

Vernacular Stone Architectural Details of the Cotswolds and the Stamford Region compared

by

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This paper is based on field observations of architectural details in the Cotswolds on the one hand, and on the other a region around Stamford (Lincs.), Oundle (Northants.), and in the vales of the Welland and Nene rivers in Rutland and north Northamptonshire. The appearance of vernacular buildings in a particular locality derives largely from their use of local natural materials, and as these are the legacy of the geology of the area, one would assume that the buildings of different regions on comparable strata are likely to have common characteristics. We might expect therefore to find a similar architectural vocabulary in the vernacular houses, cottages and farm buildings with stone walls and stone slate roofs that define the character of whole towns and villages in the Cotswolds and, about sixty miles distant to the north-east, the Stamford region. Both regions lie on comparable limestone formations and the likeness of their buildings is widely acknowledged; nevertheless, despite the similarity of their indigenous materials, some distinctively specific architectural details have evolved in each. The predominance, scarcity or absence of such features within the otherwise matching vernacular styles of the two regions, hitherto not fully recognised in published sources, contributes to a subtle difference in their architectural ambience.

Situated on the Jurassic limestone belt that runs south-westwards in a sweeping ogee curve from the Humber to Dorset, the Cotswolds and the Stamford, Rutland and north Northamptonshire region are both richly endowed with deposits of oolitic freestones of grey, cream and golden honey shades. These and walling stone have been quarried locally from well-known Cotswolds quarries like Painswick, Guiting and Taynton, and in the Stamford area from those at Clipsham, Ketton and Weldon. Both regions also have localised strata of fissile limestone that yield the Stonesfield stone slates of the Cotswolds and the Collyweston stone slates from the Northamptonshire village of that name.

Other authors have, of course, discussed the architectural character of these regions. Clifton-Taylor, for example, in *The Pattern of English Building* ranks them as the two great areas for English oolitic stones, lying on the Great and Inferior Oolite.¹ However, although acknowledging geographical design variations in some features, he devotes more attention to the aesthetic aspects of the buildings in their environmental context and to the qualities of the stones from different quarries rather than to consideration of the architectural detail of the vernacular buildings. The Penoyres in their *Houses in the Landscape* relate architectural forms, materials and features to the geology of particular

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Fig. 1

Collyweston (Northants.). Two-story canted bay windows on a 17th-century house.

Photograph, author

geographical areas but, while recognising an affinity between the buildings of the two regions, also make no detailed comparisons of their individual features.² Brunskill's indispensable *Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture* is a tool-kit of basic information on vernacular architecture rather than an atlas of stylistic detail.³ Its sections devoted to architectural details categorise certain elements of buildings such as windows, chimneys and ornament and summarise their chronological development, but some lesser details of specific styles that contribute to a building's regional character are unrepresented.

The vernacular buildings under consideration are mainly the smaller houses or cottages of the yeoman farmers or merchants' houses (Fig. 1). They would probably have been designed by local builders, whose names are now unknown, conservatively working within a tradition of regional practice. This tradition was fundamentally medieval, as expressed, for example, by informal elevations and mullioned windows, but it gradually absorbed Renaissance motifs, coalescing into the hybrid style now recognised as vernacular. Although their precedents can be related to the 16th century, the Cotswold and Stamford vernacular styles are essentially of the 17th century, though some features persisted through the 18th century and into the 19th. It is the particular association of certain features with each style that differentiates one from the other.

FACADES

A significant aspect of Cotswold domestic architecture is the expression of multiple gables as dominant features of a façade, sometimes as high, or nearly as high, as the main roof ridge (Fig. 2). Upper windows of two-story cottages are often set in small gables breaking the eaves line (Fig. 3) or are built as stone gabled dormers (Fig. 10). Continuation of the front wall into the roof zone in this way establishes the frontage gable as a characteristic feature of the Cotswold style.

By contrast, in the Welland-Nene region, in what may be called the 'Stamford style', large gables on house frontages usually only occur as the expression of a cross wing. Instead, major emphasis on façades is provided by stone canted bay windows extending through two stories (Fig. 1). They are often built in ashlar stonework, contrasting with the rubble used in the main walls, and typically are surmounted at eaves level by a small parapetted stone gable rising from corbels projecting rather uncomfortably over the splays of the angled bay window beneath. Stone dormers are less common than in the Cotswolds and windows at eaves level are more usually two-light wood-framed dormers with rendered cheeks and gables (Fig. 4).

