



As an architectural historian I travel all over the country, researching houses from medieval halls, Georgian townhouses, Edwardian villas and all building types and periods in between. I research houses for architects and property professionals as well as for private home owners, usually to support planning applications or listed building consent.

I find every house fascinating in its own right, whether it is a medieval manor house or a more recent Victorian terraced house. I have even researched a building constructed in 1968. Each house has its own unique story to tell and last year I was lucky enough to research a house with a history that stretches back to the thirteenth century; the Old Rectory in Limington, Somerset.

This intriguing Grade II house has belonged to Professor John Langdon and Paul Vintner since 2003. At first sight you would think that The Old Rectory is a beautiful late Georgian house. The catch though is that the "late Georgian" front is merely one part



The back of The Old Rectory



The Old Rectory in the late 18th century

Unlocking the History of The Old Rectory



of this fascinating house. At the back is the seventeenth century range and at the core of the building, the solid fifteenth century stone wall, once the exterior wall of this property. Over the centuries the house has evolved and gathered historic brick and stone layers to create the amazing home it is today.

My research confirmed that there has been a home for the parish priest on this site since the thirteenth century and historical evidence confidently points to this place being the home of a young priest in 1500 called Thomas Wolsey.

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This was his first parish posting, after teaching at Oxford. But despite his later eminent elevation as Cardinal he began his ecclesiastical career at best as a largely absent priest and at worst a carousing drinker! The local sheriff had the young Wolsey put in the stocks in Limington for his unpriestly behaviour. However, this was something Wolsey did not forget and twenty years later had the said sheriff put under house arrest for several years. As a young man though, Wolsey was officially the priest for Limington until 1509 when better offers drew him away permanently.

In my research of the Old Rectory I uncovered a "Glebe Terrier" from 1613. To the uninitiated this sounds like a breed of dog, but in fact it is a written survey or inventory, which gives details of lands and property owned by the church. In deciphering the antiquated handwriting I could work out that it was written by the Rev John Rowse in 1613 and it diligently listed all the possessions connected to the Rectory.

This 1613 Glebe Terrier is the earliest known written record of the "Rectory Parsonage,"



Johannes Conant S.T.P.



as it was named. It describes the building itself and other lands in its possession. The terrier indicated that it was a substantial property. It refers to a barn, stables, brew-house as well as a pigeon house, indicating it was more like a small manor house than the home of a humble priest. Such documents are rare but if found terriers can be very revealing. You could say John Rowse was a very safe and reliable pair of hands for Limington, as he was there for nearly 30 years.

▲ From left to right:
 ▲ Rev. John Conant, Rev. Daniel Dumaresq
 ▲ Rev. Griffiths 1837

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But things did not stay peaceful for long. Rowse's successor was a clergyman renowned for his puritan beliefs. Such was his reputation that local harassment from Royalists at the height of the Civil War ensured that one journey to London was one way as it was deemed safer for him to remain there. Which he did for several years! His place in Limington was filled by his nephew who was also a clergyman and was also called John Conant (very confusing for historians!). Once the upheaval of the Civil War and the Restoration was over, life settled down and none more so than in Limington. But colourful characters will always come to the fore and this happened with Rev Daniel Dumaresq in the late 18th century. It has to be said that by the time he came to Limington much of Dumaresq's adventures were over but in short; as a younger cleric he had travelled to St Petersburg in Russia as chaplain to various English commercial interests. He spent seventeen years there and during that time learned fluent Russian and for two years became Chaplain to the British Ambassador in Russia.

Dumaresq met Catherine, the future Empress of Russia, whilst at the Russian Court. When she became Empress, she asked him to help set up schools throughout the country. He gave some time to this project, and when it was completed, he was asked

by the King of Poland for help in developing education in Poland. He finally returned to England in 1762.

The watercolour of the Rectory at Limington was painted at about the time of Dumaresq's tenure but by the 1830s it is likely that some renovation and modernisation was required by the new vicar, the Rev. Thomas Griffiths. He immediately set about rebuilding the Rectory, taking out a Queen Anne's Bounty (an ecclesiastical mortgage) of £800, offset against the tithe rents and other incomes. He brought in a local architect James Baron Beard, who's plans and specifications were helpfully retained in the diocese archives. This gave a rare insight into the detail of this rebuild. What was particularly striking was the extent of the recycling of materials. We could learn a thing or two in today's building environment.

The Rectory continued to be a comfortable home for a succession of incumbent vicars into the twentieth century with some further structural additions to the house to accommodate the new fashion for indoor plumbing and bathrooms. Thankfully, as the Rectory was owned by the diocese a quinquennial was carried out (a survey every five years) and these reports have been kept in the Somerset archives. Further plans documenting alterations in the 1950s were

also kept safely there and all these records helped me plot the evolution of the house over several decades. The property was sold by the diocese in July 1960 and since then has been a private home.

The Old Rectory is a true witness to the ups and downs of Limington's history, as is seen in its evolution over at least the last 600 years. A part from the demonstrable architectural variations clearly showing its evolution it is thanks to reliable diocesan administration and other archival sources that we also know more about its colourful clergy and meticulous architects. 🌿

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