast line between the vernacular and the ‘polite’ (that is, buildings that adopt the architectural language of the court or the aristocracy). Vernacular buildings were responsive to change and frequently emulated polite architecture, but a degree of conservatism remains an essential part of their character. By their nature they will seldom be in the vanguard of fashion, but they often display considerable technical innovation and versatility, and they need to be judged in their own right rather than as clumsy and backward imitations of ‘refined’ work.

Guidance on other kinds of houses is provided in the other three **Domestic Buildings** selection guides: [Town Houses](#), [Suburban Country Houses](#) and [The Modern House and Housing](#). This guide concentrates on housing erected mainly before the Victorian period, when increasing standardisation of materials and design became widespread.

Vernacular houses can pose challenges in being adapted for modern living, but listed status does not preclude appropriate adaptation once the special qualities of the building in question are understood and respected.



Figure 1
The Yeoman's House, Bignor, Sussex (listed Grade II*). A good example of a fifteenth-century Wealden-type house, with a central one-bay hall flanked by jettied end bays. The hipped roof is thatched.

1 Historical Summary

Very few vernacular houses remain from before the thirteenth century and relatively few before the fifteenth, although there are marked regional variations in survival. For instance, in Kent where there was a strong tradition of timber building, it is estimated that 2,500 hall houses (that is, houses with a hall originally open to the roof) survive, most dating from between 1370 and the sixteenth century. More typically, it is from the sixteenth century onwards that significant numbers of substantial vernacular houses of wealthy yeomen survive. There is a wide temporal and geographical variation reflecting the local economic cycle. The same processes could also bring about the large-scale replacement of earlier vernacular houses with ones in brick in fairly uniform styles, as occurred in East Yorkshire during the Agricultural Revolution of the mid-eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century when relatively uniform designs in brick replaced many earlier buildings.

As well as temporal and regional variations, research is continuing to identify building types where a specialist function dictated a particular design or plan form. For instance, church houses, where people gathered for church ales and festivals and which were often built alongside churchyards, are found predominantly in the south-west. Typically these have a ground floor with service functions such as a fireplace and oven, and a first floor where functions were held.

1.1 House plans and their development

Typically, the larger rural medieval house consisted of three components: a hall (the principal living room) at the centre; a service end (or in longhouses, an area occupied by livestock, but usually converted to domestic use subsequently) divided from the hall by a cross-passage or simply opposed doorways; and, at the other end, or upper end, the more private rooms. The hall was single-storeyed and open to the roof, but both ends could be storeyed, with separate

upper rooms being accessed by stairs or ladders. Wealthier families might enjoy more specialised rooms, such as a second parlour, a chapel or a separate kitchen (which might be attached or detached). Linear plans, in which all three elements shared a single roof, were widespread, although one or both ends could take the form of a wing roofed at right-angles to the hall.

The tripartite, cross-passage plan, arranged in line or with a wing or wings, continued in some areas (with modifications such as the division of the hall into two storeys) through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and even into the eighteenth century in areas like the North York Moors, but there are many regional variations. Wealden houses, to take one of the most celebrated and dramatic variants, take their name from the area of south-east England where the form was first recognised, but their distribution is much more widespread. They are characterised by jettied (overhanging) ends, which are linked at eaves level by a continuous plate passing in front of the recessed hall range, allowing the

whole building to share a single hipped roof. Very different in character, and somewhat later in date, are the stone bastle houses of the Anglo-Scottish borders where the living accommodation is above a ground floor devoted to cattle housing: their arrangement reflects the lawlessness of the region in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, security being provided by the first-floor entrance and thick masonry walls. A variant bastle type has recently been identified in Alston Moor, within the North Pennines in Cumbria.

Gradually (though not constantly) increasing wealth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fostered a growing concern for comfort, privacy and convenience, leading to a change in the functioning of the hall. It saw the adoption of improved heating (and smoke extraction) in the form of smoke-bays, smoke-hoods – projecting covers, either timber or stone, which captured rising smoke (see below) - and chimneys (often grouped into stacks), one method sometimes succeeding another in the same house. Additional fireplaces were provided, especially to heat parlours and first-floor chambers. This often took the form of cross-axial stacks which backed onto the cross-passage, or else stacks built within the space of the cross-passage, which thus became early examples of baffle-entry plans. The gradual abandonment of traditional plans was also influenced by the more centralised houses of the nobility and gentry that themselves reflected continental patterns. Such influences were slow to have much impact. Separate kitchens became more common and often took the place of the unheated service rooms in the medieval house. A combined hall and kitchen, which is sometimes called a hall space, was an option in lowlier houses, allowing the hall to be reserved for dining and more general social uses.

The proliferation of hearths and gathering of their flues into stacks had profound consequences for the way in which houses were planned in that it allowed two or more rooms to be heated from the same stack. This could be done by placing the stack between the hall and the parlour, often as part of a ‘lobby-entrance plan’ in which the entrance was placed directly in line with the stack, shifting the point of access away from

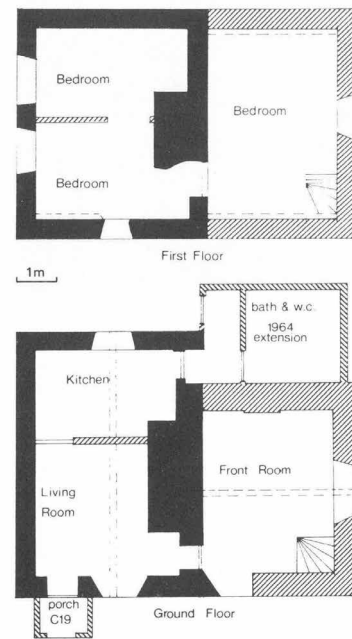


Figure 2
Style Cottage, Uffington, Oxfordshire (listed Grade II), one of the oldest labourer's cottages in Oxfordshire. The left side of this chalk-block cottage was built as a one-up one-down dwelling before 1699; a second one-up one-down was built against it between 1705 and 1766. About 1900 the two were knocked together.

the services towards the ‘upper end’. Many halls had floors inserted, creating an additional upper chamber, and consequently many stacks incorporated upstairs fireplaces as well. As chimney stacks became less bulky, the central cross-axis of the house was freed up, allowing for a more generous



