



DBRG NEWS

June 2026



Do you recognise this house?
(see p.4)

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From the Editor

A puzzle for you this time – Do you recognise the house on the cover? Martin would love to help someone trying to locate it. (more details p.4).

Martin had another puzzle when he was asked to look at a barn in Bletchingly. The clues to dating the barn were rather unusual.

There is also a report on the AGM and the Bletchingly walk.

My thanks go to Martin for providing nearly all the copy for this issue. I would love to receive contributions from more of you for next time.

Rosemary Hughesdon

Group Matters

DBRG Archive Project

We reported in the last DBRG News about our Archive Project to deposit around 40,000 drawings from the reports produced by DBRG when recording buildings, at the Surrey History Centre.

Each drawing has to be matched with its photocopy to replace it and then the report needs to be prepared in acid free inserts, carefully catalogued and boxed.

The costs involved meant that we were budgeting about £4000 and grants were obtained of £2000 towards this. It was expected to finish some time in Summer 2026.

After a bit of a hiatus because some reports and some drawings had been hiding elsewhere, the good news is:-

- we have completed about 3300 of the approximately 4800 reports.
- it is likely that we will do this under budget.

Further help may be needed from other volunteers and we would like to set up another volunteer session at East Horsley Village Hall. If you

would like to be involved to help get this project over the line, please contact Brigid.fice@btinternet.com.

Thank you to all those who have already helped and to Teresa Gray at the Surrey History Centre who continues to be consistently helpful.

Brigid Fice

The Surrey Dendrochronology Project

The results of the **Surrey Dendrochronology Project** were published in *The Development of Timber Framing in Surrey's Old Buildings* at the end of 2022. With the help of Surrey Archaeological Society we have ensured that all the relevant repositories and museums have received a copy. We paid for every member of DBRG in that year to be able to have a complimentary copy. We also offered a copy to every owner whose house was dendrodated, at cost price.

We knew it would be a specialist market so decided on a small print run of 250 which we have been selling through our website. We now have only a few remaining copies.

Part of the Heritage Lottery Funding terms of the Project was that we should make the results widely available. So instead of getting another large batch of books printed (which someone has to store) we planned to make a searchable pdf available on our website.

We are pleased to announce that this is now available on our website at <https://www.dbrg.org.uk/surrey-dendrochronology-project-report> .

This is free but as there are always more buildings we could dendrodate to further our understanding of the chronology of Surrey's vernacular architecture, there is also an opportunity to make a donation.

So do take a look and if you do want a last chance to buy a hard copy, email Brigid.fice@btinternet.com before they're all gone. They're £20 + £4.70 p&p.

Brigid Fice

Research Topics

Do you recognise this house?

DBRG occasionally gets asked if we can identify a house from a painting or old photograph. Here is an enquiry that has come where I



would welcome members' help. Please drop me a line if you know this house with the distinctive straight garden wall.



Martin-higgins@outlook.com

Extract from correspondent:

I have attached the only external images we can find, taken early 1980s, and hoped you might recognise the property or its whereabouts in Surrey please? These photos don't do it justice.



The first image (on front cover, Ed) is taken from the road so entering from that side of the property. The home had beautiful old exposed beams inside (looking very Tudor), with some Tudor work on the front facade and in a large-ish garden with historic walls, swimming pool and tennis court. The grounds backed onto a small river/stream.

I remember it not being that far from London (an hour away or just over, by car), seemed rural and I don't recall any villages or towns that we drove through.

