

From Eric Ricketts' book "Buildings of Old Weymouth" Part 3 (The Villages)

As we tour Sutton Poyntz and Preston we will observe the simple vernacular building style of the first half of the 19th century, in addition to the older dwellings. The Georgian influence is shown in the balanced design of detached cottages, often quite small in scale, together with terraced cottages of equal dignity. The roofs are low pitched and of slate, walls of silvery stone from Lodden, and window panes of correct proportions.

Limekilns existed on the west side of the Iron Age fort of Charlbury, and chalk overlies the limestone. Perhaps the old Dorset "plasterers" came up from Sutton for materials of their trade? ⁱ Of course much good agricultural lime also was produced in the area. Now to turn to the south-east to reach Sutton.

*We move by way of Mission Hall Lane and the Waterworks access, to enter **White Horse Lane**, where the cottages sketched above survive from the 18th century. These look southwards, across the pastures and farmlands upon which the first occupants toiled. These cottages are remote outposts of old Sutton.*

*The **Waterworks cottages** must not be overlooked, representing, as they do, the ability of the "turn-of-the-century" architects to design inoffensively in such a setting. Sir Frederick Treves wrote in his "Highways & Byways" that the "Corporation of Weymouth (sic) has erected a waterworks of exceptional ugliness". The tall brick chimney most probably drew forth the complaint, for the engine house is a modest stone and slate building of c.1890. Poor Corporation! It was not one of its Projects! The history of Weymouth's water undertakings has been recorded in book form, of great interest, by the Waterworks Company's former Engineer and Manager, Mr S E Barrett.*

*The cottages, No 115 **"Streamside"** and its neighbour, **"Budmouth"**, in simple slate and gabled stone idiom, are on the west side of the approach road. The former appears to be a refronting of an old cottage, and is now dated 1883, with good masonry and keystones to window and door openings. "Budmouth" was a diminutive late Georgian balanced design, updated in recent years, but with a considerate hand. Below, a sketch of a little lane to the west with **"Myrtle Cottage"**, "Springfield" and "Southview" grouping nicely in front of open country. Myrtle Cottage has a 1718 date on the south gable which once abutted another cottage, now demolished.*

Whilst sketching this attractive group it seemed a good idea to consider the wirescape, and it is drawn above. We think that this delectable village is a reasonable claimant for a dewiring operation!

*In **Mission Hall Lane**, a cottage of three storeys, stone with brick dressings – of c.1840 – and retaining original window proportions. Sutton has many delightful prospects in miniature such as the little view sketched below, looking toward White Hall Hill from the Lane.*

*The cottages to the **north-west of the Mill Pond** are sometimes overlooked in the matter of contribution to the visual delights of the area. No's 109 and its slated-roof neighbours have no great architectural pretensions – just good scale, and, at the moment, no "olde-worlde" nonsense. Looking downstream, the prospect is the equal of the famed view looking from the south – used as a frontispiece in this work. Let us consider for a moment the group depicted therein. It is not unreasonable to claim that the Sutton thatched group west of the Mill Pond, together with the Swanage Mill Pond stone-tiled cottages, gave to our county of Dorset priceless examples of the beauty of historical vernacular domestic building in Britain. Some would say the equal to the justly acclaimed Arlington Row, Bibury, in the Cotswolds.*

Sadly, the Sutton group, after some three hundred years of use, and needing much restoration, was not saved, and complete rebuilding took place. One thatched cottage remains, but the re-builds are in reasonable harmony.

We move to the south and to the area around the Mill, passing the site of the ancient lock-up. This pound was an insignificant structure just to the north of "Northdown Farm". The farmhouse, of well-laid fine ashlar, appears to be a rebuild of c.1850. To the south of the house, the site of Landlord Weld's Courthouse, a centre point of Sutton. Old records show it to have been a building of late Tudor times, and it is said that some of the timber used in constructing the Preston Church lych gate came from the Courthouse. The building was made unusable by a fire in 1908.

The mill building, probably built in its present form in about the year of Waterloo, is an essential ingredient in the Sutton scene. It cuts off the busy world to the south in visual fashion, though many thousands, in summer, pass through the "barrier" to sample the delights of the spring head. The mill is of rich textured brickwork on a stonework plinth. The old roof, of heavy tiles, had so distorted the mansard roof and the old walls, that it became necessary to relieve the stresses by a new roof of lightweight steel, bitumen covered, and this saved the structure. Thos Hardy made full use of the buildings, and scenery around, in his "Trumpet Major", Sutton being the true "Overcombe".

The "Mill House", sketched above remains unaltered in appearance since its building, probably a little later than the mill. Clean squared ashlar, original well proportioned sashes, keystone window heads, and semi-circular spoked fanlight, again, simple elements, giving just that touch a distinction as befitted the mill-owner's home.