Figure 3

Tiptofts manor, Wimbish, Essex (listed Grade I). Its core is an aisled hall of about 1350, flanked by later cross wings. Like many substantial medieval houses

in claylands it is surrounded by a contemporary moat; whether drainage or security was the prime motive remains unclear.

stair directly in line with the entrance. The external shafts of stacks rarely survive from before the seventeenth century. Fireplaces frequently survive with only minor damage or alteration, though many have been progressively filled in by smaller arrangements or have been blocked altogether. Where the fire area can be examined it may be found to incorporate a bread oven, an inglenook bench, a smoking chamber or evidence for a former crane and roasting jack. An important characteristic of vernacular houses found in various parts of the country was the use of the smoke-hood (also known as the fire-hood), made either of timber and plaster or of stone, as the standard means of carrying away smoke from the fire in the hall and/or kitchen. Surviving smoke-hoods are very rare and of great interest: their former presence can be deduced from evidence in timber floor beams and in the roof, where the firehood rose through the roof covering. It became commoner during the seventeenth century to place services at the rear of the house rather than at one end, echoing gentry precedents and enabling a more symmetrical front to be

presented on the main elevation. During the eighteenth century, more centralised plans of this kind became widespread in vernacular housing.

In a pioneering article in 1953 (*Past and Present* 4) W G Hoskins characterised improvements such as the introduction of chimneys and the insertion of a floor above the hall as 'The Great Rebuilding', which he dated to the seventy years after 1570. Although this is now seen as overly simple, nonetheless it has validity as indicative of general patterns. Work since then has shown very considerable local variation in where and when such changes took place, sufficient variation indeed for the idea of a Great Rebuilding to be almost – but not quite – discarded: it remains the case that in the century either side of 1600 most parts of England saw a general transformation in the type of houses in which people lived, and in their lifestyle. Evidence of this will always add to a building's interest, embodying as it does the transition from a medieval to an early modern form of housing.

1.2 Materials and construction

Broadly speaking, English vernacular buildings are built either with mass walls (of stone, brick or mud) or with timber-framed walls incorporating non-structural infill, or with a combination of the two. Invariably vernacular walling materials are locally derived as are those used for roofing. This section discusses in turn some of the key features of timber, stone, brick and mud construction.

Timber construction The availability of good-quality timber for building varied both through time and regionally. Its availability fundamentally influenced the way buildings were constructed, and typically only in densely wooded parts of the country did the availability of better-quality timber make possible larger and better carpentered structures in villages and on farms. Oak is the principal timber used although elm appears occasionally, particularly for floorboards, also chestnut and even willow. The use of soft woods such as pine generally indicates a date in the eighteenth century or later. Many surviving vernacular buildings, including some of the



Figure 4
The Ancient House, Clare, Suffolk (listed Grade I). From the later sixteenth century it became fashionable, especially in south Suffolk and Essex, to cover timber framing with decorative moulded plasterwork called pargetting. Good examples will increase the likelihood of listing at a higher grade.

earliest, are timber-framed. Nearly all, whatever their walling materials, possess roof structures of framed timber (see below), and many incorporate timber-framed internal partitions. Timber-framing was employed formerly in all parts of the country, although in some stone-rich upland areas it may never have been common for external walling. In many areas such as Cheshire it remained the building material of choice until the second half of the seventeenth century, but by the eighteenth century it was no longer considered fashionable even by people of moderate wealth, as classical models became ever more dominant. Many timber houses were encased or re-fronted in brick or stone, or concealed by render, tile-hanging or weatherboarding, and jetties were frequently under-built in brick; all these things sometimes make identification difficult. From the eighteenth century timber-framing was increasingly confined to dwellings of the lowest status. In general, considerable chronological and geographical structural variations occur in timber construction; only a brief summary can be offered here, and those wishing to know more are directed to the [Select Bibliography](#) at the end. Many buildings may be said to contain ships' timbers. This is not impossible, especially close to the sea or waterways, but it is a rare occurrence. Much more common is the re-use of timbers brought from dismantled buildings elsewhere, which can lead to confusion.

Aisled construction, resembling the division of a church into nave and aisles, sometimes in stone but much more commonly in timber, is generally considered to indicate an early date, at least in the south of England. But, while the double-aisled domestic halls are seldom found after the fourteenth century, single-aisled examples appear to have lasted longer and may have evolved into the 'outshuts' (or lower extensions) characteristic of many seventeenth-century and later vernacular buildings. By no means all early buildings are aisled but where there is evidence for aisled construction, this is likely to be of significance. Those which retain decorative aisle posts, substantial elements of the original roof, parts of one or more aisles or coherent evidence for room use and circulation may be

listable in a higher grade. There are significant concentrations of aisled buildings in Yorkshire dating from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century; here the relationship between medieval aisled construction and post-medieval houses with outshuts is still being explored. What is clear is that any evidence suggestive of developments in planning is likely to be of considerable interest.

Cruck construction uses large, generally curving pairs of timbers (referred to as ‘blades’) to transfer roof loads to the ground. The technique, which occurs in several important variations, has a particularly marked regional distribution: it is relatively common across northern, western and midland England but almost unknown in East Anglia and the south-east. Most surviving

cruck buildings are relatively modest but in the medieval period some high-status houses were built in this fashion with well-finished crucks. There is no evidence that cruck construction pre-dates box-framing, but it remained in use for a long time, perhaps as late as the eighteenth century on the North York Moors. Because cruck-framed houses were relatively difficult to modernise (offering little scope for good first-floor rooms), some were eventually downgraded to farm use, while others were raised and re-roofed to provide a more generous upper storey, often retaining the crucks *in situ* or re-using them (or parts of them) as structural members in outbuildings, so their context needs to be assessed carefully.

Box framing, where horizontal and vertical timbers are joined together to form the frame of a building, the panels of which are filled with materials such as wattle and daub, and later brick, is the most widespread form of timber framing. The size of panels can be a useful dating indicator. Large panels of large scantling (that is, consisting of sizeable timbers) are characteristic of early framing; close-studding (where the studs are roughly equal in width to the spaces between them) is particularly a feature of the decades on either side of 1500; geometric patterns based on quadrants are common from the late sixteenth to the mid seventeenth century; square panels are common in the seventeenth century; and large panels associated with long slender straight braces (often nailed) are typical of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century work. The material used to infill each panel varies from area to area, and over time. Wattle-and-daub and lath-and-plaster are widespread, but stone is sometimes found on the eastern fringe of the Pennines, for instance. From the sixteenth century brick began to be used to fill panels and this became the norm in many parts of central and southern England.



