

Exmoor National Park
Historic Environment Report Series No 30

COUNTY GATE COTTAGE COUNTISBURY

NGR: SS 7935 4865

LISTED BUILDING 1213009 (GRADE II)



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Exmoor National Park
Historic Environment Report Series
Author: Shirley Blaylock
Design: Pete Rae
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This report series includes interim reports, policy documents and other information relating to the historic environment of Exmoor National Park.

Further hard copies of this report can be obtained from the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record:
Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset. TA22 9HL
email her@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk, 01398 322273

FRONT COVER:

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SUMMARY

The cottage at County Gate (Listed Grade II) is a local landmark, sited in an isolated but prominent position on high coastal moorland beside the A39 on the boundary between Devon and Somerset. It was built between 1842 and 1862 probably as a gate keepers or estate workers house. It appears to have been built for the Glenthorne Estate which was developed by the Halliday family from 1829. The cottage is a single storey stone building with a simple porch and ornate windows on the front elevation, two of which are housed in projecting rectangular bays. The cottage was originally a simple rectangle, probably of three rooms. A rear extension was added in the first half of the 20th century to form an L-shaped building, and a further small service extension was added in the second half of the 20th century. The cottage has been owned by Somerset County Council / Exmoor National Park Authority since 1977. It was used as a visitor centre and café from around 1980 when much of the interior was removed. It has been disused and boarded up since 2015. Some opening up in 2017 revealed addition information about the main original fireplace and layout.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an outline of the development of County Gate Cottage. It is intended to inform the repair and re-use of the building. Site visits were made on 24/05/2017, 17/08/2017 and 14/12/2017.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COTTAGE AT COUNTY GATE

The cottage is a Grade II Listed Building (NHLE number 1213009 - Appendix, Exmoor HER number MDE21369). It is listed together with the pair of slate gate posts which stand either side of the road (A39) on the boundary between Devon and Somerset and the parishes of Countisbury (Devon) and Oare (Somerset). It has similarities with other estate buildings at Glenthorne, with the use of unrendered local stone and ornate windows, although the windows are of a different design. It may be of a comparable date to recorded work on the estate buildings, for example Yenworthy Farm was remodelled in c1850 and the Lodge, built 1832 was remodelled in 1853. It is known that Halliday had a copy of P. F. Robinson's "Rural Architecture; or a Series of Designs for Ornamental Cottages", published in 1823, in his library which is said to have influenced his estate buildings. No design in that work is an exact match for County Gate Cottage but it is clear it could have provided inspiration. In summary, the cottage has significance as a designed mid-19th century estate cottage, part of the designed landscape setting and estate of Glenthorne. The cottage with its gate could have marked the entrance to the estate on the high ground before the long descent down to Glenthorne House.

2.1 Location and Setting

The cottage is isolated from other settlement although prominent beside the A39 between Porlock and Lynmouth. It is sited in a dramatic position on a neck of higher ground, known as County Gate or Cosgates Feet. The neck forms a ridge between Cosgate Hill and Yenworthy Common. It lies at 325m OD, above two steeply sided combs; Ashton Cleave to the west, of which there are extensive views from the adjoining public car park, and Coscombe to the east which runs down to the sea. The cottage is tucked into a cutting on the south slope of Cosgate Hill and faces south east, overlooking the road as it approaches from the south. This topographic position coupled with the significance of the geographic position where the road passes through the county and parish boundary are the likely reason for the establishment of this building in the mid-19th century as part of the entrance to the Glenthorne estate. The cottage and gateposts continue to be a well-known landmark.

2.2 Historic Development

Summary

The cottage was built at some time between 1842 and 1862. It is sometimes referred to as a toll house (including in the List Entry description) but there is no evidence that the A39 was ever a Toll Road or that tolls were collected here. At the time of the drawing up of the Tithe Maps (1841-2) the land was not owned by the Halliday family who began building a house and developing an estate at Glenthorne from 1829. Ursula Halliday (1995, p64) states that by 1850 Walter Halliday had almost achieved his ambition to own the entire parish of Countisbury (the exception being Wilsham Farm which he acquired later). From this it can be assumed that the land at County Gate Cottage had been acquired by him by 1850 and that the first phase of the building was constructed at around this time before it is first shown on mapping in 1862. A rear one room extension was added to form an L-shaped building, probably in the first half of the 20th century. This was followed, probably in the 1960s or 1970s, by the insertion of a flat roofed addition joining the two ranges (for a bathroom).

