



DBRG NEWS

January 2025



Dormer Cottage Frensham
Surrey's only known true cruck dwelling
(see p. 5)

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From the Editor

Happy 2025 to you all.

This year there will be changes to DBRG News. Recently there have been fewer events and not much in the way of recordings. This has had the effect that there has been very little copy available for the Newsletter, so for the time being the News will be reduced to two issues a year, January and June. Should activity pick up again then this will be reconsidered.

This time Martin has once again stepped into the breach with an article on crucks and Ian gives a report on the Farnham walk. Marcella gives us details of her research on ecclesiastical matters in East Surrey

Rosemary Hughesdon

Group Matters

DBRG Events

DBRG 2025 AGM and Town Walk:– Saturday, 12 April 2025. Godalming United Church, Bridge Road, Godalming GU7 3DU. Meeting room 1st floor, lift access available, limited on-site parking. We will meet at 11.15 am for a walk around Godalming, please bring a packed lunch, tea/coffee will be available at the venue. AGM starts at 2p.m.

Old Palace Croydon: There is to be a final open day at the Old Palace at Croydon (building up for sale) on July 1st 2025, 10.00-3.00. We are advertising this to members who may not want to miss this opportunity. We are thinking that we may have an informal meeting at the venue to share information. More details to follow.

Other Events

EHBG [Essex Historic Buildings Group] Annual Day School, details as follows: Saturday 28th June 2025, Maldon Town Hall, entitled 'Markets & Shops in the Medieval & Early Modern Period'. The tickets are £40 and can be purchased from the EHBG website

<https://www.ehbg.co.uk/media/other/66620/ehbgdayschool2025bookingform.pdf>

Research Topics

Appeal for information on Surrey's tarred buildings

Recently, I was delighted that one of the magazines I receive had an article on pitch and tar being used to protect and blacken weather-boarded buildings. I was excited to learn more and cut straight to the relevant pages. While it was very interesting, it failed to answer several key questions like where did one get the pitch/tar, when did this start, and is there a geographical spread?

A cursory search of the internet gave a few clues, but before writing a note for The NEWS I thought I would ask if any Members have come across anything relevant such as building accounts or peculiar uses of pitch/tar in Surrey. There are certainly many examples out there, both barns and houses.

As an example, Ian West believes that the weather-boarding of his house of c1680 in Chalk Lane, Epsom was tarred from the outset. Epsom is particularly rich in boarded houses, some early(?) ones black, other later(?) ones white, and some, like those below, both.



Houses near Epsom Hospital: white on the front but black elsewhere. I am particularly interested in addresses and photographs of any houses with blackened fronts as my perception is that Surrey houses are almost always white on the front. Any documentary references also sought.

Please send examples to martin-higgins @ outlook.com.

Martin Higgins.

Crucks in West Surrey



Conwy church porch, Wales.

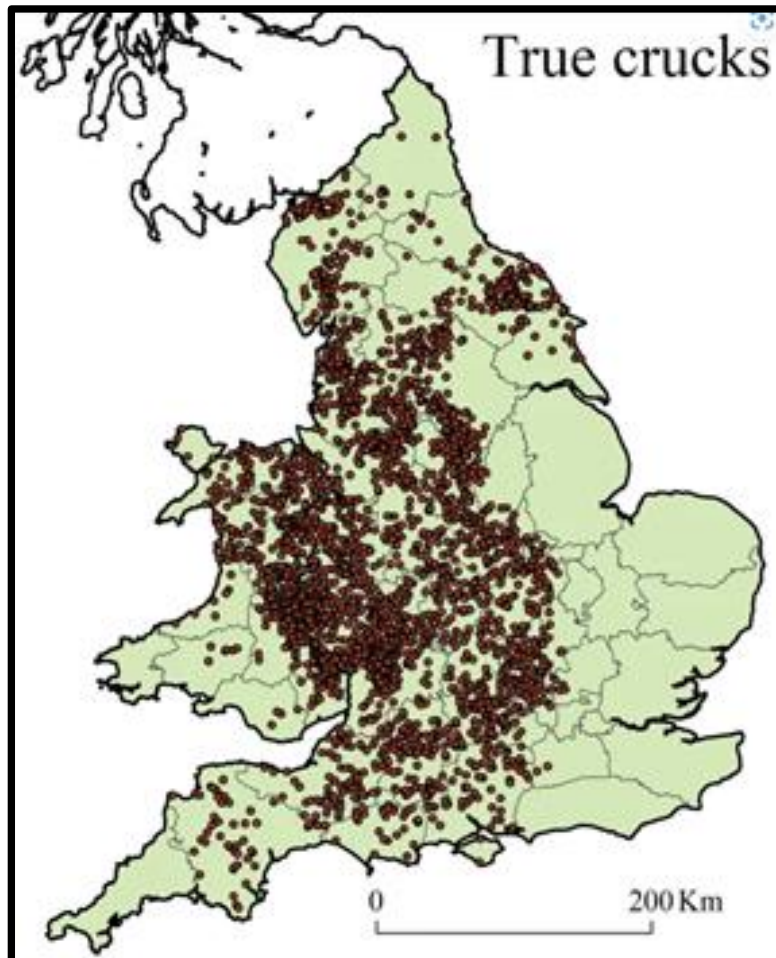
Crucks are curved timbers that support the roof directly from the ground. At the church porch illustrated each cruck acts directly as both wall post and principal rafter. Crucks are often split from the same timber so are perfectly symmetrical.