Figure 5
Distribution of recorded cruck-framed buildings in England and Wales, showing their marked central and western distribution. Many types of vernacular buildings have a far more discrete spread.

Stone construction As both stone quarrying and brick making became more widespread from the late sixteenth century onwards, so ashlar stone and brick, previously restricted in use to higher status houses, were more widely used as building materials for vernacular houses. Whilst stone



Figure 6

Water Street, Lavenham, Suffolk. A small town in an area with a strong timber-framing tradition. The close spatial relationship of these buildings

(almost all the buildings on the street are listed, including some at Grades I and II*) adds to their individual interest.

and brick walling provide less obvious or precise dating evidence than can the analysis of jointing techniques or tree ring dating, the ways in which walling stone and brick are used, the formation and detailing of door and window openings and the application of decorative detail to stone and brickwork can provide evidence of date, the chronology of construction and alteration and the hierarchy of importance or status of different parts of a house. Their endurance, too, can endow buildings with particular claims to note.

Particular stone types often require specific techniques and responses on the part of the mason. Flint, whether knapped or unknapped, is a good example of a highly distinctive local building material, demanding particular techniques of construction. While flint buildings are commonest in swathes of East Anglia and the south-east, they are also found in parts of western, midland and northern England. Especially in higher-

status buildings, flint is sometimes employed in decorative bands or in chequers with other materials, such as ashlar.

In many areas where good quality building stone became available for vernacular buildings, it was often used to replace and sometimes to completely encase external timber-framing. In areas such as the Pennines and Cotswolds stone could be quarried to produce both walling stone and dressings – quoins, mullions, jambs and lintels as well as roofing slate. In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries vernacular houses were often built to high masonry standards, the earliest (at least in some areas, like north-east Derbyshire) with well-finished coursed stonework, long quoins to corners, deep lintels and quoined surrounds to doorways and window mullions set well back from the wall face in moulded surrounds. External embellishment such as the use of string courses, hood and drip moulds

above windows and doors and the application of mouldings to door and window surrounds often combined decoration and utility. Door lintels, such as those in the Halifax area, could be highly decorative and often display the initials of owners and the date of construction. Internally, these masonry skills could be expressed in the detailing of hearth surrounds, mantle shelves or stone winder stairs. In areas where stone was less easily worked and shaped, uncoursed rubble might be used for walling in combination with dressings, brought from other areas, or with timber lintels and mullions. It should be borne in mind that render, either a plaster coating, or repeated layers of limewash, was very often used to cover rubble stone walling, even if all trace of it has now disappeared. It was also used (along with overhanging roofs) to give protection to clunch, a hard chalk which weathered badly.

From the end of the seventeenth century the detailing of door and window openings became more simplified with flush flat-faced mullions and surrounds to window openings and plain band and string courses. Doorways sometimes marked the growing influence of polite architectural fashion, and later, as sash frames replaced mullions, the facades of stone houses began to document the decline of purely vernacular building traditions whilst still expressing traditional plan forms.

Brick construction The use of brick at the vernacular level began in the sixteenth century in those parts of the east of England where brick-making had been established during the medieval period. Its gradual spread into other parts of central England to replace, clad or infill external timber-framing was driven at least in part by structural necessity, whereas its use in areas where stone construction was prevalent was initially linked with architectural fashion. By the mid nineteenth century brick was the most widely used building material, its massively increased production driven by improved, mechanised manufacturing techniques and by the more widespread extraction of brick-making clays, often as a companion product of deep coal mining operations. Canal and then railway transport

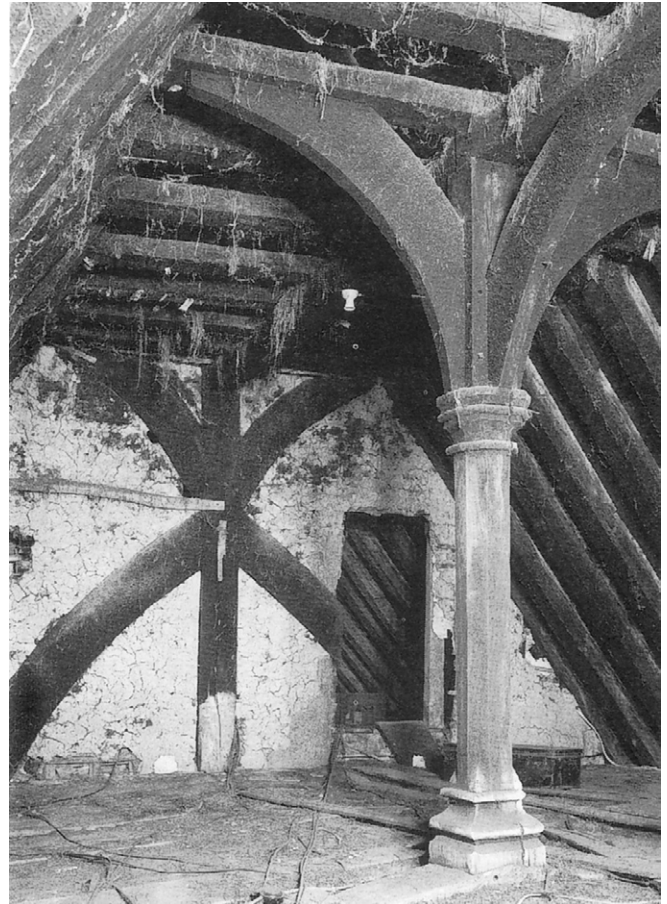


Figure 7
Parsonage Farm, East Sutton, Kent (listed Grade II*). A good example of how an elaborate roof structure – here a crown post roof dendrochronologically (tree-ring) dated to about 1436 – could be relegated to an attic and perhaps forgotten after the open hall was ceiled over.

also meant that the economic imperative to use only local materials changed and a much wider range of materials became available.

Brick could be moulded to provide purpose-made components for door and window surrounds, for mullions, hood moulds, plat band courses every bit as complex as their masonry equivalents. Chimney stacks were particularly favoured as showcases for decorative and moulded brickwork. Moreover, specifically shaped or cut bricks could be utilised to form arched heads to openings in the form of voussoirs, and decorative effect could be achieved not only by moulded brickwork, but by the creation of patterns by using bricks of different colours and different brick bonds.