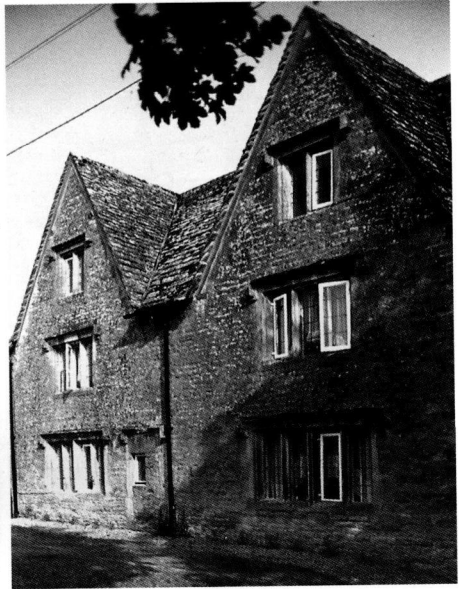


Fig. 2
Barrington (Glos.). Cotswold twin-gabled house. 17th century.
Photograph, author

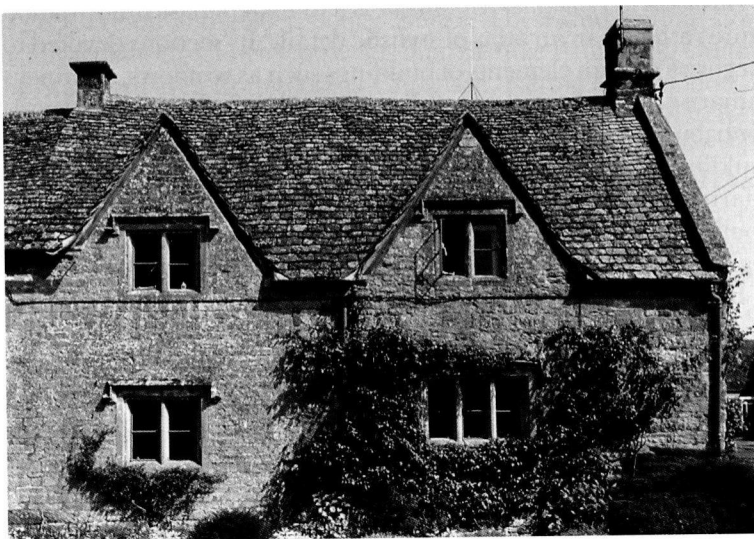


Fig. 3
Bledington (Glos.).
First-floor windows in
Cotswold gables breaking
the eaves line.
Photograph, author

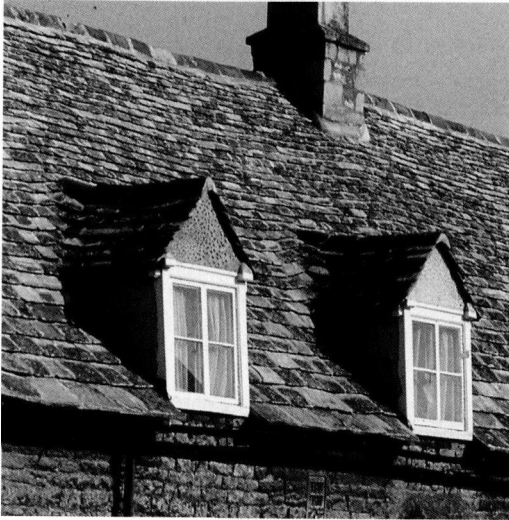


Fig. 4
Easton on the Hill (Northants.). Eaves dormer
windows on an 18th-century cottage.
Photograph, author