Evidence from Map Regression

Maps and photographs available through the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record (ENPHER) have been consulted together with a photographic copy of the relevant part of the Inclosure Map provided by Mr G Halliday.

Historic maps indicate that the cottage was built at some time after 1841-2, when the area is shown as open moorland and no buildings are shown on the Tithe Maps of Countisbury and Oare. A dashed and dotted line along the boundary on both Tithe Maps suggest that there was no solid boundary here at this time.

The cottage is first depicted on the Oare Inclosure map of 1862 held in the Glenthorne estate archives. It appears to show the main building with the porch but no gate across the road and no outbuilding to the south is shown.



Figure 1. Oare Inclosure Map of 1862 (Glenthorne Archives by permission)

The cottage is also depicted on the Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" map of 1888. A gate is indicated across the road between a solid boundary running on the county boundary to the north and south. It is clearly sited at the meeting point of a number of tracks as well as beside the main road. It has been suggested that the main road has shifted further to the east than the route shown on the Inclosure map.

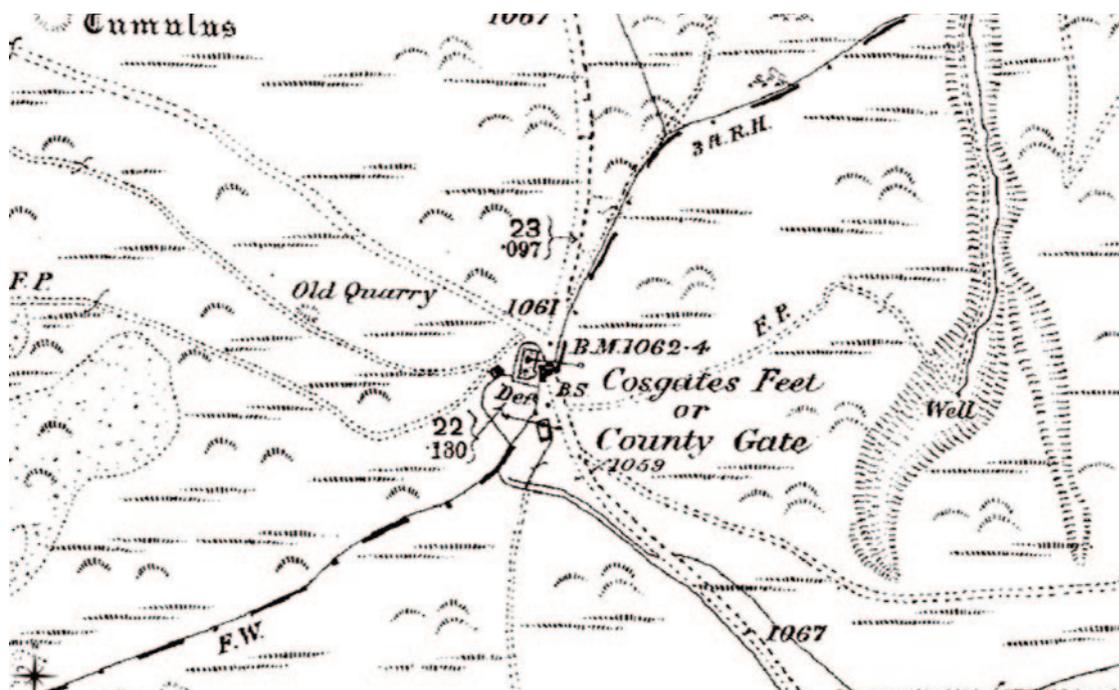


Figure 2. Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" map 1888

The building is shown as a simple rectangle with a porch, forming the front range of the current building. A small outbuilding, possibly a privy, which is no longer present is shown to the west. A further building, now public conveniences and a walkers shelter is shown to the south. The same arrangement of buildings is shown on the 2nd Edition map of 1902-1907, although the twist of the boundary across a gate is not shown and it is unclear whether a gate is present.