There was a suggestion it could have been around Dorking or Newdigate Road but possibly demolished. Enquirer



Martin Higgins

Land drains, thatch ties and Lidar

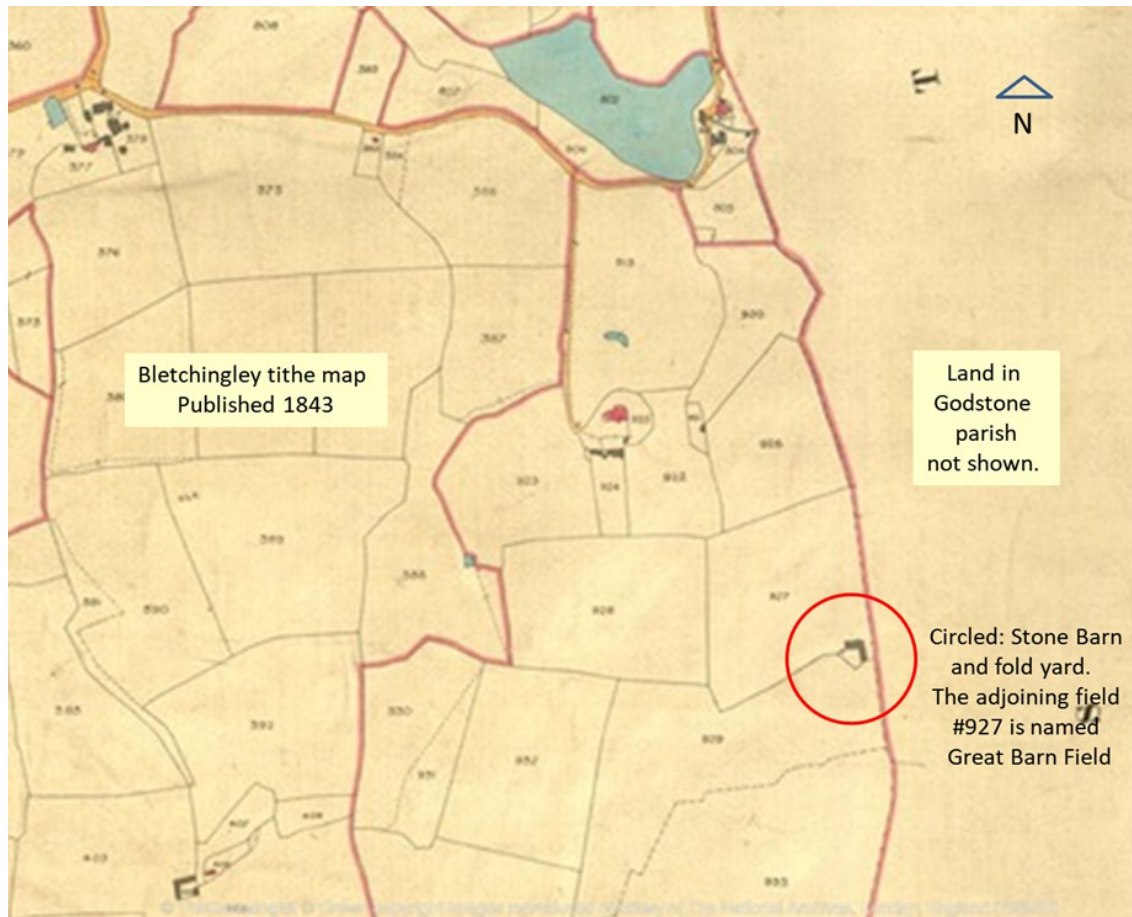
Land drains, thatch ties and Lidar all had a role in dating and interpreting a recent recording undertaken by DBRG of an outlying barn just in Bletchingley but belonging to a farm in Godstone.



The stone barn from the North East. It stands on the edge of woodland.

The date of the barn is not recorded but a building is shown on the 1843 Tithe Map of Bletchingley. The adjoining field is “Great Barn Field” although it is unclear whether the barn or the field was considered great!

The barn is to be converted to a dwelling and DBRG was invited to record it before the necessary alterations. Both the engineer who checked the stability of the structure and the conservation adviser to the local planning authority assumed the structure was 17th century. The barn’s softwood roof was assumed to be a replacement.



Bletchingley Tithe Map of 1843 with the site of the barn circled.