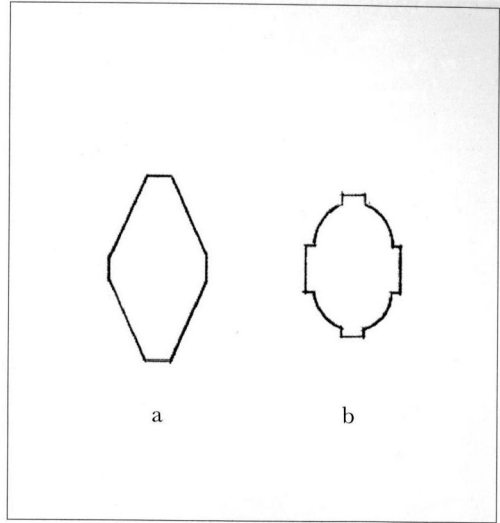


Fig. 5
Window mullion sections. a. Diamond; b. Ovolo
Drawing, author

WINDOWS

Stone mullioned windows are characteristic features of both regions but the differences of their detail give each their local signature. In general, Cotswold mullions have a diamond profile, being chamfered inside and out between the glazing plane and their inner and outer faces (Figs 5a, 6); the chamfer is continued on the lintel and jambs of the window. The equivalent detail on the mullions and outer jambs of most windows of the Stamford style is ovolo-moulded (Figs 5b, 7), i.e. having convex quadrants with a small flat fillet between instead of the plain chamfers of a diamond section.



Fig. 6
Bibury (Glos.) A Cotswold two-light window with diamond-
shaped mullion and drop-eared undercut hoodmould. 17th
century.
Photograph, author

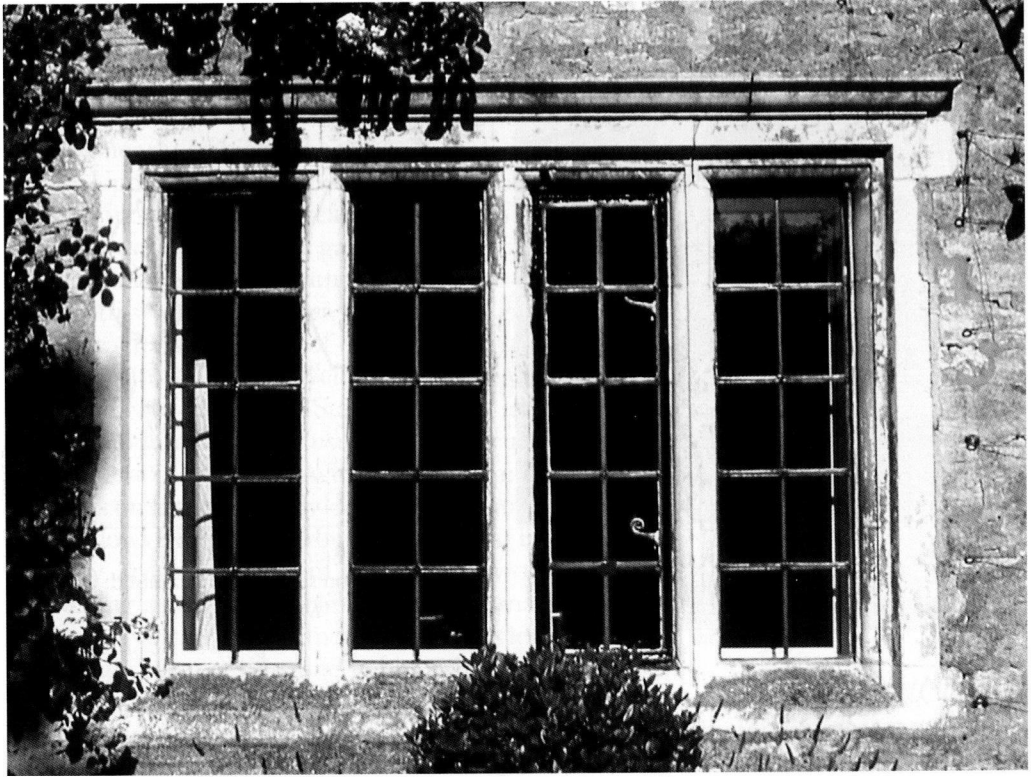


Fig. 7

Duddington (Northants.). A four-light window of the Stamford region with ovolo mullions and a straight cyma hoodmould above. 17th century.

Photograph, author

A hoodmould, or label, over the window is a feature common to both window types. The Cotswold hoodmould has short drops at each end terminating with label-stops and typically is of an undercut section which forms an effective drip-mould (Figs 2, 3, 6). The Stamford type of label is straight, without end-drops, and is usually a cyma moulding (Fig. 7). These different sections are of particular interest in that the undercut Cotswold section is essentially a detail of Gothic church architecture and is not found in Antiquity whereas the cyma is a classical profile, although also used in the later Middle Ages (the ogee moulding).

During the 18th century, with the general adoption of more vertically-proportioned windows, stone mullioned types in both styles were largely superseded by wooden casements; these usually had oak lintels though some were of stone in higher-quality buildings. Cotswold-style mullion windows became favourites in Gothic revival architecture of Victorian and more recent times and, with their drop-eared hoodmoulds, were often used throughout the country in secular 'polite' architecture.