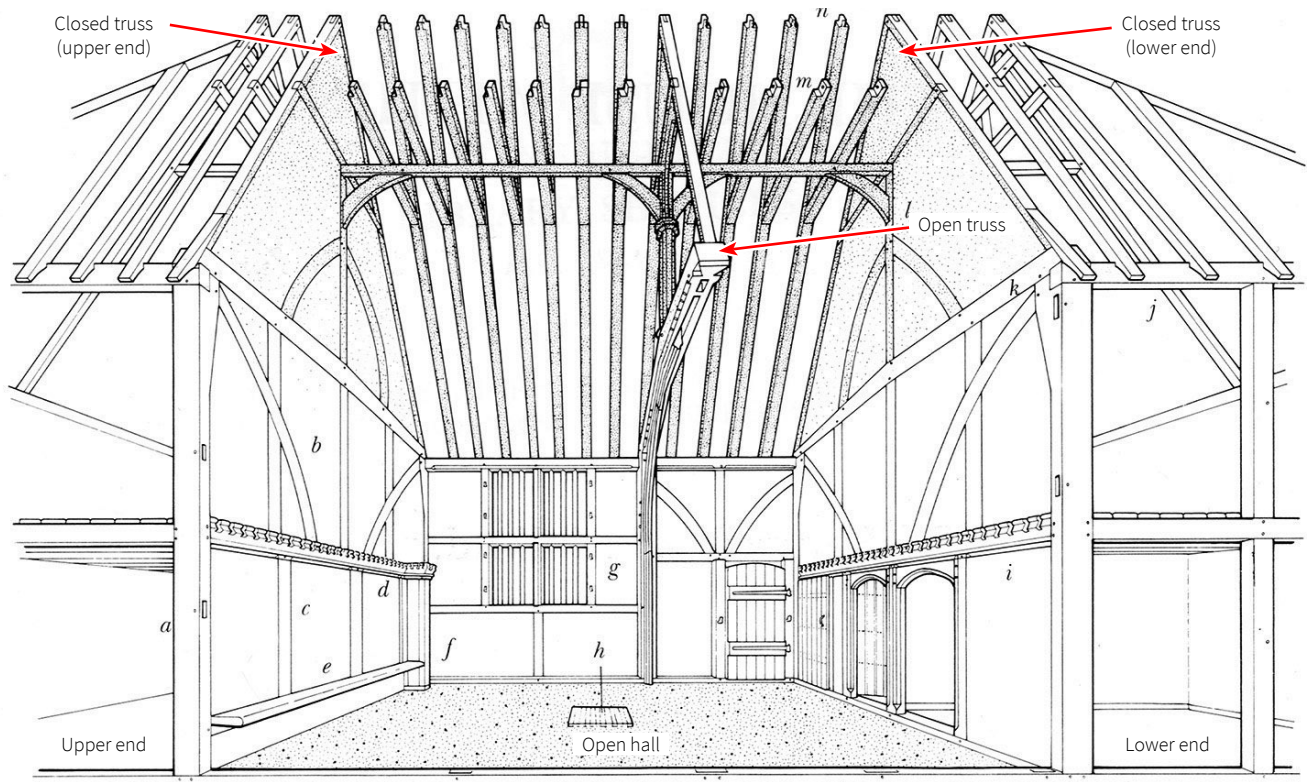


Figure 8

Some elements of a typical, fairly substantial, late medieval house: (a) main post (b) brace (c) stud (d) dias beam (e) dias bench (f) spere (dias spere) (g) hall

window (h) open hearth (i) lower-end beam (j) wall plate (k) tie beam (l) crown post (m) collar (n) rafter.

The early use of brick for vernacular houses often took the form of chimney stacks in timber-framed houses built to replace smoke-hoods or to provide additional hearths, as can be seen in many parts of the Midlands for instance, where they may clearly be seen as additions to existing buildings. Early bricks were often uneven in shape and were laid in irregular bonds, but from the seventeenth century when Flemish bond was developed clearly identifiable bonds were adopted so as to allow savings to be made in the number of bricks required and to enhance the neatness of the finish. Increased standardisation and the ending of the Brick Tax (imposed during the wars with Revolutionary France in the 1790s, and abolished in 1850), besides developments in the mass-production of brick and its distribution by rail and canal, made brick the cheapest and most widely available walling material, used for the humblest cottages and hovels which were some of the last manifestations of vernacular building traditions.

Mud and earth construction There are a number of techniques, each with different geographical and chronological distributions, for the use of unbaked earth, clay or mud in the construction of buildings. On the whole mud was regarded as an inferior building material, only used when other materials were unavailable or too expensive. Its use is therefore largely confined to vernacular houses, agricultural buildings and garden walls, though in the south-west, where the cob tradition has proved resilient, some higher-status buildings with mud walls may be found. Related to these is the use of *pisé* or rammed earth as a building material, sometimes encountered in Georgian rural buildings. Despite the low esteem in which it was held, the cheapness of earth as a raw material has encouraged a number of revivals – in the early nineteenth century, and in the early twentieth century under the influence of Clough Williams-Ellis. More recently the ‘green’ credentials of mud building have prompted renewed interest.



Figure 9

Pentre Isaf farmhouse, near Oswestry, Shropshire (listed Grade II*). A typical multi-period farmhouse in the Welsh marches retaining (centre) a hall (now

ceiled over but retaining a dias end screen) with a seventeenth-century accommodation wing to the left and a nineteenth-century service range to the right.

The different traditions of mud building fall into three main groups. In mass wall traditions, such as cob, earth is mixed with binding agents such as straw and laid down in successive ‘lifts’. In framed traditions, such as mud-and-stud in Lincolnshire and ‘mud-and-frame’ in south Leicestershire, timber is used to form a load-bearing structure, the walls of which are then in-filled with mud panels. In modular traditions, such as clay lump, bricks or blocks are formed in moulds and then dried but not fired. Regardless of the technique, all mud buildings require footings of stone or brick to protect them from damp and a breathable shelter coat such as lime render to prevent penetration by rain. For this reason many mud buildings go unidentified unless their condition deteriorates to the point where the mud walling becomes exposed. The thick, sculptural walls characteristic of some traditions make an important contribution to local distinctiveness.

