



SELWORTHY

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL



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- 2 Tithe Map of Selworthy 1841
- 3 Selworthy c.1889 (First Edition O.S.map 1:2500 scale)
- 4 Selworthy c.1928 (Revised Second Edition O.S.map (6 inches to the mile scale))

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- 5 Existing Conservation Area & Listed Buildings
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A cottage on Selworthy Green dating from the early 19th century in the ornee style which was popular at that time.

1 TOPOGRAPHIC & HISTORIC BACKGROUND

(i) Location & Essential Characteristics

1.1 Selworthy is probably the most noteworthy of the villages of Exmoor, and is recognised as one of the more picturesque in Britain, both in terms of its setting and the quality of its buildings. It lies in a sheltered situation in a small hollow on the lower slopes of Selworthy Beacon to the north. From this position there are extensive views across the eastern end of Porlock Vale to high open moorland, including Dunkery Beacon to the south. Although having a sense of seclusion, the village is about 1 km. south of the A39, with Porlock some 3 km. to the west and Minehead about 7 km. to the east.

1.1 Selworthy and the countryside surrounding it has been largely owned by the National Trust since 1944. It is part of the Holnicote Estate, which is the Exmoor seat of the historic Acland family, whose ancestors date back to Hugh de Accalen in the 12th century. Like other villages on the Estate, there are good examples of local vernacular detail, especially in cottage groups, and several have been discovered to have medieval origins.

1.3 During the 1990's the National Trust carried out a detailed historic survey of all the buildings in its ownership in Selworthy, which is kept at the Holnicote estate office. As might be expected, the Trust takes great care to maintain the traditional features of its buildings, which adds to their timeless and homogenous character.

(ii) Historic Background

1.4 In the Domesday Book, the village is *Selerude*. Later references are *Selworh* in the Assize Rolls of 1243, and *Syleworth* in the *Taxatio ecclesiastica* of 1291. The name indicates a settlement or enclosure with a copse of sallow. The parish of Selworthy is large, containing several hamlets, most prominent of which are Bossington and Allerford (see separate Conservation Area Appraisals). The manor at Holnicote, also within the parish, was awarded to Ralph de Limesi by William the Conqueror (as was



Left: Selworthy main village street with cottages set back from the highway within their own gardens.. Right: Selworthy Green where cottages are set around a communal garden with public access.

East Luccombe). The name is thought to derive from the Anglo-Saxon *Holegn* (holly) which suggests it was established prior to the Norman conquest. The Luccombe family are recorded as holding both manors on behalf of the de Limesi dynasty. From 1301, by the authority of Edward I, the manors were transferred to Henry de Pynkeny with the Luccombes still in possession. In 1333 Elizabeth Luccombe married into the St. John family who then acquired manorial rights. There was a further change of ownership by marriage to the Arundell family of Trevice in Cornwall.

1.5 The Arundells are known to have built the north aisle of the parish Church in the 17th century. Another noteworthy local family, also for some time owners of the Manor, although no record could be found of their period of tenure, was the Steynings, who probably built the south aisle, in the early 16th century, since there is a date of 1538 high up in the west-end. On the wall, there are good 16th and 17th century brasses to various members of this family. The Acland family became linked by an Arundell marriage to the Holnicote estate from 1745, and the estate eventually transferred entirely to the Aclands in 1802.

2 THE CONSERVATION AREA

(i) Background & Setting

2.1 The present conservation area was designated in 1984 and includes the entire 19th century boundary of the village, with very little development added since. Buildings are loosely grouped and arranged informally, with no clearly defined street frontage, except on the northern side of the approach to Selworthy Green. The especially attractive group of thatched and cream rendered cottages bordering the Green itself, fronted by meandering paths, is set in a hollow against a backdrop of trees, yet with extensive outward south-facing views. Not surprisingly, this part of the village is a special draw for tourists.

1.2 Within the conservation area are some 10 entries included in the statutory list, including several cottage pairs. (see section 7). Of these, all are grade II listed apart from the Parish Church (grade I), and the Tithe Barn and a Churchyard Cross (grade II*).

(ii) Purpose of the Character Appraisal

2.2 The statutory definition of a conservation area is “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for designated conservation areas. This requirement is expanded upon in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 section 4.