So, where do land drains fit into the story? Well, all walls of the barn have built into them a series of land drains to provide ventilation to interior of the barn. These are integral to the stone wall which is narrow at just a brick and a half thick at the doors.

Land drains are not normally something DBRG would study, but a quick search proved a building built with land drains could not be 17th century. The Rural Life Museum at Reading states in [A Land Down Under | The Museum of English Rural Life](#) .
It is thought that the earliest English example of their [tile



Examples from a collection of drainage tiles and tools accumulated by Adas Soil and Water Research Centre, Anstey Hall, Trumpington, Cambridge (MERL 94/78/1-111)

land drains] installation came in 1810, on Sir James Graham's Northumberland estate. Their use expanded rapidly in the mid-nineteenth century, supported by well-financed government loans.



South elevation of the barn showing the round land drains to allow ventilation

The drains used in this barn appeared to be extruded (a later manufacturing process) suggesting manufacture of drains was well established by the time the barn was built. Being made of fired clay land drains were taxed under the Brick Tax. However from 1826 to 1850, when the tax was abolished, they were exempt if the word "DRAIN" was stamped on them. We hope to recover some of the pipes when the building is converted to further narrow down the construction date.

Now the barn was known to be 19th century at the earliest, the softwood roof was looked at more closely. This is scientifically designed with iron bolts holding it together.

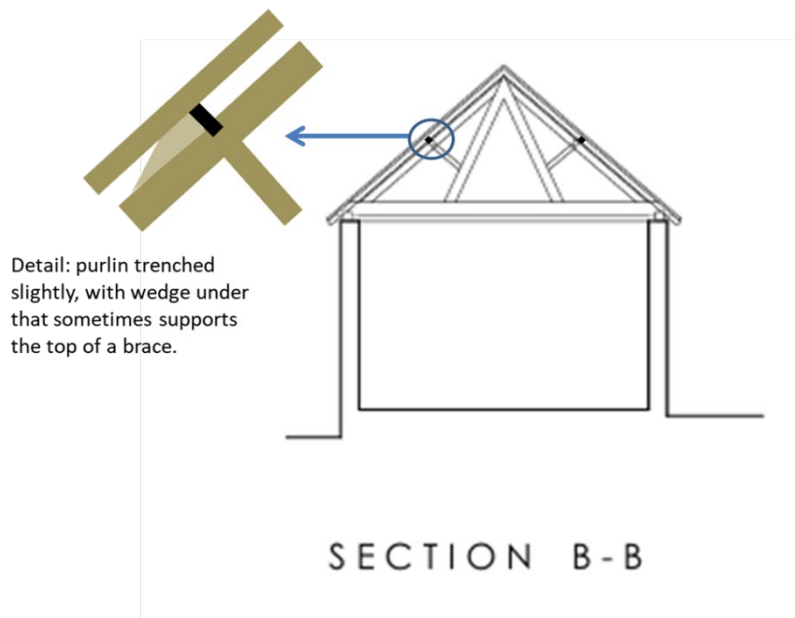


Detail of land drains used as ventilation



Left

Barn interior looking West.



Left

Drawing, with detail showing purlin slightly trenched, with wedge under that sometimes supports the top of the brace