There are considerable variations in the survival of the different mud-building traditions. Cob buildings, found across much of south-west and central southern England, remain numerous, although in some areas such as the New Forest modern attrition has been so high as to render any survivals of some interest. Far less numerous, though still surviving in significant numbers, are the mud buildings of the Solway Plain and the mostly nineteenth-century clay lump buildings of Norfolk and Suffolk. While the use of these materials will not constitute grounds for listing on its own it will contribute substantially to a case for listing where other considerations such as intactness, rarity and early date are present. Across large parts of the Midlands mud building was once widespread but known survivals are thinly spread. Some entire traditions, such as as Horsham stone slabs in Sussex, clamstaff-and-daub in the Fylde district of Lancashire, and wychert in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns, are now represented by only a handful of examples.



Figure 10
Town Council Offices, Ledbury, Herefordshire (listed Grade II*). Here a painted room of 1575-1600 (possibly a court room) with geometric and floral motifs and biblical texts survives almost intact.

These categories, as well as new discoveries in areas where surviving traditions have not hitherto been identified, will potentially justify listing even where the surviving mud walling is relatively fragmentary (for instance, a single wall in a building otherwise rebuilt using stone or brick), and a high grade of listing for any examples approaching completeness. The stigma attached to mud construction, coupled with the problems associated with poor maintenance, mean that mud walls and panels were frequently replaced using other materials. Unusually complete survival of mud walling will generally warrant a greater degree of protection than that outlined above.

Examples of the nineteenth-century revival of mud building techniques, including *pisé* or rammed earth, are extremely rare. Fostered mainly by landowners seeking economical solutions to rural housing problems (and by this token not strictly vernacular, but treated here for convenience), they

exemplify an experimental impulse in farm and estate management which is characteristic of the Agricultural Revolution. Twentieth-century examples, such as the clay lump council houses designed at East Harling, Norfolk, by George Skipper in 1919-20 (listed Grade II) are also very rare.

1.3 Roofs

Roof structures are important not only as evidence for traditional technologies but also for the social meanings they embody since, during the medieval period and into the sixteenth century, the hall and frequently other rooms were open to the roof, which was often decorated, sometimes lavishly.

The earliest surviving roofs are of the coupled common-rafter type in which the rafters are of a constant scantling (that is, cross-section and length) throughout. From the thirteenth century trussed roofs appear, in which the common rafters are grouped in structural divisions called bays divided by trusses, and the roof is stiffened longitudinally by purlins which are attached to the trusses. There is an extensive range of such roof forms, and considerable specialist knowledge is sometimes required to tease out the full significance of their carpentry. Some, like the crown-post and arch-braced collar types, enjoyed great popularity and then fell out of use, the former during the sixteenth century, the latter shortly after 1600, while others, such as the king-post and queen-post types, were progressively refined and remained in use for centuries. Different roof types were suitable for different circumstances and conveyed different ideas of status.

Better quality first-floor rooms were also open to decorative roofs, although as more houses became storeyed throughout, and the upper rooms were ceiled there was no longer any need to decorate roofs since they were now hidden behind plaster ceilings. Increased attic accommodation encouraged the adoption of truss types that permitted free movement at this level. Such adaptation is one of the factors that mean that roof structures frequently survive, often

unsuspected, even when lower portions of the building have been extensively rebuilt, and why inspecting roof spaces is an important element of any assessment.

There was an increasing tendency to ceil roof spaces, often creating attic rooms in the process. Roof-spaces and sometimes upper floors were frequently used for the storage of agricultural produce or merchandise. The insertion of full lath and plaster ceilings ('underdrawing'), concealing the beams and joists, remained rare in vernacular houses throughout the seventeenth century, and even in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it is often restricted to the parlour or to a handful of better rooms. Stairs constructed by joiners begin to make their appearance in the seventeenth century, as do panelled doors, but simple boxed or winder stairs and plank doors, or false-panelled doors remain the norm at the lower social levels throughout. Upper floors of plaster laid on reeds are found in some areas (for example, the east midlands).

In terms of roof coverings, local traditions and materials were far more in evidence before the mid-nineteenth century, when Welsh slate (and to a lesser extent, Cornish slate) was brought to many parts of England by canals and then the railways. Thatch was a universal roofing material and reed, straw and heather were used, occasionally also heather and ling. The best reed came from specially cultivated Norfolk beds; straw was usually wheaten although rye was sometimes used. The size of clay plain roof tiles was standardised in 1477 and their use, favoured for fire resistance, especially in towns, spread outwards from the eastern and south-eastern counties. Pantiles, originally imported from Holland, were locally manufactured in the eastern counties from the early eighteenth century. Some regional roofing materials are now rare, such as heather thatch and 'wrestler' (that is, intersecting) slates in northern England. Occasionally materials like thatch may be found hidden, either under overlays or later coverings like corrugated iron. These hidden materials can occasionally be of great age (for instance, fourteenth-century thatch survives in Devon) and retain palaeo-biological evidence of great

value. The type and weight of roofing material used had a bearing on the pitch of roof required, and as different roofing materials were adopted structural changes to roofs could follow.

1.4 Heating

Since the evolution of vernacular houses is driven to a considerable degree by the adoption of new methods of heating and smoke extraction, it is important to consider carefully the evidence which individual houses retain. Open halls which have retained their original roof timbers may also preserve evidence of smoke-blackening. This has often been reduced by subsequent cleaning to a fragmentary condition, but well-preserved smoke-blackening is a vivid reminder of past heating technology. Louvres or cowls, which were used to allow the smoke to escape through the roof almost never survive, and good evidence for their former position should be treated as important. Smoke extraction via gablets at the top of hipped roofs also merits serious consideration. The evolution of heating technology proceeded rapidly in vernacular houses from the late fifteenth to the seventeenth century. Early chimneys – some provided in traditional open halls – are worthy of special notice, as are chimneys or stacks retaining original fireplaces. Smoke bays (discussed above) were a relatively short-lived phenomenon and surviving examples are rare; smoke-hoods (also called fire-hoods) were bulky and – except when built of stone – vulnerable to fire, and most were replaced in succeeding centuries.