About thirty five years' ago I took over editing the NEWS from the late Katie Dodson. She had been my first primary school mistress at Brockham back in the late 1960s but I will best remember her as a great artist and illustrator of DBRG Reports. She was going to be a hard act to follow, and I was still very wet behind the ears as far as vernacular buildings were concerned.

What has this got to do with crucks I imagine you are thinking? Well, one of the articles submitted was from Phillip Brooks, a member from West Surrey, which related to crucks. Phillip had been transcribing the medieval pipe rolls of the Bishops of Winchester and found references to what he thought were cruck buildings being repaired and erected on the Bishops' estates in West Surrey.

Well, I was nervous about publishing this because I was certain that crucks do not occur in Surrey (for the record, Surrey has just one, in

Wrecclesham, right on the Hampshire border). I put Philip's paper to one side, hoping to pluck up courage to ask the opinion of one of the luminaries in the Vernacular Architecture Group who knew about crucks. By this time Joan Harding was no longer with us to hold my hand or offer sage words herself.



Map of over 4000 known crucks in England and Wales created by Nat Alcock of the Vernacular Architecture Group. Only one is in Surrey.

The long and short of it is that I delayed too long and misplaced the article, so it never got published. Now I am older and (a bit) wiser I want to make sure Philip's research is acknowledged for the importance it had. It may be that this jogs someone memory that they have a copy of his draft manuscript we could belatedly publish.

A national database of cruck buildings in England was created in 2019 and it has been constantly updated. Dr Nat Alcock created this by gathering information from published sources and Vernacular Architecture Group members, including me as Chairman of the DBRG. I was able to confess my youthful ignorance and both he and I set about searching for any papers Phillip Brooks might have published or deposited anywhere regarding his findings. We both found Hampshire

Record Office had four volumes of his transcripts of the Winchester Pipe Rolls any I willing volunteered to view them in the hope Phillip's name could rightfully be associated with the national cruck inventory. The four perfectly legible hand-written volumes had been prepared by Phillip and David Graham and I extracted references to buildings. The first volume mentioned a "chimonea" and windows at Farnham Castle in 1220. The second records payment in 1224 for five glass windows in the hall and three in the chapel, and for other windows in the hall, cords for them (?for shutters to high unglazed windows?). In 1235 the bishop paid for iron shares for the ploughs at Bentley "because of the great drought", but still no references to crucks.

Volume 3 in 1244 records two shillings being paid "for 4 ropes bought for the windows in the hall at [Farnham] castle". Volume 4 records new glass was bought for the hall and the chapel in 1248 but it's not clear if this relates to the same windows as 1224. There are numerous records of charcoal being made or supplied "against the coming of the bishop" which suggest he did not like smoke in his palace and braziers were used. Finally, in 1248, I found references to houses. Alas their form was not stated but it took eight days to "throw down" two "seized" houses of John the Parker and Peter the Moneya (for 4s 10d) and a further 12s 6d to cart the timbers to Farnham.

So, I failed to locate Phillip's manuscript of cruck buildings in the bishop's estates in West Surrey. I hope a copy survives and turns up one day. I recall he found numerous references to buildings containing pairs of crucks. I think the term "furcis" was used, which means fork and is the term used generally. Phillip's research was certainly sound and he made accurate transcriptions of considerable importance.