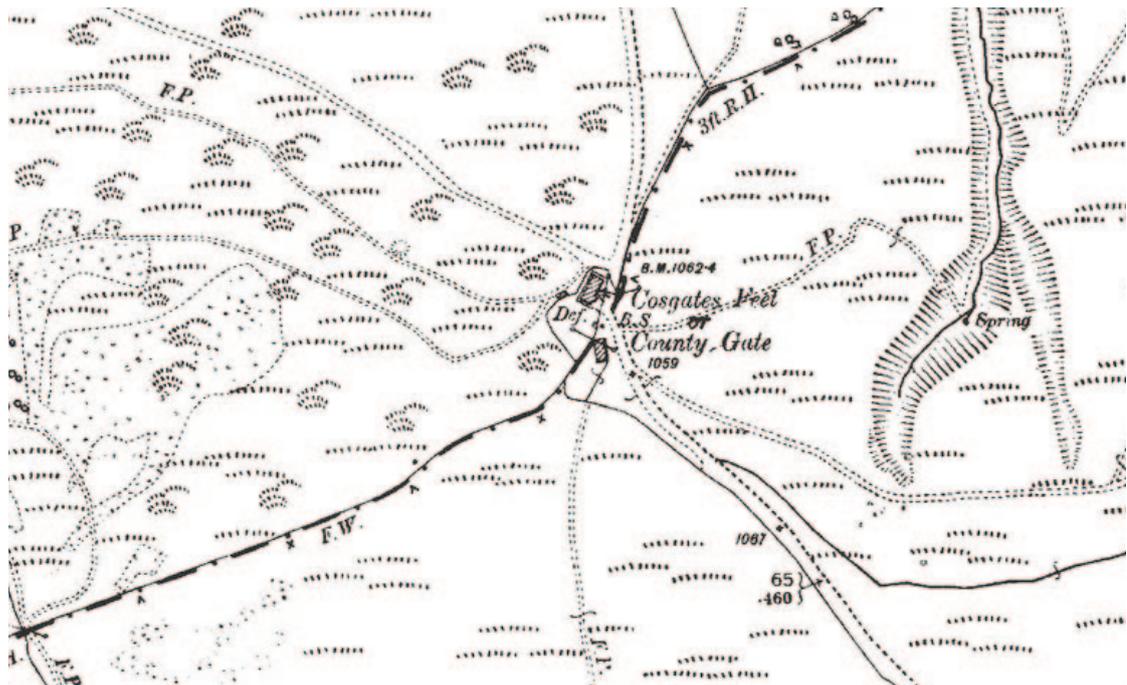


Figure 3. Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25" map 1902-1907

At some time in the 20th century probably before the Second World War a rear range was attached, followed by a flat-roofed extension built in the angle between the original front range and the added rear range, probably in the 2nd half of the 20th century but before 1977.

Evidence from Other Sources

Two photographs from the 1940s or 1950s are included in a local history publication (Ramsay 2011, pp47-48). These show the former railing and gateway along the front of the cottage; the central brick chimney (since removed) and stove flues at the apexes of the north and south gable ends.

A Royal Air Force vertical photograph from c1946-8 appears to show the rear extension present.

A copy of sales details from 1977 and two conveyances held by ENPA provide details of the most recent transfers of title. In 1965 the land for the adjoining car park was sold by Walter Halliday to Devon County Council (conveyance dated 24 May 1965) and in 1977 the Halliday family also sold County Gate Cottage and the associated building, then used as a café, to Somerset County Council (conveyance dated 28 July 1977).

There are two planning applications relating to the cottage in 1978. The first (62/11/78/005) granted permission for a temporary mobile Information Centre in the car park and for extensions, alterations and a new garage at County Gate Cottage. These would have provided a larger 3-bedroom dwelling but were not carried out. No photographs are in the archive but the submitted drawings (Fig 4) provide some useful information:

- The position of the original cellar and raised floor level above is indicated with the proposal to infill the cellar and lower the floor shown on the section.
- A dotted line indicates stonework to be removed in front of the position of the original fireplace. It seems likely that this stonework was not original as the extent is larger than the known size of the original fireplace.
- Slate hanging and the chimney stack are indicated to be removed at the gable end of the Northwest extension. The chimney stack remains today with an inserted door but the gable end is now rendered [Plate 3].
- The position of a former stove on the Northeast gable is indicated.

The second planning application of 1978 (62/11/78/012) is for the conversion of the existing building into an Information Centre which appears to have been largely implemented to provide the plan existing today (Fig 5). One apparent difference is that the rear wall between the original building and the extension is now represented by a retained pillar rather than a widened doorway opening. This conversion involved the removal of the internal partitions and ceilings.

