

Old wallpaper: Vine Cottage, Draycott, Shepton Mallet part 2

The National Trust has a blog about its collections written by [Emile de Bruijn](#). One of his articles [discussed layers of old wallpaper](#) found in some houses in Birmingham. The photographs of some of the examples reminded me of some scraps I had saved years ago when we lived in Shepton Mallet. I still have these scraps. Emile has encouraged me to publish them. Here are some scans of them [I think they should be called “papyropsies” since some of them were almost surgically extracted from behind Victorian woodwork; cf “biopsies”.]

All of the samples are now in the collection of the [Somerset Archives](#).

Sitting Room

The second set came from the sitting room. This was the room below the bedroom from which the “papyropsies” in [part 1](#) came. This room appears to have become the sitting room in the Victorian renovation. Before that it was probably a kitchen. These samples were obtained during the summer of 1978. Prior to Victorian renovations, this room included a staircase.

One of the most visible Victorian additions to the room were the cornice and picture rail, both made of wood. These had been fixed on top of earlier wallpaper.



This was found behind the picture rail over a Victorian gothic window.

The same pattern was found at the front of the house. These were on the wall behind the cornice over a Georgian window. The window originally had a curved corner between the soffit and the inside of the front wall. The addition of the cornice had made a gap between the front of the wall and the back of the cornice. This gap had been crudely filled with plaster which eagerly came away, bringing a little paper with it.

Because of the plaster, I could not scan these “papyropsies”. Instead, I used a camera. It wasn't till after I'd taken the photographs that I realised that, to get reasonable lighting, I had the objects upside down.

Old wallpaper: Vine Cottage, Draycott, Shepton Mallet part 2



These samples were found behind the Victorian cornice over a Georgian window.

At the north-ish end of the house is a sash window which appears to be older than the opening in which it sits. Looking at the construction of the surround, I think it was put into its current location during the Victorian renovation. An archaeologist who worked with old buildings suggested that the window was a lot older than its current surround.



From behind the framework of the north-ish window.

Old wallpaper: Vine Cottage, Draycott, Shepton Mallet part 2



This piece was too long to scan in one go. It came from the front wall of the house, behind the architrave of the shutter frame at the right of the north-ish window, as viewed from inside the room.

Old wallpaper: Vine Cottage, Draycott, Shepton Mallet part 2

In addition to the cornice and picture rail, the Victorian renovation saw a new, coal-burning, open fire installed with a suitable surround and mantelpiece. The stone wall at the back of the house has a considerable batter on it: this was obviously not thought suitable for a Victorian sitting room. The back wall was lined with hardboard. On the chimney breast, this went from the skirting to the top of the mantelpiece. No attempt had been made to merge the front of the hardboard with the plaster. We decided to tidy this up. Removing the hardboard led to an avalanche of mortar and broken bits of clay roof tiles. We had found the right-hand half of an earlier freestone kitchen fireplace: the smell of rancid smoky bacon lasted for weeks!

Such fireplaces were not uncommon in Shepton [5 ft 8 1/2 inches wide, if my memory is correct, which it might not be]. The dressed stone had been wallpapered, pecked for plastering, plastered, lime-washed, and the hole partly filled in to accommodate the Victorian fireplace.



Wallpaper from under the plaster on the freestone fireplace.

Old wallpaper: Vine Cottage, Draycott, Shepton Mallet part 2

Compare this with wallpaper found on the front wall of the house where the Victorian partition met it.



Samples of wallpaper from the front wall of the house, hidden by the partition. This appears to be identical to the paper found in the fireplace.

Old wallpaper: Vine Cottage, Draycott, Shepton Mallet part 2

One more papyropsy was found in this room. This too came from by the north-ish window.



From above the end, or north-ish, window.

It is probable that, before the Victorian renovation, in a previous existence for the building, the north-ish window opening was a doorway.

As I mentioned in [part 1](#), I cannot be certain which way was 'up' in most of these examples. It would be very interesting to hear from others if they have found any of these designs. It would be most interesting to know the possible ages of these papers, especially the one in the earlier fireplace: with or without the smoky bacon!