The link below will take you to authoritative background reading about crucks if you are interested.

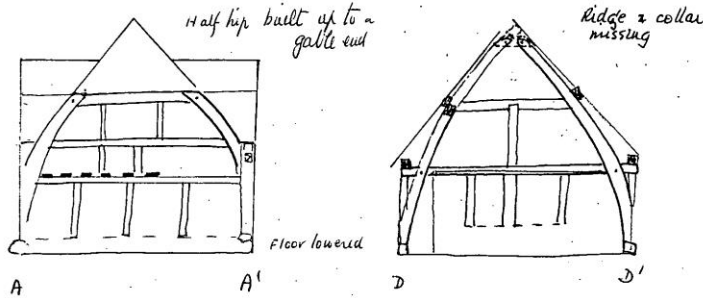
Martin Higgins

[*Cruck construction: an uncouth and rudimentary building technique? – The Past*](#) (an easy and informative read – recommended, Ed.)

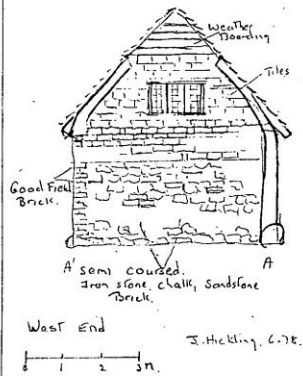
Surrey's only true Cruck

(Reprinted from DBRG News No 108, January 2008)

Many of the summer results from the Surrey Dendrochronology Project have now come through. A particularly memorable visit was to Surrey's only cruck house, *Walnut Tree Cottage* in Frensham (formerly *Dormer Cottage*). There are one or two base crucks in the county but,



J. HARDING 6.78



according to Joan Harding, only this one true cruck house. We think she was right. A true cruck has principal trusses in a letter 'A', two great bending posts, starting almost vertically and yet meeting at the ridge (see front cover). They are quite common in the Welsh Marches but rare in south-east England. Hampshire has a few, but otherwise there is just this one in Surrey.

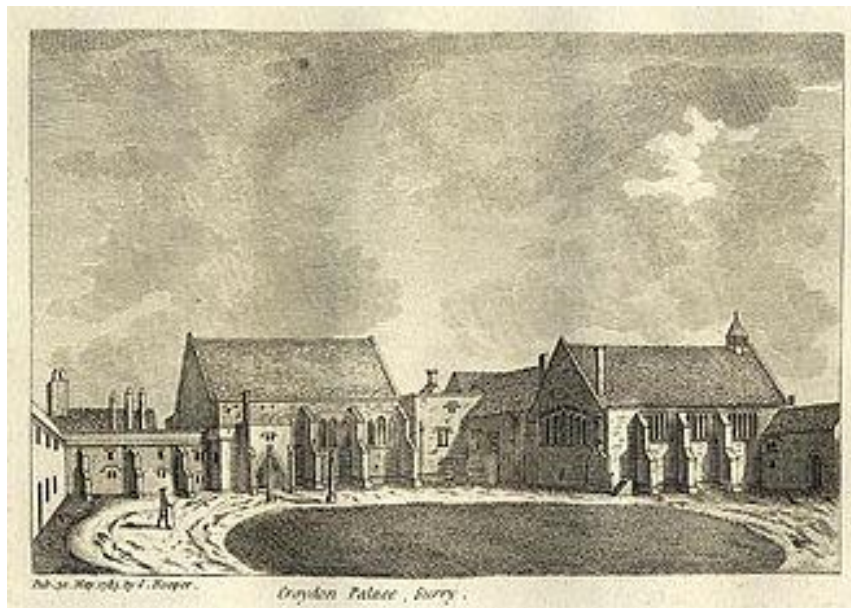
Walnut Tree Cottage looks to be just a simple country cottage from the outside. The original was just three bays, an open hall with a

floored bay either side. It has been much modified and extended, but two complete trusses remain, a true (or full) cruck and a base cruck that was originally under the end half hip. Cruck buildings are sometimes thought to be very old, because of their archaic construction, but they were erected over quite a long period, presumably because of their simplicity. Hampshire examples (for domestic buildings) date from 1360 to 1487. We had estimated early 15th century for *Walnut Tree Cottage*. In the event, Andy Moir found two felling dates, the winters of 1427/8 and 1429/30. So we have a likely build date of 1430 or soon after – not far from the estimate. It is interesting that there were two felling dates, two years apart, something not common. The earlier date was for a single timber which must have been stored. The date of 1430 is a little later than most Hampshire examples.