1.5 Fixtures, fittings and decoration

Medieval vernacular houses were simply fitted out with exposed beams, joists and unceiled roofs. However, some timbers might be carved or moulded and roof decoration could be elaborate, especially over the hall. Fireplaces and doorways generally received some form of decorative emphasis. Doors and door furniture were usually very simple, although the moulded and carved doors of spice cupboards could be



Figure 11
28-30 South Street, Titchfield, Hampshire (listed Grade II*), a jettied urban house set parallel to the

street frontage which dendrochronology suggests was built in 1413.

quite elaborate. Windows were originally unglazed at all but the higher social levels, and secured with timber mullions and shutters. Stairs were crudely constructed with solid baulks of timber instead of separate plank treads and risers. Not uncommonly, houses may preserve ritual 'atropaic' marks, typically made next to entrances to the house such as hearths, door and window openings (although examples can be encountered in roof structures), by means of which occupants sought to invoke divine protection or ward off evil spirits. These should be noted in List descriptions.

Extensive schemes of original wall decoration may once have been relatively common but most have now been either damaged or concealed by over-painting or wallpaper. Wall panelling, or wainscot,

widely adopted in greater houses during the sixteenth century, began to appear in wealthier vernacular houses towards 1600, along with the first instances of decorative plasterwork.

1.6 Other vernacular house types

Cottages Cottages, the dwellings of some of the poorest in society, are documented throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. Huge numbers were built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the population grew, notably in villages and on commons and waysides where manorial control was weak (places sometimes called 'open villages'). These were typically of just one or two bays, single-storeyed, perhaps

with an end-chimney heating one room, and typically highly vernacular in character having been constructed on a self-build basis from materials locally to hand. Especially in upland areas dwellings associated with stock management (some occupied seasonally) occasionally survive; Old Ralphs, for instance, a late eighteenth-century herdsman's cottage in the Staffordshire Moorlands, is listed Grade II. The very poorest in society (other than the roaming indigent) typically occupied hovels, often little more than brushwood huts. These are highly unlikely to survive, although relatively modern descendants such as the huts provided for the use of seasonal hop-pickers sometimes do. In a few parts of England the poor excavated into soft rock outcrops to create homes, notably in Nottingham where there were both cliff dwellings and cellarcaves, and around Bridgnorth (Shropshire) in the Severnside red sandstone.



Figure 12
Jackson Bridge, Wooldale, West Yorkshire.
Terraces of weavers' cottages, of about 1800.
Many are Grade II listed.

Urban house types In smaller urban centres and on the peripheries of larger settlements, houses share most of the characteristics of their rural counterparts. But in the centre of larger towns, houses often assumed different urban forms. A typology related to the position of the hall in relation to the street was developed some decades ago, and recent work has refined our understanding of the influences affecting the form of the larger urban house in the medieval period. House types range from large courtyard houses (London, Bristol) to very small open-hall houses (Rye, Sandwich). The commercial benefits of placing shops on the street frontages displaced living accommodation to the rear of the building or to upper levels (more information on medieval shops can be found in the [Commercial](#) selection guide): both large (Chester Rows) and small (Church St, Tewkesbury) examples are known.

The urban vernacular tradition lasted into the nineteenth century (and has never altogether disappeared). As outlined above, many of the buildings that have come down to us tend to be the more solidly constructed and hence more opulent examples. Many cities retain examples of transitional construction in which the conventions of polite building are modified by vernacular approaches. Plan forms can vary to suit multiple occupancy; staircases can be configured to suit particular patterns of use; space can be found within a house for industrial uses; and re-used materials can be incorporated into a structure. The evidence of lower status dwellings survives particularly unevenly, and it can sometimes require further analysis to identify the true importance of a building. Often, older houses were sub-divided for multiple occupancy by poorer families. This obviated the need for distinct vernacular housing in towns. More discussion of this is provided in the [Town House](#) selection guide.

Industrial housing Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, when relatively uniform streets of terraced houses were built in towns and cities across the land to accommodate the ever-larger workforces demanded by industrial and commercial employers, industrial housing in both

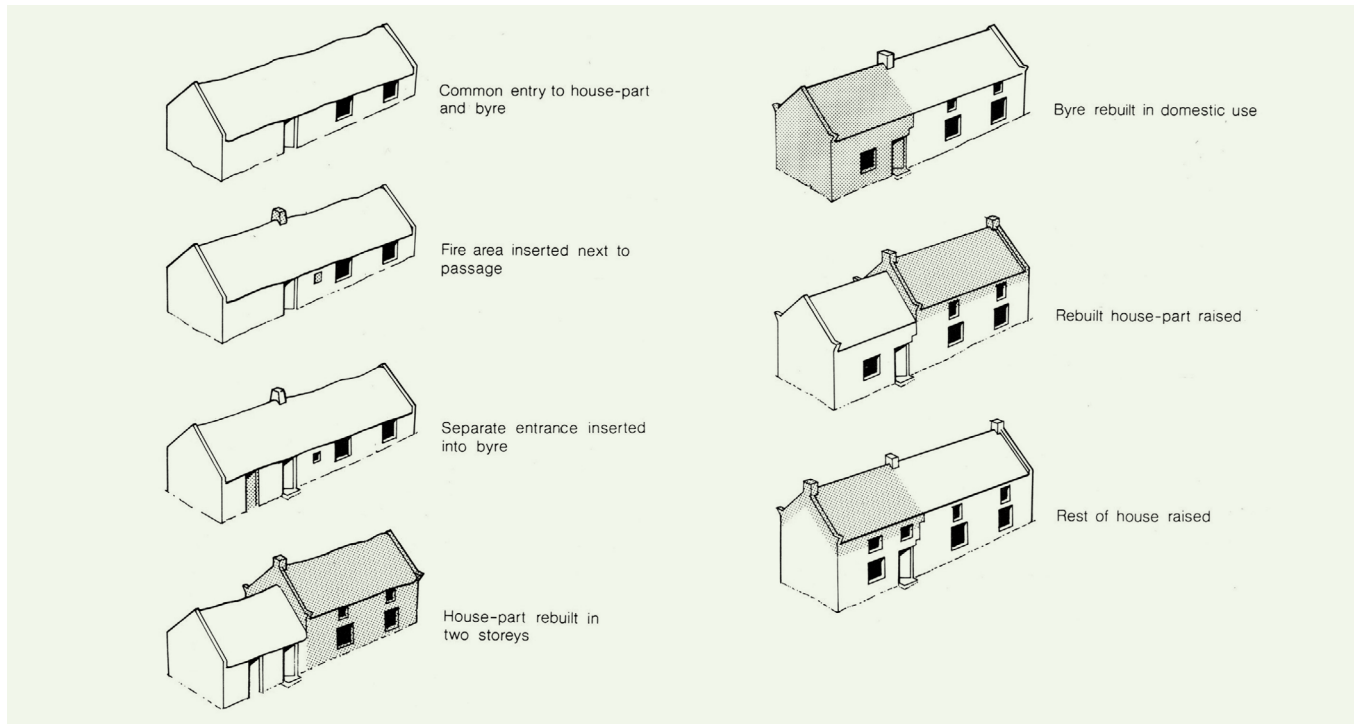


Figure 13
Laverock Hall Farm, North Yorkshire (listed Grade II).
Analysis allowed its evolution to be shown from a
longhouse to a four-bay farmhouse.