An oral comment by a retired ENPA employee at County Gate Cottage reports that in 1977 the cellar steps were visible immediately to the right of the front door and the original stone floor was visible and later covered by the present floor covering (Molly Groves *pers comm.*)

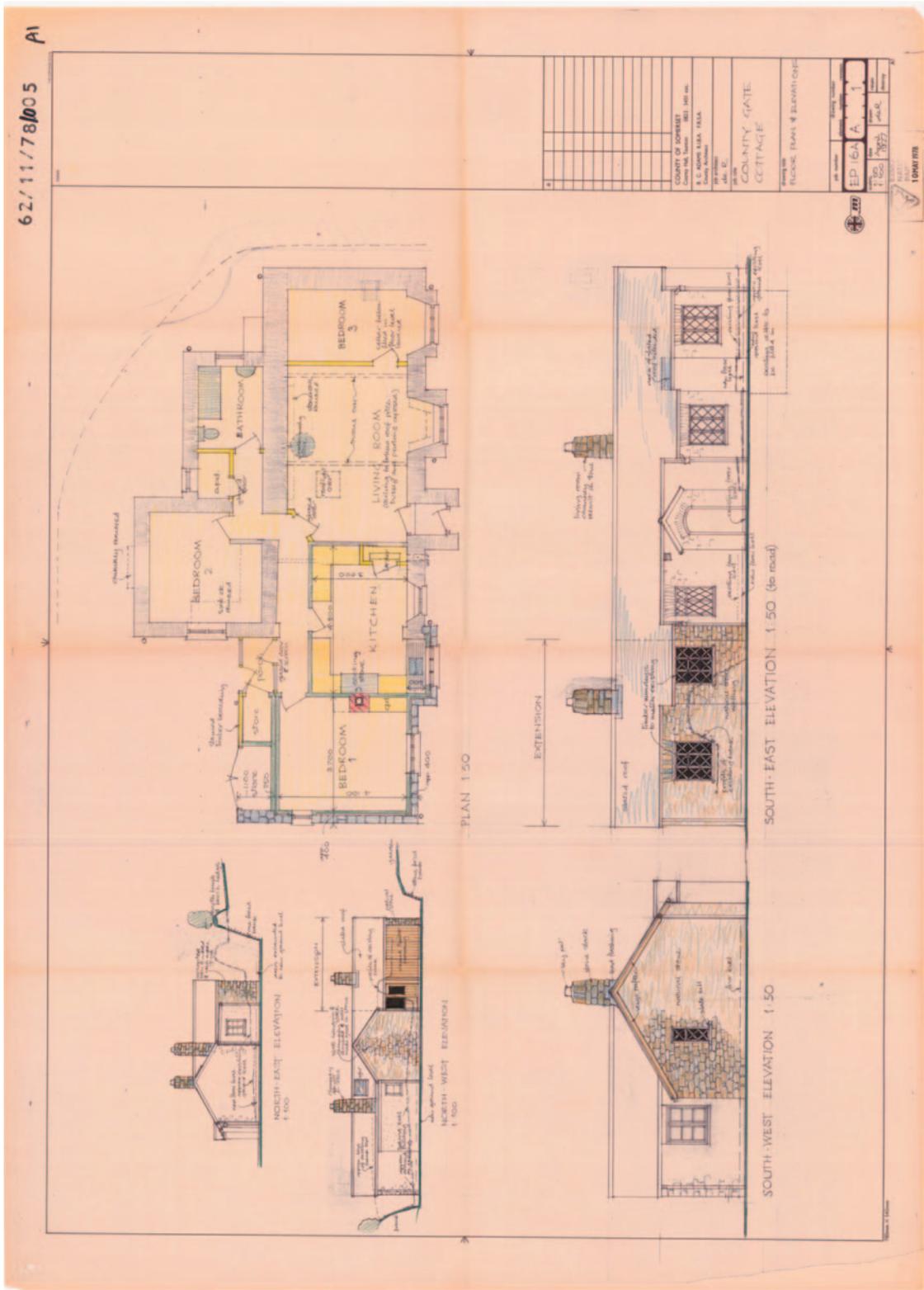


Figure 4. Proposal to extend the cottage in 1978 not implemented (application 62/11/78/005)

3. DESCRIPTION OF BUILDING

The building is as it is described in the List Entry (Appendix): a one storey building with an L-shaped plan with a slate roof and gabled ends, the rear wing is later. It is of coursed local stone rubble construction with slate hanging to the south west and a rendered rear wing. There are three windows on the front elevation with the two right-hand windows in square bays over which the roof is carried down. The windows are 19th century wooden lattice casements, the right hand two windows are of three lights, the left hand one of two lights, all have flat stone arches and slate cills. The doorway is left of centre and has an original gabled stone porch with a segmental stone-arched head and a 20th century door. 20th century roof lights to the rear. There is a rendered external end stack on the rear wing through which a later door has been inserted, and a 20th century flat roofed addition lies in the angle. Internally the front (original) range has a four-bay roof with collar trusses, the later rear wing has trussed rafters. The internal partitions and ceilings have been removed but the evidence suggests it was originally of three rooms, the main room lying centrally with a rear fireplace.