?Barry Cox

Limpsfield

After our DBRG visit to Limpsfield last spring I was intrigued to understand the development of the village; the original purpose of the



many substantial and prestigious properties, and if there were any links to historic pilgrim routes. The first clue to this connection was a mural outside the venue depicting a scene from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, I also found a local

map reference nearby to Pilgrims Way. Further searches confirmed that two important and ancient routes do converge in the area; between Winchester and Canterbury and London and Canterbury.

My particular curiosity was in relation to the proximity to the Old Archbishops Palace, Croydon, and the more or less direct route that would have been taken between Croydon and Canterbury. My childhood home stood right alongside this fascinating building, and after much research into that I do know that regular journeys were made between Lambeth and Canterbury via Croydon / Addington. Limpsfield would certainly have been a reasonable day's travel distance from Croydon at that time, and these journeys were often major events carrying all manner of valuables and necessities, along with advisers, cooks, servants, etc. It is a reasonable assumption that much industry would have been generated to accommodate the needs of travellers. On further investigation I found references to Limpsfield having several convalescent homes and similar establishments; one source hints at a medieval building boom post plague era, along with an unusually high percentage of public houses. This would fit with an early hospitality tradition and could well correlate closely with a theme of pilgrim worship, which was big business back then.



I have been able to establish that much of the land in these parts was held by various religious houses and jurisdictions but beyond that little information is readily accessible, in part due to C16th Reformation.

For example, any search into the history of the neighbouring Titsey Estate starts with its acquisition post Reformation. The most promising avenue for research remains within the environs of the neighbouring Addington Village: The Church there in particular is a good source for local noteworthy individuals; burials, etc. [including Lady Jane, daughter of Sir Thomas Brown, Betchworth Knight]. Elsewhere I have found references to an order of Knights Templar, with land leased of Archbishops Palace at Croydon. Knights Hospitallers or Order of St John of Jerusalem also strongly associated with the area. The scant evidence available does tend to support speculation of an early hospitalier theme. and a natural progression towards familiar hospitality traditions. The many significant buildings in the region do suggest a thriving complex of some sort, and I believe consideration of the impact of socio- economic factors an important factor in the development narrative.

So my little hunch of a link between Limpsfield to my childhood haunts, although tenuous at best, proved very fruitful. I have a great interest in local histories, and as I said grew up right by Old Parish Church, now Croydon Minster, and have always been intrigued by this history. I do think it's a fascinating area for research, and hope you will have enjoyed reading of my investigations. Many of you will be more familiar with places along the ancient route between Winchester to Canterbury,

and as DBRG has invited members to contribute items of interest to the newsletter with updates on visits, etc., maybe a topic for further research?

Marcella Harris

Addendum

*A good account of the old palace complex can be found at [Croydon: Introduction and Croydon Palace | British History Online](#). For most of its history Croydon fell within the Surrey boundary, and parts of the Old Town district still retains some relics of its past. The Elias Davy Almshouse founded C15th alongside the church exemplifies the typical philanthropic enterprises of medieval societies, and might help illustrate the origins of a similar settlement such as Limpsfield. Canterbury itself of course retains many examples of the hospitality extended to travellers. Croydon Old Palace does hold open days with guided tours of the complex, though I have just learned that the building is to be sold.

References

+ BHO (British History Online)Croydon and Croydon Palace

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre/marvels/seals-among-the-deeds-of-the-leigh-bennett-family>

Visits

DBRG Visit to Farnham – 23rd June 2024

The weather was very good for our visit to Farnham Castle and Castle Street, sunny but not too hot. We met Robin Crane in the inner courtyard of the Castle where the DBRG celebrated recording 1,000 buildings. For 12 years from 2001 Robin worked on major repairs and improvements to the Castle. In addition to being a defensive building it was also a “Palace” belonging to the Bishop of Winchester and was the mid ‘stay over’ on journeys between London and Winchester. There were two other ‘stop overs’ at Kingston (later moved to Esher) and East Meon.