urban and rural settings commonly reflected local vernacular traditions, albeit sometimes adapted to provide for the carrying on of industrial or craft processes at home: an example would be the rows of weavers' houses in West Yorkshire or South Lancashire with long ranges of windows to an upper floor to light the loomshop.

1.7 The end of the vernacular tradition and its legacy

Vernacular houses continued to be built into the nineteenth century, and exceptionally (as in the Cotswolds) the twentieth. Then, as living standards rose, as pattern books and architectural journals encouraged particular fashions and styles, and as canals and railways made mass-produced building materials more widely available, even the homes of the poor approximated to a national standard and shed most of their regional characteristics.

1.8 The influence and inspiration of vernacular architecture

From the earlier nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, architects stimulated by the Picturesque Movement in art, and the Romantic Movement at large, looked increasingly to vernacular buildings for inspiration. This trend was transformed into the Arts and Crafts style of the years to either side of 1900 and, in diluted form, determined the character of much twentieth-century mass housing. Its importance as a source of inspiration remains current today, as architects and builders continue to design houses which relate to the distinctive place in which they are being constructed. This sense of tradition and ongoing relevance adds to the importance of surviving vernacular buildings from earlier epochs. For further detail see [The Modern House and Housing](#) selection guide.

2 Specific Considerations

2.1 Regional and local characteristics

Much of the special interest of vernacular houses lies in how they differ in form and appearance from region to region. House building generally remained grounded in local tradition and locally derived building materials until the nineteenth century. The use and availability of local materials can mean that changes in the form and appearance of buildings can occur fairly abruptly, sometimes from one village to another. The assessment of the special interest of vernacular houses should take into account, amongst other things, how clearly they represent local geology, farming and tenorial practices, social hierarchies, and building traditions and materials. Buildings which are typical and representative of a region can have special interest and be listable, just as much as those considered exceptional or unusual: this is an important acknowledgment of the importance of local distinctiveness, a value which can attain national importance.

2.2 The dates of buildings, and rates of survival

Particularly early examples of buildings or the innovative use of structural techniques or materials are likely to give a building special interest. Relative numbers of early houses remain very small, which is why there is a presumption to list all pre-1700 examples which retain significant early fabric – significant, that is, in terms of the light it sheds on the development and use of the building. In particular, while vernacular

architecture is sometimes said to be the architecture of the common people, only rarely do the houses of the poorest survive (see above, Cottages). Thus early survivals of houses of the lowest ranks in society may be strong candidates for listing, despite their architectural modesty, and because of their extreme rarity. However, earliness is not the only gauge of significance: occasionally a late example may be scarcer or more revealing than an early one.

Timber buildings, or components like roofs or even doors, are also important in that they may be susceptible to dendrochronology (scientific tree-ring dating). Since salvaged timbers were frequently re-used, it is important to establish whether timbers are in their original location or not. Sometimes re-used timbers may be of historic interest, but only exceptionally will their presence, of itself, justify listing; earliness of date, decoration and proven connections with earlier buildings, structures, or even ships will be key determinants.

2.3 Alteration

Hardly any vernacular houses have escaped alteration over time, and many will have undergone several phases of change, reflecting altered concepts of privacy and hygiene, as well as the impact of other social and economic changes. The insertion of a floor into an open hall, for instance, can add significantly to a building's interest, whereas the complete obliteration of an early floor plan can impair our ability to

understand its development. The evidence of change, important in any building type, has particular value in those that have adapted incrementally over hundreds of years.

From the nineteenth century onwards, and with rapidly growing momentum in the twentieth century, vernacular houses attracted better-off occupants, influenced by ideas of the picturesque and the cult of the simple life, and aided by improvements in transport. Many such houses were restored, extended or otherwise adapted to meet the expectations of the new residents. Alterations of this type that are sympathetic to the vernacular fabric, demonstrate good design or are well-preserved exemplars of important trends, may add to, rather than detract from, the significance of the building, and should be noted in the List description.

2.4 Specialist functions

Many vernacular houses were not exclusively domestic in function. Farmhouses frequently incorporated a dairy, cheese room, apple loft or brew house reflecting local agricultural practice. Others accommodated small-scale processing or industrial manufacturing either in rooms which doubled as domestic accommodation or in an additional room or rooms provided specifically for the purpose. In rural south Yorkshire, for instance, some farmsteads incorporated small-scale forges for small-scale metal working. Most rooms of this sort have been converted to domestic uses, often making them difficult to identify (anomalies in plan-form, or variations in elaboration or building materials may furnish clues), but such features, where they survive in recognisable form, can add interest to the building as a whole.

2.5 Proportion of survival

Often the outcome of an assessment of special interest will hinge upon the extent and impact of alteration, and the proportion of historic fabric that survives. This is sometimes most clearly illustrated in the assessment of timber-framed

buildings where elements of the original structure have been removed. In general, losses of fabric or of elements of the building are commonplace and do not necessarily preclude designation. For instance, buildings with substantial evidence of original or early roof carpentry may still merit listing, even if other parts of the original structure are lost. However, where these losses are extensive, for example, with the loss of an entire roof structure, the case for designation may be significantly weakened. Such losses may be counterbalanced by other considerations such as the survival of other notable elements of the building's fabric or internal decoration, or by its historic interest or associations.

2.6 Plan form, room use and circulation

Plan form tells us much about how buildings were used, and should play a part in their assessment. House plans vary according to location and the wealth of the builders and changed over time, but not uniformly: some changes took place in south-east England a century or more before they did in parts of the north. Where the original plan-form survives or can be identified, especially where it is unusual or incorporates ephemeral elements like screens and lightweight partitions, this may be sufficient to give the special interest required for designation even if the building's exterior is compromised: judgement is needed on a case-by-case basis. An exceptionally intact surviving plan form can play a part in assigning a higher grade, as where both the exterior and the interior of an early dwelling survive little altered its special interest is likely to be enhanced.