It is interesting to note that the wall of the south gable end and part of the rear wall appears from the plan to be narrower than other walls. This may be because the remaining rear (west) wall accommodates the chimney flue and the front (east) wall contains a number of openings. The front projecting bays, which could provide window seats, give the impression of being in a much earlier building with very wide walls, which may have been an intention of the design.

Additional observations (SJB 14/12/17) have been made following some stripping out around the original fireplace [Plates 13-15. Figures 6 & 7]:

- The original height of the floor above the cellar is indicated by a projecting plinth 0.15m above the current floor level. It seems likely that the original building had a central stone paved main room and access to the cellar, with slightly raised wooden floors to rooms (bedrooms?) at each end.
- No original partition walls or ceilings are present, most surviving information is obscured by plaster or thick paint. One side of the position of the partition north of the fireplace is visible where a patch of plaster skim has been removed. It lies 0.13m south of the projecting plinth.
- A modern plaster skim and some hard, modern plaster was removed to partially reveal the main fireplace. It is visible as a blocked opening with the surviving original lime plaster outlining the position of a former fireplace surround of 1.63m wide and 1.43m high. Bricks of the flat or low arch are now exposed with stone jambs forming an original opening

1.30m wide and 1.25m high. At some time brick has been used to narrow the width of the fireplace by approximately 0.12m on the left hand side. The LH jamb also is disturbed by some earlier intrusive work. The fireplace is blocked with a built wall of concrete block 0.80m high topped with six courses of brick. The fireplace and chimney have been in-filled with rubble (including Westbricks, stone, mortar and cement). A small way through the rubble to the back of the fireplace indicated it has a depth of 0.65m.

- A slate panel 0.30m x 0.30m, now part missing, is fixed centrally placed above the fireplace. No inscription or applied decoration or paint was detected.
- Lime plaster survives beneath the modern thick paint coating.
- The internal treatment of the walls is obscuring any other surviving features.

4. TIMELINE

- 1841 Countisbury Tithe Map no buildings shown. If present, the cottage would lie within plot number 251, named Old Burrow Common, which is a large area of open ground (271 acres, 2 roods and 30 perches) including Cosgate Hill and the site of Old Burrow Roman fortlet. The owner and occupier is recorded as the Reverend Matthew Mundy (Glebe).
- 1842 Oare Tithe Map no buildings shown although the road is shown continuing for a short distance into Countisbury. If present the building to the south of the cottage would lie within a large area of ground numbered 74 on the map. This is named as North Hill Common (634 acres, 2 roods and 35 perches). The owner is recorded as the Reverend John Blackmore (Glebe) and occupier John Locke.
- 1850 By 1850 the land acquired by Walter Halliday of Glenthorne.
- 1862 Cottage shown on Inclosure Map
- 1888 Cottage shown on Ordnance Survey map with gate indicated (extensions not shown)
- 1902-7 Cottage shown on Ordnance Survey map (extensions not shown)
- 1928 Newspaper report of a peddler who broke into the dwelling house of Mr Bertram Gordan Thepbald at County Gate in April "*the lodge was*

isolated and used as a summer residence and unoccupied in the winter months when the windows were barricaded with boards. The boards had been [?] from one of the windows and a pane of glass was smashed. Some knives and food to the value of £1 was taken. The accused said "There is not much doing the peddling line now. I was down and out. That is what made me break into the lodge."
[Western Times 11 May 1928]