There is a small exhibition room in the stables in the inner court that shows the development of the Castle. Robin indicated the uses of the buildings that remain part of the castle and some of those in the “Palace” that adjoins the castle. Following this we went up to the platform that was formed by the infilling of the area within curtain walls. Henry II instigated the demolition of the keep that stood 35M above the

present platform. Archaeological excavations on the platform, after the removal of a concrete raft that had been laid in the 1940's, revealed that the "well" was in fact the lower part of the keep. A timber structure has been erected over the remains of the keep. Stairs under the traditionally designed canopy allow access to part of the keep below platform level. Owing to the exposed position of the 'canopy' specially designed joints at the base of the posts allow movement. When the structure was being erected over the remains of the keep a crane was used to lift the materials up from ground level. The crane was visible from the Hogsback. Stone for the repairs came from Dorset although that originally used probably came from France. Farnham Castle is thought to be the longest continually lived-in building in Surrey.

Owing to the substantial grants that financed the restoration work the keep area of the Castle is open to the public without charge all year except Christmas Day. Access to the residential parts of the Castle is



available by tours at present on Wednesdays.

On completion of our very interesting tour of the Castle where we were shown drawings and photographs of the works we walked down Castle Street and discussed the varied examples of buildings in the Street. The DBRG have recorded some of these buildings and the reports were most helpful in respect of the following:

74 Castle Street (Express Pizzeria)

At the rear of the c1770 houses there is a timber framed wing that has the remains of a crown post roof. The end truss of the roof had always abutted another building. There was no recording below the roof which

was longer than a single bay and thought to date from the 15th C or early 16th C. During the 16th and 17th centuries the house was owned by butchers; the butchers' shambles being located in the street outside. In 1997 the building was restored by David Swindell.



General view of Castle Street (Martin Higgins)

67 Castle Street (Zizzi)

67 and 68 were originally one house and date from the late 17th C. The positioning of the two front doors offset below a central window indicates the sub-division of the property. At the rear of 67 a group of outbuildings were for over 30 years used as the Castle Theatre. These buildings included a 16th C cottage with later timber framed structures to the rear.

16-18 Castle Street

Behind the brick façade of these buildings is a medieval 3 bay open hall house. There are large jowls to the main parts. The roof has clasped purlins that are sooted in the central bay (No. 17) only. There is a straight joint in the brickwork between No. 16 and 17 indicating a separate ownership of 16 from 17 and 18 when the walls were erected.

7A Castle Street

Behind the brick façade of 6 and 7 Castle Street are two adjoining timber framed houses. For over 180 years these buildings were occupied as an ironmongers about 140 of these years run by the Tily family.

7A is located at the rear of the above building and consists of a row of 4 structures that date from the 16th C. All are timber framed with Queen Post and Butt Purlin roofs. The row is at right angles to the street and the first to be constructed is a dwelling closest to the road. Later 2 other storage buildings were erected joining the two dwellings but these appear to have been used for storage. Later all these buildings become used for storage.

The afternoon ended with thanks to Robin for his contributions to the walk along Castle Street as well as sharing his knowledge about the Castle.

Ian West

DOMESTIC BUILDINGS RESEARCH GROUP (SURREY)

Surrey is rich in the smaller mediaeval timber-framed buildings. The Domestic Building Research Group (Surrey) is a voluntary group that has recorded, analysed and reported on more than 4,000 domestic and farm buildings, mainly in Surrey, over the past fifty years.

The DBRG has a few remaining publications for sale

George Howard, *The Smaller Brick, Stone and Weatherboard Houses of Surrey, 17th to mid 19th century. A statistical analysis*

Peter Gray, *Surrey Medieval Buildings An analysis and inventory*

Joan Harding, *Granaries in Surrey - An Obituary.*

Currently available from Rod Wild, 01483 232767

and

Marion Herridge & Joan Holman, *An Index of Surrey Probate Inventories.*

Available from Martin Higgins, 01737 842625)

For an index of recorded buildings, glossary and membership forms,
visit www.dbrg.org.uk

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I would welcome items for the next Newsletter
to reach me by 20th December, please

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If it is possible, it is always very helpful if contributions could
be sent by e-mail, as an attachment, to
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Illustrations as separate jpegs please – you can always indicate in the
text approximately where they should go.