Circulation in vernacular houses was invariably simpler than in great houses, but this is an aspect of plan which is worthy of consideration. Is a work area effectively segregated from the dwelling area, as in a Yorkshire clothier's house? Are living-in servants separated from family members? What patterns of circulation for different members of the household are suggested by the plan form, particularly the means of moving from one floor to another?

Part of the interest of vernacular housing lies in the use of rooms at different social levels, and in changes in room use over time. The gradual incorporation of the dedicated kitchen (taking cooking out of the hall and thus changing the function of the latter room); the development and sometimes multiplication of parlours (sometimes revealed in decorative schemes or the provision of heating); and the confinement of sleeping to upper floor chambers are among the significant changes evident over time in vernacular houses of some size. Other changes include the conversion of the byre of longhouses to domestic accommodation. These subtle clues to past usage are often only detectable through very careful analysis.

2.7 Fixtures, fittings and decoration

Extensive schemes of wall decoration such as painted schemes, wood panelling and decorative plasterwork seldom survive in anything like their complete form; thus even where fragmentary, early interior decoration is likely to be of particular interest. More complete schemes may warrant a higher grade. In higher-status vernacular houses the hall was the centre of hospitality and had strong symbolic overtones that favoured its retention. Roofs and screens might be decorated and sometimes evidence survives of fittings such as the dais (or high table) with its coving. A combination of such features might well warrant designation in a high grade. Evidence of decorative schemes in poorer vernacular dwellings is rare, and correspondingly likely to add to a building's special interest, and perhaps a higher grade. Similarly, clear evidence for the former existence of a smoke bay or smoke-hood will be a factor in determining whether a house merits listing, and substantially complete examples may merit higher grades.

2.8 Houses and industry

Vernacular houses associated with industrial enterprises, whether provided by a mine or factory owner, a speculator or built by the individual

worker, can form an integral part – along with the remains of industrial buildings, and even waste heaps – of a particular place, and thereby have greater interest than where they lack strong local context. In selecting examples for designation, houses where specific adaptation for industrial or commercial processes can still be seen will be strong candidates, so too where innovative forms occur such as tenemented housing for textile workers at Papplewick, Nottinghamshire, or the 'cluster houses' built by the Evans and Strutt families of cotton spinners in Derbyshire. In the countryside, rural industry such as small-scale mining was often associated with self-built labourers' houses, often resembling the mean squatters' cottages found on commons; where such dwellings survive in a little altered state they can be strong candidates for designation.

2.9 Materials, finish and grading

The best and most intact of houses of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries will merit consideration for listing at a higher grade. With medieval cruck buildings, as with aisled and timber-framed buildings, higher grades may be appropriate for examples which are particularly complete; which exhibit a finish indicative of high-status use; or which illustrate relatively uncommon constructional hybrids such as contemporaneous cruck and box-frame construction. Similarly with medieval roofs, early, decorative or technologically significant roofs may merit listing at a high grade, especially if other parts of the structure survive. Because some roofs have been little altered they may preserve fragile surface finishes and other features such as smoke-blackened thatch, or evidence of louvres or smoke gablets. The survival of such evidence may enhance the case for a high grade.

The quality and extent of survival of external and internal detailing in stone vernacular houses will be a significant factor in a designation assessment. Evidence of phased development and alteration may be read in differences in coursing and surface tooling of walling stone as well as in the shape, size and moulded finish

of mullions and quoins and should be noted in list descriptions. Where mullions have given way to later window types, the surrounds of the earlier window openings are sometimes retained, sometimes below drip moulds and string courses which have been hacked back flush with the wall face. Window positions sometimes change, with earlier openings blocked, sometimes with mullions *in situ*, or with straight joints marking the junction of walling and infill. Vernacular buildings with well-preserved facades with original door and window detailing are not uncommon, but examples which combine high quality masonry and external detailing of exceptional quality and architectural interest can merit consideration for designation at a high grade.

The presence of early brickwork in a vernacular house can contribute to the assessment of special interest. Well-preserved examples of brick houses of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century date may merit careful consideration for designation where other elements such as plan form and external architectural detail survive, and exceptionally complete examples of early date may merit consideration for designation at a high grade. Moulded, decorative and patterned brickwork and distinctive bonding and jointing can all add to the special interest of a building and should be noted in list descriptions.

Very exceptionally, the early adoption of particular building materials (say, imported softwood for a roof structure) will be a factor in giving a house special interest, or adding to it.

2.10 Historical associations

By their nature most vernacular houses have no documented association with well-known historical figures. In a minority of cases, however, such associations do exist. Frequently they relate to the birthplace of someone who later (usually elsewhere) achieved fame. In such cases, such as Isaac Newton's birthplace at Woolsthorpe Manor, Lincolnshire (listed Grade I) there is often a powerful contrast (and corresponding emotional charge)

between the commonplace or even humble building of their birth and their subsequent achievements. Less frequently, vernacular houses may themselves have been the setting for great achievements: Dove Cottage, Cumbria (listed Grade I), where much of Wordsworth's greatest poetry was written, is an example.

Individual buildings must be assessed on their own merits. However, it is important to consider the wider context and where a building forms part of a functional group with one or more listed (or listable) structures this is likely to add to its own interest. Examples might include [purpose-built housing or process buildings associated with industrial or military sites, or agricultural buildings associated with a farmhouse]. Key considerations are the relative dates of the structures, and the degree to which they were functionally inter-dependent when in their original uses.

2.11 Extent of listing

Amendment to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides two potential ways to be more precise about what is listed.

The empowerments, found in section 1 (5A) (a) and (b) of the 1990 Act, allow the List entry to say definitively whether attached or curtilage structures are protected; and/or to exclude from the listing specified objects fixed to the building, features or parts of the structure. These changes do not apply retrospectively, but New listings and substantial amendments from 2013 will provide this clarification when appropriate.

Clarification on the extent of listing for older lists may be obtained through the Local Planning Authority or through the Historic England's Enhanced Advisory Service, see www.HistoricEngland.org.uk/EAS.

3 Select Bibliography

3.1 Bibliographies

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4 Where to Get Advice

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