- Pre-1946 Used by an artist with the detached building used as a studio [Ramsay 2011]
- 1946 Grandparents of Tony Richards (Granfer and Granny French) moved in. Photographs post-dating 1947 show them in front of the cottage, one with Farmer David Pile doing his deliveries on horseback. The photographs show a brick chimney on the rear elevation and stove flues at each gable end with metal railing along the roadside front with wooden posts to a gateway to the front door. The Frenchs are said to have had a garden at the back where they grew vegetables. The water for the cottage was pumped up by a ram from down in the combe and the toilet was a 'bucket job'. The building at the side of the cottage they called the studio, because a previous resident had been an artist, and that's where he'd worked. It's been turned into a bus shelter now. Granfer used to sell Dornats mineral water to passing people...He had a little stall outside the door. [Ramsay 2011]
- 1965 Conveyance from William Halliday to Devon County Council on 24 May 1965 of a parcel of land for a car park and access. This is the current car park. (ENPA Archive)
- 1977 15 June 1977, the 3 bedroom detached stone built bungalow and neighbouring café premises, both with permission to extend, and adjoining a public car park and toilets together with a block of land extending to 61 acres, put up for sale by tender by direction of A.J.B Halliday. Bought by Somerset County Council on 28 July 1977 for £30,163. (ENPA Archive)
- 1978 Proposal to extend the cottage as a 3 bedroom dwelling (application 62/11/78/005) approved.
- 1978 Proposal to convert the cottage into an Information and management centre (application 62/11/78/002) approved.
- 1988 County Gate Information Centre and Gate Piers listed Grade II. (Appendix)

Figure 6: Measured sketch of internal elevation of west wall Showing blocked original fireplace, position of fire surround and position of partition