DOORWAYS

No specific architectural details differentiate the doorways of the two regions, in both of which simple designs are often similar. Those with ashlar dressings may have just a single chamfer to the jambs and head, and in many the lintel may be of oak rather than stone. In doorheads of more ornamental design that have a low four-centred or Tudor arch of stone, a hoodmould above it usually echoes that of the windows – the Cotswold version with eared end-drops and the northern version with a straight cyma moulding.



Fig. 8

Taynton (Oxon.). Cotswold stone porch canopy.
Photograph, author



Fig. 9

Easton on the Hill. Stamford-style wooden porch canopy with Collyweston slate hipped roof. Probably 18th century on a 17th-century house.
Photograph, author

Some Cotswold doorways have a stone porch hood of a type not found in the more northern region. It comprises a flat stone slab supported on carved stone console brackets (Fig. 8). An equivalent in the Stamford style is probably a small Collyweston-slated hood with a hipped roof supported on cantilevered carved wooden brackets (Fig. 9).

GABLE PARAPET COPINGS

Parapetted gable walls, weathered with stone copings, are common to both traditions. Cotswold gable copings are usually plain square-edged stone slabs with a projection over the wall of about their own thickness and an apex stone at the top with crossed roll mouldings (Fig. 10). Stamford-style parapet copings differ in having a simple chamfer on the underside of their projection, and a single roll on the apex stone (Fig. 11). A minor difference is seen in the treatment of the kneeler stones at the lower ends of the copings. In the Stamford style the chamfered edge-profile of the coping continues unchanged across the kneeler stone at its



Fig. 10

Aston-sub-Edge (Glos.). Square-edged Cotswold parapet copings with cross-roll apex stone, on stone gable dormers. 17th century.
Photograph, author



Fig. 11

Stamford. Chamfered parapet copings of the Stamford style with single-roll apex stone on the gable of a canted bay window; date-stone 'AM 1663'.

Photograph, author

termination, but at the foot of the Cotswold type the underside of the coping's projection on the kneeler may be flattened and have a drip worked on it.

Where a parapetted gable wall supports a chimney, the square edge of a Cotswold gable coping is extended as a surface carving on the chimney's plinth stones, terminating in a small roll at the apex (Fig. 13). In the Stamford style, a chamfered moulding continues the edge-profile of the copings horizontally across the gable below the chimney plinth (Figs 12, 14).

CHIMNEYS

Ashlar chimney stacks of the Stamford tradition are usually more elaborated than their Cotswold counterparts. Set on the weather moulding of a wider plinth, ashlar stone slabs form square flue shafts that terminate with a simplified version of the three elements of a classical entablature – an architrave moulding, a plain frieze and a cornice (Figs 12, 14, 16). In double chimneys, the flue shafts above the plinth are formed as two separate elements with a clear narrow gap between, but unified at the top by their shared entablature motif (Figs 14, 16).

Where Cotswold chimneys have a plinth, it is normally the same width as the stack, but a moulding between them is not uncommon (Figs 13, 15). The stacks usually terminate with a single cornice moulding (Figs 13, 15, 17). In double chimneys the two flues are accommodated within a wider undivided stack (Fig. 13), although sometimes a narrow, shallow vertical recess worked on the surface of the chimney shaft expresses the duality within.

CHIMNEY WEATHERINGS

Where a chimney of the Stamford style penetrates the roof, weathering at the abutments of the slating to the chimney stonework is achieved by simple mortar fillets (Fig. 16), but in the Cotswolds, a more elaborate method is often followed. On each roofslope, the bottom ashlar stones of the emerging chimney have extended sloping skirts that overlap the slates (Figs 15, 17) and also projecting side weatherings similar to the square-edged mouldings on the outside of a gable chimney (Fig. 13). These details occur on gable chimneys (Fig. 15) and on chimneys emerging through the ridge at other positions (Fig. 17).

Fig. 13

Blockley (Glos.). Cotswold double gable-chimney stack, with the apex of the gable parapet coping carved on the stonework of the chimney plinth. Plinth and stack are the same width. 17th century.