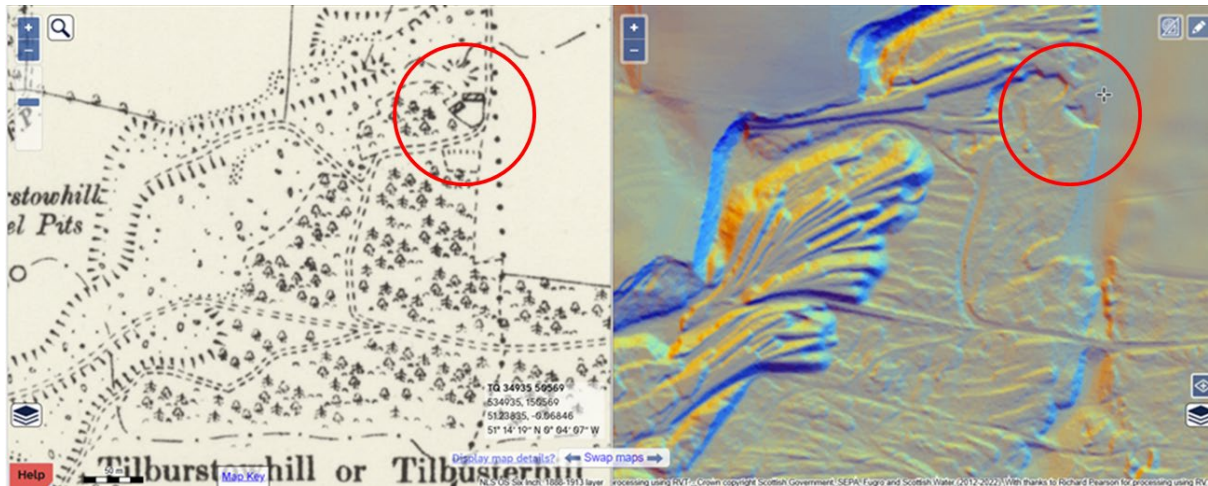
The barn has a corrugated iron roof covering, but was this original? The answer came from the stains on the rafters of tarred thatch ties, as marked with arrows on the photo below. This method of fixing the first course of thatch was used throughout Surrey in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the marks will commonly be found in barns. “Thatch” is used here to describe a harvested roof covering. Being next to ancient woodland coppiced “chip thatch” may have been used here.



Black tar stains from thatch ties occur on the rafters.

So how does Lidar help with the interpretation of the barn?

Lidar is a modern topographical arial survey technique that records the shape of the terrain and after computer processing shows it as a three-dimensional image. The early ordnance survey maps identifies Tilburstowhill gravel pits to the west of the barn (left image below). The corresponding modern Lidar plot on the right shows raised fans where quarry spoil has been tipped from temporary rail tracks. These tip lines occur all round the barn which stands at the bottom of the tip lines.



Historic Ordnance Survey map to left and matching modern LIDAR (levels survey) to right.

The working face of the gravel quarry and tipping lines of the spoil are evident throughout the plantation.

In conclusion, the barn appears to be of a mid/late 19th century date. The degree of ventilation is unusual for Surrey, as is its isolated position. In plan, there are opposing doorways of the same height and no indication of internal fittings for animals or machines. Its use is unknown. Maps show the yard was repeatedly remodelled.

The report writer suggests that the barn and its associated yard were associated with the gravel extraction, perhaps for storing fodder to feed quarry ponies or other draught animals working in the quarry, or to pull loaded carts for onward travel to customers.

Martin Higgins

AGM guided tour of Betchworth Village Core



Picture of Betchworth Church

Before the 2026 AGM, Martin Higgins, our Chairman, led a tour of the village core.