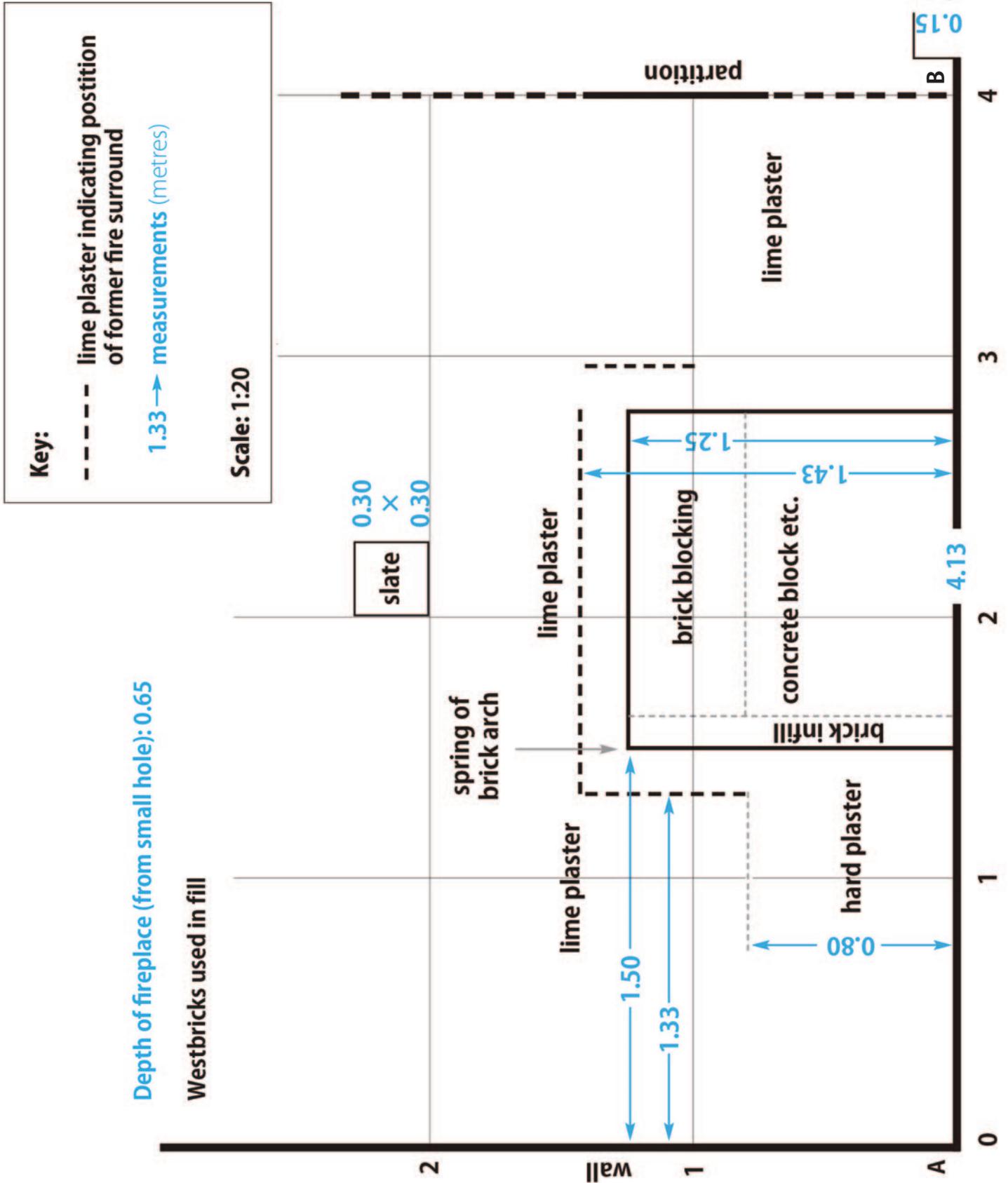
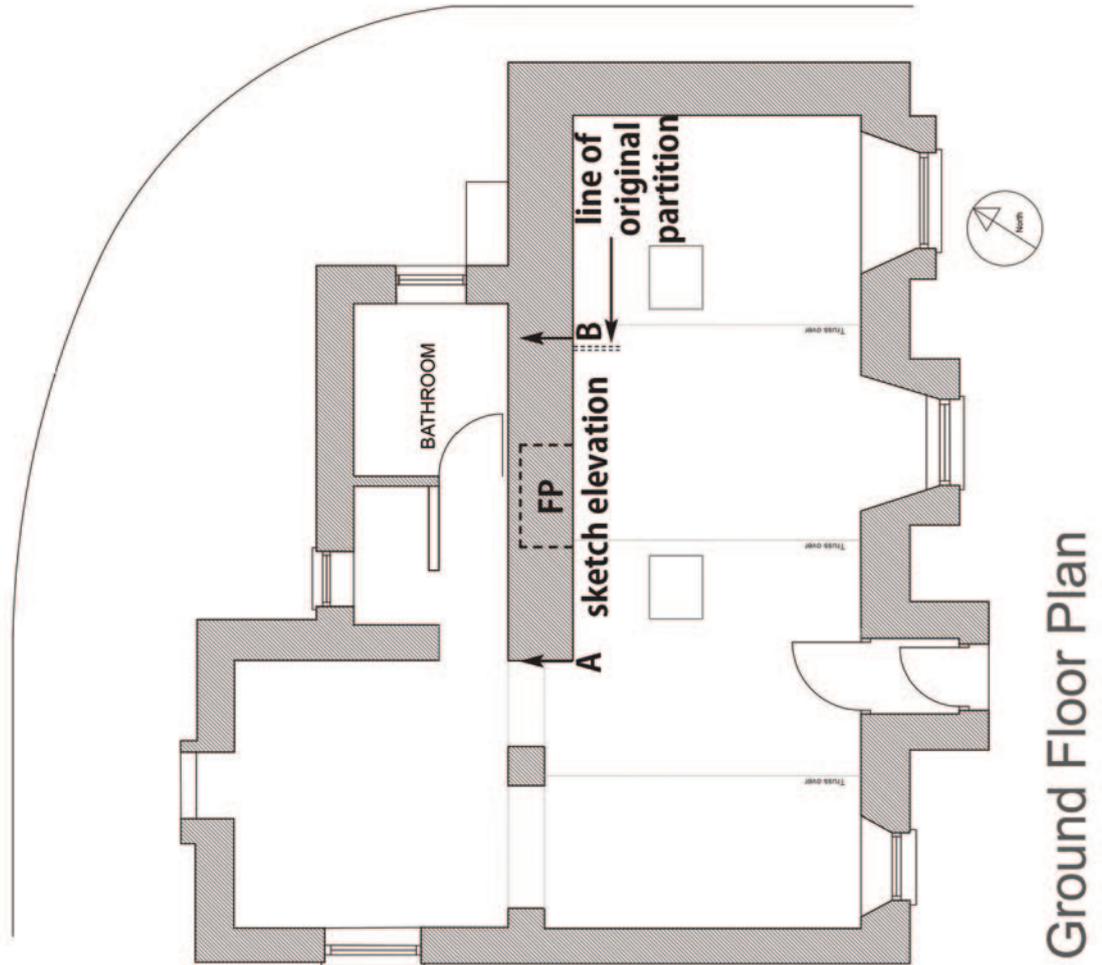


Figure 7: Ground Floor Plan



FP = Fireplace

Scale: 1:100



Scale Bar in metres

This drawing is for Planning purposes only. All dimensions to be checked on site prior to work commencing.

Do not measure from this drawing as printing can distort scales.

William Bowden
 ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN SERVICES
 Tel 07532 264184
 Lynton Devon EX35 6AA
 will@willbowden.co.uk

County Gate
 Brendon, Devon

Drawing: 1135/P/10



Plate 1 The slate hanging on the southern elevation



Plate 2 Detail of the unboarded southern front window and rustic nature of stonework.