Photograph, author

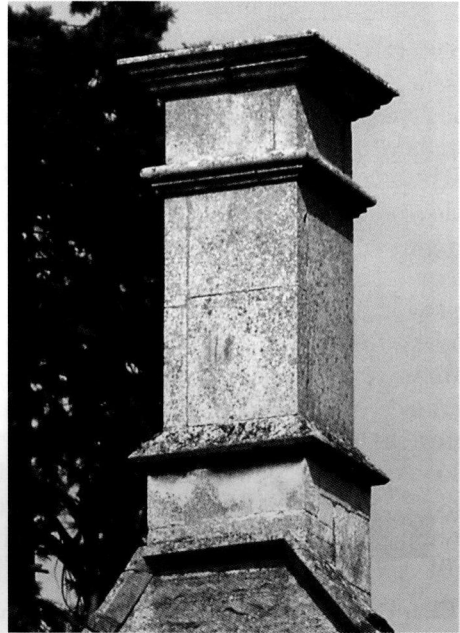
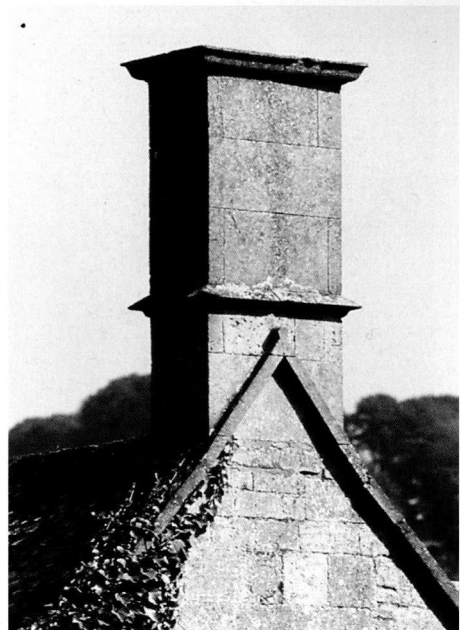


Fig. 12

Ketton (Rutland). Typical Stamford-style single chimney stack (1629); with wider plinth, entablature motif at the top, and a horizontal moulding beneath the chimney plinth.

Photograph, author



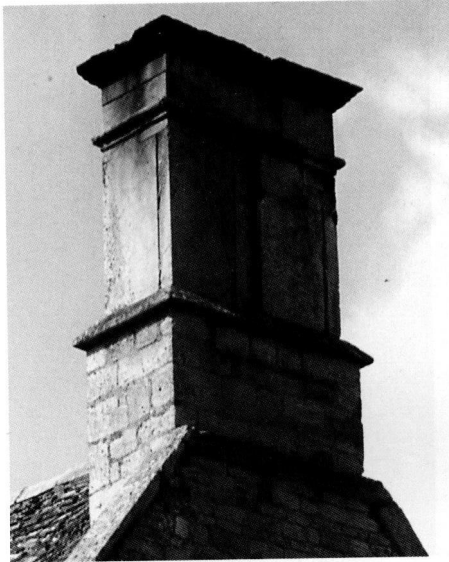


Fig. 14

Elton (Cambs.). Stamford-style double gable-chimney with a gap between the flue shafts. The horizontal moulding beneath chimney plinth matches the edge-profile of the gable coping. 17th century.

Photograph, author



Fig. 15

Willersey (Glos.). Stone skirt on its flank and a square-edged moulding on the inside face of a Cotswold gable-chimney provide weathering over the slating. 17th or 18th century.

Photograph, author



Fig. 16

Cotterstock (Northants.). Mortar fillet on a Stamford-style chimney (1720), to weather the slating to the stack.

Photograph, author



Fig. 17

Stanton (Glos.). Typical Cotswold single ridge-chimney with a cornice at the top and no plinth. Stone skirt and square-edged weather moulding to the slating. Probably 17th century.

Photograph, author

ROOFS

Stonesfield and a few other Cotswold quarries are the sources of the stone slates used for Cotswold roofs (Figs 10, 18, 20), and Collyweston near Stamford yields the material for roofs in the Stamford and surrounding area (Figs 4, 19, 21). In both regions the slates are laid in diminishing courses with the larger ones at the eaves and the smallest at the ridge. Since Collyweston slates are larger on average, the difference in slate size between eaves and ridge is more noticeable on a Collyweston roof than on a Cotswold one. Collyweston slates are also a little thinner and as, traditionally, their jointing is mortar-pointed, roofs of this material have a more even surface texture than unpointed Cotswold ones. Traditionally, Cotswold ridges are of freestone, cut to a V-shape (Fig. 20), whereas the ridges of Collyweston roofs are hog-back clay tiles, either buff or red (Fig. 21). Where roof-slopes meet at right angles, traditional valleys between them are formed differently in the two regions. On a Cotswolds roof, specially cut tapered valley slates are carried round the angle, forming a 'swept' valley in which continuity of the slate coursing of the two slopes is maintained (Fig. 18). By contrast, on a Collyweston roof, the junction between the two roof-slopes is formed by means of a 'laced' valley, locally called a 'turned' valley; near the valley, the horizontal courses on each roofslope curve slightly upwards, exposing the valley slates as diamond shapes at the junction (Fig. 19).