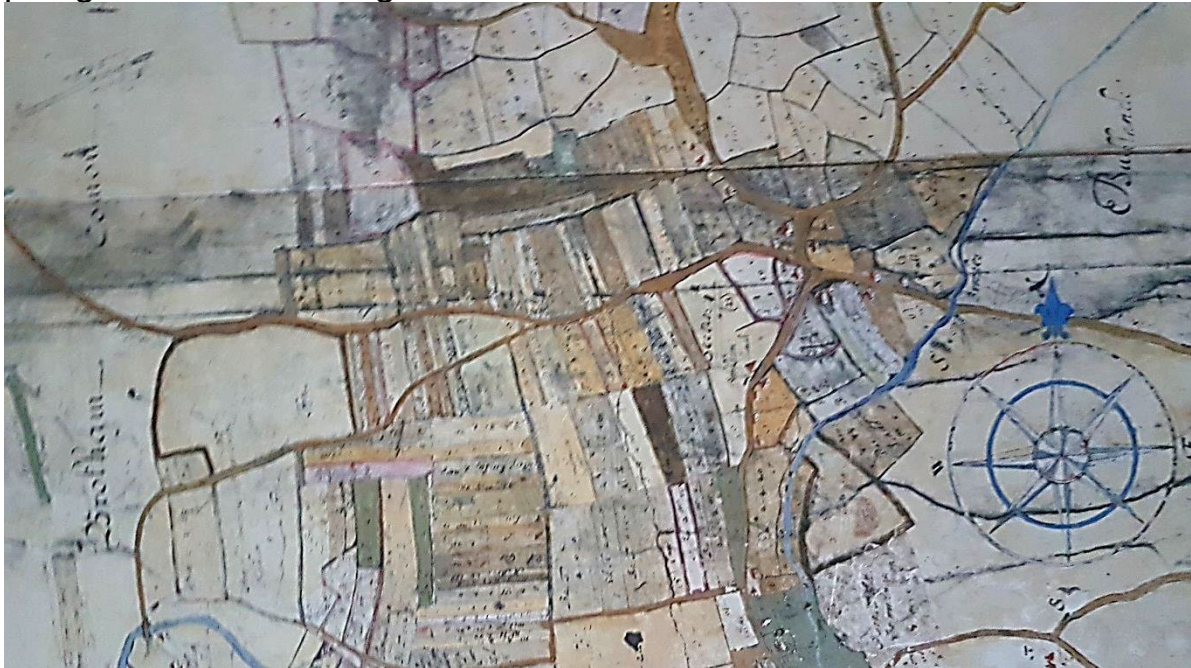
We started by looking at the Reigate Stone masonry of Saint Michael's church. The early work is random with no clear horizontal courses or 'lifts' where the lime mortared stonework had been allowed to set before the next lift was raised. We speculated that periodic repair and replacement might have destroyed any level courses, if indeed they did exist. In contrast the very tops of nave walls used squared stones of various sizes. These relate to the 1883 reroofing. A third style with polygonal facing stones appearing like crazy paving was seen on the south wall of the South Chancel. This wall had been refaced when two windows were added to match the original central one in the mid 19th century.

Inside the church we saw on the wall a copy of the 1634 survey of East Betchworth, as the village was then known. Martin explained that West Betchworth was a mile to the west, beyond Brockham, but that the place name had fallen out of use after (West) Betchworth Castle was demolished.

The map showed the manor (essentially the modern village) to be long and thin. This is characteristic of the manors and parishes south of the Downs so that each community has equal access to the natural resources. In terms of geology moving from north to south each has

Chalk, upper Greensand (Reigate Stone), Sand then Clay. Each geology type in turn has its own plant and tree species.

In the mediaeval period the clay was too heavy to be worked with a plough so was laid to grass. The sand, on the other hand, was tillable



1634 map showing the common fields (apologies for the poor reproduction – Ed)

and it is on this narrow east-west strip that the Common Fields of the villages were laid out. The 1634 map shows the (East) Betchworth Common Fields divided up into hundreds of narrow strips. Martin explained that tillable land for common fields was essential to the formation of nucleated villages, and that the line of villages just south of the Downs is the southern limit of common fields and nucleated villages in Surrey. Betchworth has perhaps the best surviving relationship of village to unenclosed Common Field in the County.

East Betchworth Manor was the most important of the four manors in the ecclesiastical parish and its Court Leet appointed officials such as Ale Tasters and Reeves for the other manors. The other Manors held only Courts Baron to record changes in land ownership and manorial rights and duties.

The Lords of the Manor of East Betchworth were buried in the main North Chancel, while the Lords of the other manors were buried in the smaller South Chancel. The size of Betchworth Church is a reflection of it serving four manors including the populous village/manor of Brockham.