Plate 3 The rear of the building showing the two 20th century extensions, the roof lights and the door inserted through the chimney stack in 1978.



Plate 4 County Gate Cottage in its position beside the A39 and the county boundary, with the gate piers (re-sited) and former outbuilding (now public conveniences and shelter).



Plate 5 The porch, front doors and lobby.



Plate 6 The northern window interior.



Plate 7 The main front range looking north, note the plinth indicating former height of the floor above the cellar (now infilled).



Plate 8 The main range looking south.



Plate 9 From the rear extension to the front range



Plate 10 The roof of the extension cut into the main range, looking west.



Plate 11 The fire exit through the chimney stack.



Plate 12 The interior of the flat roofed extension.



Plate 13 The exposed outline of the fireplace in relation to the rear wall of the main range after the removal of a display panel and some paint /plaster skim.



Plate 14 The exposed outline of the original fireplace with a low brick lintel arch after further opening up. Note the strip of brick infill on the left jamb showing narrowing, the partially exposed stone floor or hearth and the slate panel 0.30m x 0.30m centrally placed above the fireplace.



Plate 15 The position of the north partition wall is revealed beneath the modern plaster skim, note the position in relation to the floor plinth.

REFERENCES

Published

Halliday, Ursula, 1995, *Glenthorne, A Most Romantic Place*, Exmoor Books.

Ramsay, David, 2011, *Unforgotten Exmoor* Volume 4, 47-48

Western Times, Friday 11 May 1928, WILD GOOSE CHASE

Unpublished

Countisbury Tithe Map and Apportionment Book 1841

Exmoor Historic Environment Record MDE21369

Exmoor National Park Planning application number 62/11/78/005 County Gate Cottage, Countisbury, Barnstaple, Devon, Extension and improvement and new garage

Exmoor National Park Planning application number 62/11/78/012 County Gate Cottage, County Gate, Countisbury, Lynton, Devon, Conversion to form new County Gate Information & Glenthorne Management Building

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" map 1888

Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25" map 1902-1907

Oare Inclosure Map of 1862 (Glenthorne Archives by permission)

Oare Tithe Map and Apportionment Book 1842

Conveyances held by Exmoor National Park Authority.

APPENDIX

COUNTY GATE INFORMATION CENTRE AND GATE PIERS IN FRONT ON EITHER SIDE OF ROAD (THAT PART IN COUNTISBURY CP)

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: COUNTY GATE INFORMATION CENTRE AND GATE PIERS IN FRONT ON EITHER SIDE OF ROAD (THAT PART IN COUNTISBURY CP)

List entry Number: 1213009

Location

COUNTY GATE INFORMATION CENTRE AND GATE PIERS IN FRONT ON EITHER SIDE OF ROAD (THAT PART IN COUNTISBURY CP)

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Devon

District: North Devon

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Countisbury

National Park: EXMOOR

Grade: II

Date first listed: 24-Nov-1988

Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: LBS

UID: 397370

Asset Groupings

This list entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List entry Description

Summary of Building

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

COUNTISBURY SS 74 NE 4/16 County Gate Information - Centre and gate piers in front on either side of road (that part in Countisbury CP) - II Toll House and gate piers, now information centre. Early C19 with some late C20 alterations. Coursed stone rubble, with slate-hanging to south-west and rendered rear wing. Slate roof with gabled ends. Plan: L-plan, facing south-east. The rear wing is probably a later (C19 or C20) addition. Internal partitions since removed. 1 storey. Exterior: asymmetrical 3-window front, the 2 right-hand windows are in square bays over which the main roof is carried down. C19 wooden lattice casements, the right-hand 2 are of 3 lights and the left-hand one of 2 lights, and all have flat stone arches and slate cills. Doorway to left of centre has original gabled stone porch with a segmental stone-arched head and a C20 boarded door. C20 roof-lights to rear. Rendered external end stack to rear wing and C20 flat-roofed addition in angle. Interior: 4-bay roof to front range with collar trusses, and trussed rafters to rear wing. Pair of rough monolithic slate gate piers flanking Porlock-Lynton road in front of toll house, each with fixing holes for former gates. The eastern pier stands in Somerset as the county boundary passes down the centre of the road at this point.

Listing NGR: SS7935648656

Selected Sources

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details

National Grid Reference: SS 79356 48656