We can reflect upon the life-styles in the 19th century, as we look at the almost unchanged buildings which housed the folk linked to the hills, pastures, arables, and water, by their daily toil. Here, within small compass, the farmer, farm hand, dairy maid, miller, mill hand, blacksmith, wheelwright, thatcher, mason, carpenter and carrier lived their inter-dependent lives. The last named was the only tangible link with Hardy's "Budmouth", and the world outside this fold in the hills.

Delightfully placed in little Silver Street, to the west of the mill, is Mrs Morris's cottage. Unaltered by restoration, as one would so expect, for Eric Morris was an artist and craftsman in stone, and none could cut finer lettering in the material he loved. A short walk through Silver Street, and we note "The Laurels" sketched below. Here is an attractive thatched house of great age, with buttressed stone walls, restored with great care, retaining horizontal window pane proportions. It is remembered as having a wrought-iron veranda the full length of the south front. Above is sketched "Bellamy Cottage", standing at the junction of the roads. It is a restoration of two cottages, in ruinous condition apart from wall structure. The result should convince those who fail to see the potential financial value of such enterprise – apart from the aesthetic merits – many old structures merit rebuilding as distinct assets.

In Plaisters Lane, Prospect Cottage, built in the early 19th century retains a little of the early design in its roadside facade. The site is said to be that of the 14th century Chapel-of-Ease at Sutton.

Above is drawn the reconstructed scene at the road junction, showing the Courthouse and mill in the distance, and on the right the existing cottages and cart-shed. These now have tiled roofs. On the east side of the road No 64 is a pleasant enough rebuild or remodelling of an early house, and No 56 is also of early 19th century foundation.

Now to turn into Puddle Dock Lane, and to the north, "Sutton Farm", a fine wide-eaved house of the early years of Victoria's reign, but with Regency influences much in evidence.

Further west are Victorian cottages of a much different design, with terra-cotta finials to gables and half-gables, and dated R.J.W (Weld) 1890. Opposite, the **Dairy House** (with yard and ancient farm buildings of interest, but much ruined). The Dairy House, however, is very well restored and most attractive.

Westward, as the lane terminates, are to be found, on the east side, **"The Cottage"** and a little further on and to the west, **"Chips Cottage"**, an unspoiled house of c.1830, with good masonry, sashes and fanlight. "The Cottage" is not quite so "important looking" but the care taken by the owners in ensuring retention of the original window-pane proportions is most commendable. The sliding sash boxings were found to be decayed, but the sliding sashes in good condition. The owner, Mr Startup, made a new solid surrounding frame, into which the bottom sash was fixed, and the top sash, duly weatherproofed, was hinged at the top to give good ventilation. An inexpensive remedy, leaving the cottage with its original character – and its re-sale value if ever it had to be sold – greatly enhanced. The garden, full of old English flowers, completes a most satisfying picture.

Returning to the **Sutton road**, and ascending the hill, the long terraces built c.1850 in the clean-looking ashlar stone from the Ridgeway, are noted. **No 31** in particular, retains its original fenestration and further south **No 19**, attractively decorated on stucco, and probably of c.1840, is to be admired.

In the same terrace is a survivor of C19, which must be spared further decay. It is the forlorn-looking **Methodist Chapel**, built in 1816, little altered today, but virtually obscured by overgrowth. We note that restoration appears not to be a vast undertaking. What a subject for practical work by a Conservation Society! Alternatively, use by the County Authority as a Village Library, a parallel to that at Burton Bradstock, would be rewarding. Internally many original fittings remain; externally brickwork, with Gothic arches, neat slated half-hipped roof, and good looking Victorian cast-iron gates. Houses in the terrace are now being restored attractively, and the chapel, conserved, and re-used, will be a social and aesthetic gain to Preston and Sutton Poyntz. The Wesley connection must not be forgotten also.

The Vicarage group of c1835 is derived, in manner, from the Regency, but austere indeed. The house has a pagoda-like roof over a very modern porch. The cottage and stables to the north are in fine limestone. The once elegant little turret on the stable building now has its cupola top fixed to the base, the turned supports being removed. The building has good masonry arches, with stone dressings – it is well worthy of restoration.

A short terrace running to the east, and commencing at **No 6**, has been extended at its eastern end. The work is most commendable, in that the quality, proportion and scale of the original cottages has been respected, to the visual benefit of the whole terrace.

ⁱ [N.B. Some Victorian references called Plaisters Lane "Plasterers", evidently thinking it had something to do with the trade of plastering. This was an error; the actual derivation of the name, shown in one or two medieval sources, is "Play-street"]