The Manor House (Betchworth House) is immediately south of the church, but dense tree cover prevented a meaningful view. The parkland between the house and the River Mole and beyond was remodelled after 1800 in accordance with Humphrey Repton's designs set out in one of his Red Books.

Leaving the churchyard by the east gate we saw The Dolphin P.H. which was built on a long triangular plot at the junction of The Street with Wonham Lane. The Custumal associated with the 1634 map records this plot was then occupied by a house held by Thomas Alchin. The current building, probably built as a pub, is of two storeys plus integral attics in a gambrel (Mansard) roof. It probably dates from the mid 18th century.



The Dolphin PH to right of large stack, cottage to left; now all in pub use (from an old photo).

The Dolphin today



Walking back through Church Street we saw the low eaves line of number 2, and were told of its mediaeval smoke blackened roof timbers. The west side of Church Street was all owned by the church

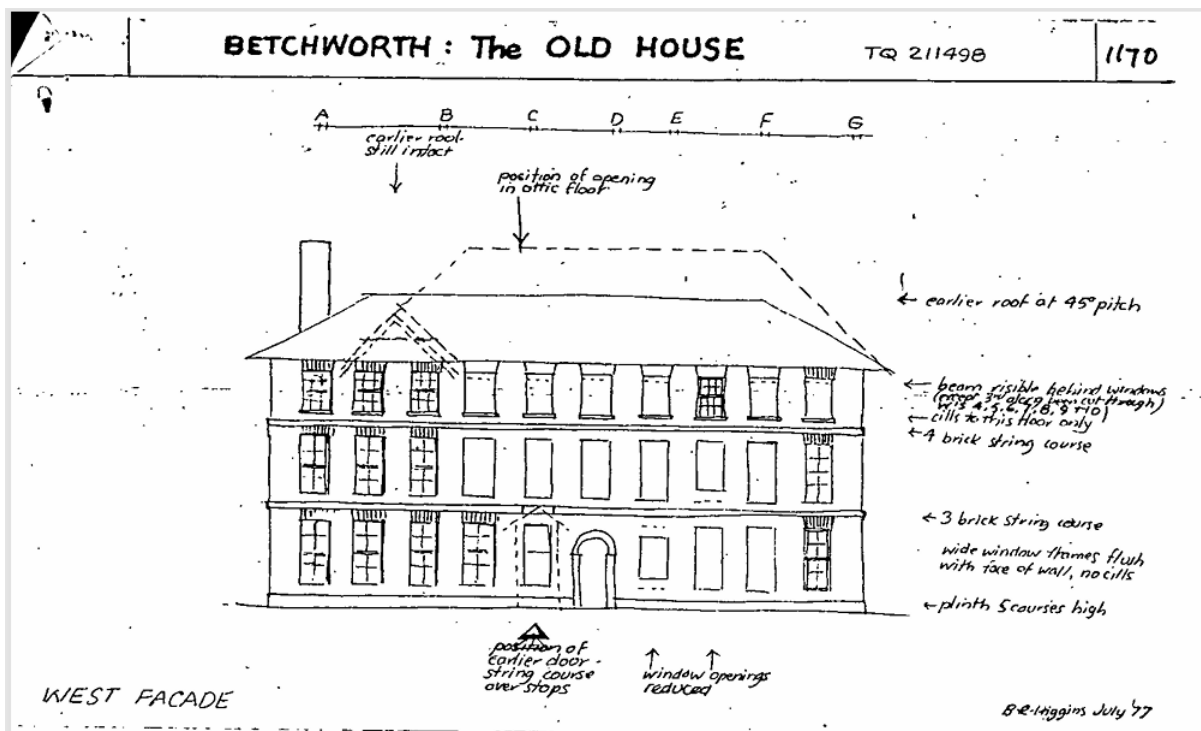
in 1634. The Old Vicarage of c1715 (documentary date) is here, as is a large 17th century barn, now converted to two houses.

