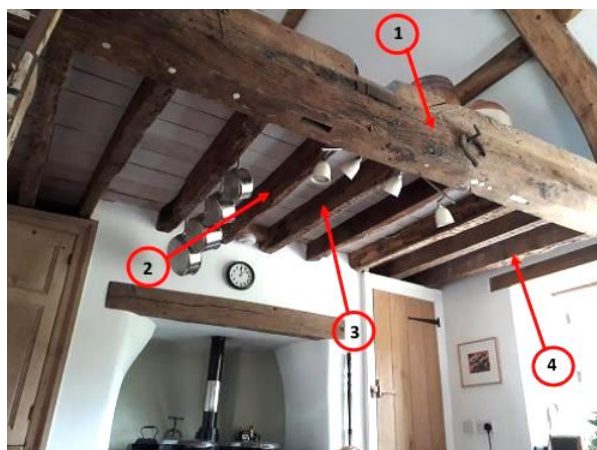
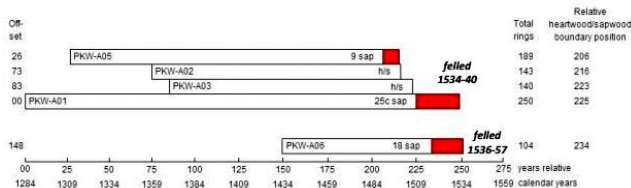


Samples were taken mainly from the kitchen with one in the bathroom and a few from the roof of the main house. The location of the samples in the kitchen are shown in the photograph opposite. All the timbers are oak. The big main beam in the kitchen (numbered 1, right) is termed a *bressummer* (a horizontal load bearing beam in a timber framed building) which produced an exceptional 250 growth annual rings including 25 sapwood rings. The fact that the sapwood was near complete allows a great deal of confidence in its felling date of 1534-40.

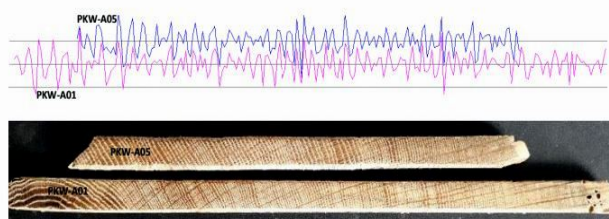


The report ¹ states that " six samples were measured and ... the site chronology is 252 rings long overall; these rings being reliably dated as spanning the years 1284-1535". The main beam in the kitchen " was planted in 1284 and felled around 1535-40! The cross matching between five of the samples was very close as shown in the bar diagram (below). Notably, the cross matching of two timbers corresponded with a high degree of similarity (below right).

"The site chronology was compared with thousands of chronologies from all over England, there was a clear tendency for it to match best, and indeed particularly well, with those from other buildings in Wiltshire. For example, Great Chalfield Manor, at Atworth, suggesting that the Pickwick timbers were sourced from a similar, relatively local, woodland".



Bar diagram of the cross matching samples



Graphic representation of two closely cross matching samples

As to the re-use of timbers, most commonly, house, barn, stable and ship timbers were re-used. Recycling of used timbers is a very old tradition.

On one of the beams in the kitchen are two 'egg-timer', 'vv' or 'Marian' marks (right) which according to Dorothy Treasure (Wilshire Buildings Record) are based on the Virgo Virginum type of apotropaic mark (meaning to turn away) and, supposedly, having the power to avert evil influences or bad luck by invoking the protection of the Virgin Mary.



¹ 12 PICKWICK near CORSHAM, WILTSHIRE SN13 0HZ ~ TREE-RING ANALYSIS OF TIMBERS, Nottingham Tree-ring Dating Laboratory 2018.

There is also a 'butterfly' mark (below, right) which is apparently a well-known representation of a 'spirit trap' ~ the premise was that any baleful/ malevolent entities entering the house would be drawn to the trap and pinned to the wood and thereby 'neutralised'. These are also known as witches marks.



In the 17th century witchcraft was a real concern: In 1604 King James I wrote, "...for some they sayeth that being transformed in the likeness of a beast or fowl, they will come and pierce through whatsoever house or church, though all ordinary passages be closed, by whatsoever open air may enter in at."

Circles were regarded as solar symbols which could dispel darkness². Those are often interconnected as in this case (right) where there are concentric circles within which are two small circles with another circle overlapping.



12 Pickwick: photograph of circles enhanced by CAD ~ Wiltshire Medieval Graffiti Survey

These are termed protection marks. and are usually very

and are usually very lightly etched or scored onto surfaces, sometimes so lightly that they are invisible unless a bright light is aimed obliquely along a beam. Another type are 'daisy wheels' can be found throughout the world. They are compass-drawn circles with six petals within and it appears on buildings and on furniture throughout Britain.



In addition, there is at least one 'candle' burn' mark (left, centre) which were believed to guard against fire or, more generally, evil. Finally, there are medieval carpenters assembly marks which often comprise paired Roman numerals (right, in this instance xx) to indicate which joints fit together.



All in all, many forms of protection were sought!

A number of points arise which are salient to the Corsham High Street Project: firstly, 'hard and fast assumptions' about buildings should not be made based just on their external appearance; secondly, how important it is to carefully to examine the fabric of buildings because it is easy to overlook all sorts of in distinct markings which nevertheless may have significance.

John Maloney

² Ronald Hutton (ed), 'Physical evidence for Ritual acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain' 2015 pps. 39-67