Regrettably, in many modern restorations these traditional techniques have been superseded in favour of the simpler method of a mitred junction over a secret gutter of lead.



Fig. 18

Bibury. A swept valley in a Cotswold stone slate roof.
Photograph, author

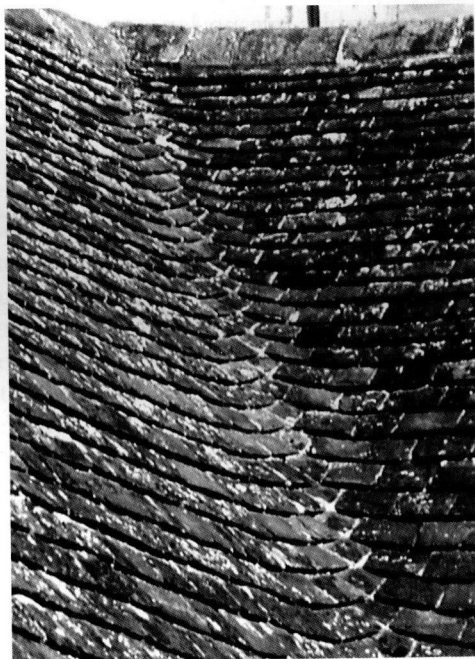


Fig. 19

Easton on the Hill. A turned valley in a Collyweston stone slate roof.
Photograph, author

THE INTERVENING AREA

No features perceived as indicative of each of the two regions predominate in the intervening area, and although architectural details of the two styles persist within it, the clarity of both idiomatic traditions becomes less emphatic.

North-eastwards from the Cotswolds, in an area comprehensively studied by Wood-Jones in his *Traditional Domestic Architecture in the Banbury Region*,⁴ the paler limestones give way quite suddenly to the darker browns of the liassic marlstone of north-west Oxfordshire, making an abrupt contrast with the visual character of the Cotswolds. Stone slate roofs are rarer the greater the distance from the source of the material, and the characteristic Cotswold-style eaves and dormer gables are no longer typical features. Stone windows, usually with diamond chamfered mullions, are used less frequently, being superseded by wood casements beneath oak lintels; and simple square chimneys, many now rebuilt in brick, are more common than the usual Cotswold stone type. Nevertheless, certain Cotswold details persist, such as drop-eared window hoodmoulds and the apex of a raked coping carved on the plinth of a gable chimney stack.

South-westwards from the Welland-Nene region, change is less abrupt than at the northern fringe of the Cotswolds. Between Oundle and the Kettering area and across the Welland in Rutland, the warm brown ironstones of mid-Northamptonshire merge more gradually with the grey limestone villages of Lincolnshire limestone. South of Northampton, where cream Blisworth limestone and Northampton Sand ironstone outcrop close together, the two contrasting stones, laid in alternating courses, are found in some vernacular buildings as, for example, in Blisworth (Northants.). Collyweston stone slate roofs are fewer, and further southwards the characteristic features of the Stamford style become less definitive.



Fig. 20

Bibury. Cotswold stone slate roof with stone ridges.