Next, still on what had been church land is The Gardens which sits on a plot labelled p'son (parson?) on the 1634 map. The small square framing of this two and a half bay building is well preserved, as is its end smoke bay (late 16th century). The house has an addition to the rear, barely seen from Church Street, of which more later.



The Gardens, late end smoke bay.

From the north end of Church Street we could see the imposing three storey Old House, with a fine early 18th Century brick front of ten bays and a shallow Welsh Slate roof. When DBRG recorded this house a five bay timber-framed core was discovered with cruciform mullion and transom windows. This was also three storeys but with a lower eaves, the wall plate of which can be seen through the top right windows of the current front. The roof had also been steeper, allowing for integral attic accommodation. In 1634 this was occupied by James Freeman surely a relative of Sir Ralph Freeman, Lord of the Manor who commissioned the 1634 survey. The core is likely to date from 1585±10, while the brick front was probably built by Richard Arnold whose memorial of 1727 says he lived in The New House.



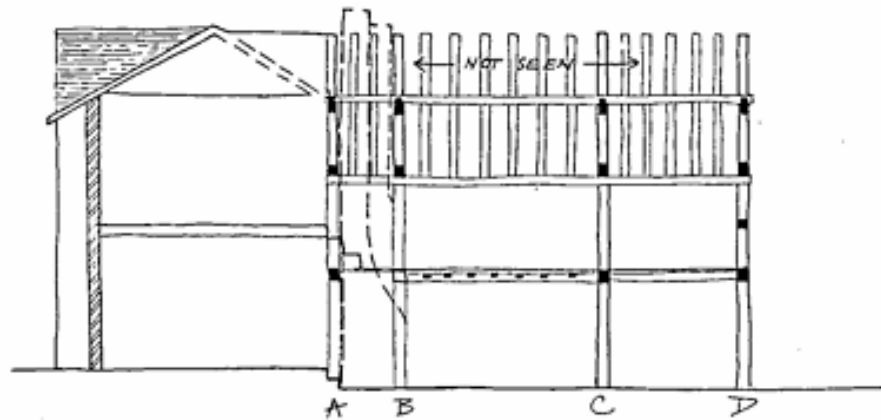
We returned to the hall in Church Street by walking round the west side of the Walled Garden to view the back of The Garden. The extension takes the form of a double fronted Regency cottage. Martin explained that the path we were on was an old drive to Betchworth House. Repton had tried to dissuade the then owner from using it because the route "was not sufficiently interesting". Instead "The road through the village therefore must be improved by a little attention to the neatness, repair, and decoration of all the houses in it: if possible those which do

Betchworth: The Gardens 2993



Betchworth: The Gardens 2993





So was the formal rear-facing elevation to The Gardens the estate owners alternative to improving the whole village?

A convivial sandwich lunch was enjoyed in the Hamilton Room in Church Street before the brief AGM.

Martin Higgins

Some more pictures of Betchworth Church (Ed.)





Nineteenth Century “crazy paving” stonework

My apologies for the very late arrival and somewhat random nature of this issue. I produce the Newsletter on a PC which is located in the hottest room in my house. Being British I therefore blame the weather!!
Rosemary

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.

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

DOMESTIC BUILDINGS RESEARCH GROUP (SURREY)

Chairman:

Mr Martin Higgins M.Phil.,
55 Middle Street, Brockham, Betchworth, Surrey, RH3 7JT

Vice-Chair:

Richard Pocock

Secretary:

email:contact@dbrg.org.uk

Treasurer:

Mr David Chalcraft,

Membership Secretary:

Mrs Sarah Jones, membership@dbrg.org.uk

Programme Secretary:

Mr Ian West,.

Recording Secretary:

Mr John Crane, icenimerde@luftfhartsbunker.co.uk

Data Secretary:

Mr Rod Wild,

News Editor:

Mrs Rosemary Hughesdon,

Committee member:

Mr Patrick Moyle,

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

Please send them to me at
20 School Lane, Addlestone
KT15 1TB 01932 846428

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