



AND THE WALLS CAME A-TUMBLING down....

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One of the joys of working in the Cotswolds and surroundings is the variety of different types of construction one comes across. This can be the 'classic' Tudor type black and white buildings such as can be found in places such as Tewksbury and further up into the Midlands, the rubblestone cottages of the villages, or the beautiful ashlar construction of the houses often associated with the great estates in the area. This is a short note on some of the constructions seen in our practice, and is not exhaustive (I don't even mention cob!)

House construction tends to be based on what materials are available locally. For example, the Tudor black and whites of Stratford and Tewksbury are built around massive timbers sourced from the local forests that have been sadly much diminished over time. These timbers formed the frames of the house and the rest of the wall was constructed from varieties of materials.



Random coursed rubblestone with masonry quoins

One of the most common was 'wattle and daub' where a mesh or lattice type of panel constructed from twigs or thin split timbers was then covered with clay or lime plaster mixed with straw or animal hair. The frames would be coated in tar to protect the timbers and then the wattle and daub panels were painted with limewash to preserve them, creating the familiar black and white. These external panels were then lined with wood panels for warmth and as decoration became more common, elegance. In the towns these constructions often were built with a jettied first floor, so that it gave more space in the upper stories when the ground floor was constrained by the roadway. Other panels would be created from bricks made from local clays, flints or various forms of render. Sometimes the wood frames are covered with some form of cladding or render, perhaps as an attempt to make the house look more 'modern' at some time. This can create all sorts of problems for restorers!

Further down into the High Cotswolds stone is plentiful, literally large amounts can be picked from the fields. This led to a form of construction known as 'rubblestone' where the walls are created from layers of more or less similar sized and shaped stones that have had minimal preparation of 'dressing' and usually constructed with lime mortar to bind them, although some are drystone. Similar to the timber framed building there is little or no foundation created and so the stone wall tend to be very thick, often feet thick. Random coursed rubblestone (which I always think sounds like Barney Rubble's posh uncle!) is more regular with the stones laid in horizontal courses, but still creates a very 'rustic' effect. It is not unusual for this construction to have 'quoins' of 'dressed' or 'ashlar' stone set on the corners of the building.



However, grander houses were built of ashlar which is finely dressed stone cut into blocks of same size and shape which create a smooth face and elegant appearance. Cotswold limestone lends itself well to such shaping and cutting and the quarrying industry is still vibrant to this day.

Where clay was easy to source bricks became an important building material. Brickmaking technology was probably brought in by the Romans, but declined after they left in the 5th Century, returning in about the 12th Century. It is thought that brick buildings were often cannibalised for use during the intervening years, for example the nave of St Albans Abbey. Who thought recycling was a modern concept! However, probably reinstated for monastic and Church buildings brick making again became important until they became widely used in late Tudor and Stuart times for grand houses such as Hampton Court Palace. Ornate decorative bricks were used lavishly with different colours and textures of bricks creating spectacular effects.

In the Georgian period bricks became much more commonly used because of industrial processes of creating them and so they were used in both urban and rural areas, and this has continued to the modern day.

A note to remember; all the foregoing methods of construction are solid walls and rely on being porous, permitting water vapour to pass though the components. Damp proof courses only became used in the late 19th Century, mandatory in London in 1875. They were usually a layer of slate or bitumen and are often found today still functioning perfectly! Cavity walls became widely used after the First World War. Historic construction will still require use of lime mortars and 'breathable' finishes in order to function as they were intended. And they won't come tumbling down!

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