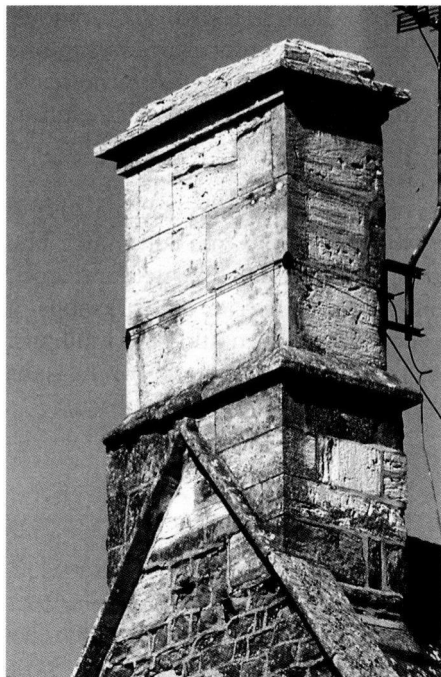
Photograph, author



Fig. 21

Collyweston. Collyweston stone slate roof with clay ridge tiles,

Photograph, author



Because of the dilution of both vernacular traditions in this intervening area, there is no distinct boundary between the two styles and instances occur where elements of both are combined in the same building. For example, at Deddington (Oxon.), not far from the county boundary with Northamptonshire, we find a building in which a chamfered gable coping of the Stamford style terminates with a Cotswold-style apex, formed on a wide chimney plinth of Stamford style with a Cotswold-style weather skirt on its flank, supporting a Cotswold double chimney (Fig. 22).

Fig. 22

Deddington (Oxon.). A chimney that combines architectural features from the Cotswold and the Stamford traditions.

Photograph, author

DISCUSSION

Although certain stylistic features may predominate in each of the regions, they are not entirely absent in the other. Nevertheless the questions arise as to how the undeniable regional preferences for certain features became established and why they differ. It is likely that innovations based on precedents from the great houses designed by leading masons would in due course have been copied by lesser masons in the urban houses of the wealthier tradesmen and merchants, and eventually became adopted by local builders as ordinary elements of yeoman-class houses outside the towns. Possible origins of some of these features can be found at great houses of the 16th century in both regions.

An early instance of the gabled façade, perhaps the most characteristic feature of the Cotswold style, occurs on the late 16th-century west front of Stanway House (Glos.), where four ashlar-faced gables, with ridges the same height as the main roof ridge and each containing a window with drop-eared hoodmoulds, are dominant elements of the facade.⁵ The mullions of the bay window on this elevation have the chamfered, diamond profile. Urban examples of the gabled façade include the almshouses built in 1612 for Sir Baptist Hicks in Chipping Campden (Glos.) with eight gables on the principal elevation,⁶ whilst a row of gabled cottages in Coxwell Street, Cirencester (Glos.), built mainly of walling stone and probably dating from the second half of the 17th century, represents a more frugal expression of the theme.⁷

In the Stamford region, windows at Kirby Hall (Northants, 1570-75), like those of the slightly later great hall at Burghley House near Stamford, have ovolo mullions of

the type that became popular in the region's vernacular buildings.⁸ Also, a prestigious, if rather eccentric, 16th-century precedent for the chimney-top entablature motif, one of the characteristic features of the Stamford style, is found in the fantastic roofscape of Burghley House (c. 1575-87), where clusters of two, three and four Doric columns forming separate chimney shafts are unified by the architrave, frieze and cornice of a complete classical entablature.⁹

Other than the possible architectural influences of great houses, it is not easy to find definitive answers as to why different features in the two regions became dominant. The reason may perhaps be no more specific than fortuitous preferences for particular details. Another factor may have been the availability from certain quarries or workshops of prefabricated 'standard' components such as parapet copings, hoodmoulds and mullions, distributed via the river systems. But the reason why, for example, Cotswold coping slabs should be plain-edged and those of the Stamford style chamfered, remains obscure.

NOTES

- 1 A. Clifton Taylor, *The Pattern of English Building* (London 1972), 76-86.
- 2 J. and J. Penoyre, *Houses in the Landscape* (London 1978), ch. 6.
- 3 R. W. Brunskill, *Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture* (2nd edn, 1978) ch. 4.
- 4 R. B. Wood-Jones, *Traditional Domestic Architecture in the Banbury Region* (2nd edn, Manchester 1986).
- 5 Illustrated in D. Verey, *Buildings of England, Gloucestershire: the Cotswolds*, Buildings of England, (2nd edn, Harmondsworth 1979), pl. 60.
- 6 Illustrated in D. Verey and A. Brooks, *Gloucestershire 1: the Cotswolds*, Buildings of England (3rd rev. edn, Harmondsworth 1999), pl. 2.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pl. 3.
- 8 For the Kirby Hall windows, see M. Girouard, *Elizabethan Architecture: its Rise and Fall, 1540-1640* (New Haven and London, 2009), pls 315, 338. The latter illustrates the continued use of the ovolo at Kirby Hall in the double bay windows attributed by Girouard to work of 1605.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p.ii, for a photo.