2.3 An English Heritage Conservation Area Practice Note published in June 1993 also states that “Local Authorities should..define that special architectural or historic character which warrants designation by means of a published detail character analysis”. Part of the purpose of such a document is to “incorporate policies in the statutory local plan...the most important (of which) will be a presumption against the loss of elements which have been identified as making a positive contribution to that special interest which warranted designation.”

2.4 A process of change within a conservation area is inevitable. The purpose of a character statement such as this is to define as clearly as possible the historic (and by implication archaeological), architectural, and natural components of the conservation area that are considered especially important and contribute most to its character. It is also intended to advise on the scope for repair or restoration where needed and to encourage improvement or removal of unsightly features. There is an emphasis upon the use of local traditional materials and methods of construction which seeks to challenge an increasing trend towards the use of standardised artificial substitutes.

2.5 To summarise, the principal aims of this document are intended to define:

- what influences have given Selworthy its special character
- what chiefly reflects this character and is most worth conserving
- what has suffered damage or loss and may need reinstating
- what should be considered in guiding future changes
- what visual features particularly need safeguarding.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 Planning Policy Guidance Notes 15 and 16 have advised that archaeology has become a “material consideration” in the planning process. Planning authorities must now consider the balance between the need for development and the effects it has on the historic environment.

3.2 As already mentioned, the National Trust has completed a survey of vernacular buildings, which includes all its cottages, farmhouses and outbuildings on the Holnicote estate. In Selworthy, this has revealed previously unrecorded evidence of several late medieval open hall houses. Much of this



Left: the 14th century Church yard Cross is grade II listed. Centre: the buttressed wall of the late medieval former Tithe Barn, also grade II* listed. Right: one of two grade II listed 18th century chest tombs.*



Left: Selworthy Farm with the former farmhouse in the background, 17th-19th century farm buildings on the left, and the remains of an orchard on the hillside beyond. Right: former outbuildings, converted to residential use, probably in the late 19th century. The Bridgwater pantiles may have replaced thatch.

information (summarised in paragraphs 7.4 -7.7), is contained in an essay by Isabel Richardson of the National Trust (see Bibliography).

3.3 The County Sites and Monuments Record shows four sites within the conservation area. These comprise the Churchyard Cross and Chest Tombs, the former Tithe Barn, and the remains of a 16th century farmhouse at Selworthy Farm.

3.4 Immediately adjoining the conservation area to the north of Selworthy Farm, is an old orchard shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map, published in 1889. The Exmoor National Park Local Plan has identified this site and defines it as an “Orchard of Landscape Importance.”

4 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 As with other settlements of the Holnicote Estate, Selworthy probably has pre Conquest origins. Since Norman times there has been an unbroken succession of estate landlords, formerly of the landed gentry until passing to the National Trust in 1944. The Trust’s survey of its own buildings in the village has revealed specific medieval detail; smoke-blackened roof timbers for example. This provides evidence of one or more former open hall houses, dating from the 15th century or earlier. The majority of cottage groups display characteristic local vernacular features, with one of the most typical features being the tall front lateral stacks and adjoining rounded bread oven, as for example at Bow Cottage on Selworthy Green. Such features probably date from the early 17th century when in most cases the building had



Left: Bow Cottage, Selworthy Green is a former medieval open hall house, altered in the early 19th century. Right: Clematis Cottage now the National Trust shop, is to the left and dates from the time Selworthy Green was formed c.1829. To the right,, Lorna Doone also has medieval origins, although the lower room was subsequently removed.

ceilings and fireplaces added to replace the hall open to the roof with a central hearth.

4.2 Although no individual feature is especially lavish in style or detail, the overall pattern where thatch combines with cream or honey coloured lime-wash over rendered or cob or local red sandstone, is especially harmonious. On entering the village, there is a sequence of cottages set in their own gardens. This transfers almost imperceptibly into the group of six on Selworthy Green; a layout planned in the early 19th century by Sir Thomas Dyke Acland (10th baronet) for estate pensioners. The concept, as well as the cottage ornee detail, in some cases added to earlier buildings, probably gained its inspiration from John Nash's Blaise Hamlet (see paragraph 5.2). Entrances are directly off footpaths that criss-cross The Green, which is a delightful informally designed communal garden. The valley and hillside setting accentuates a sense of enclosure, as well as providing striking contrasts and ever changing vistas over short distances.

(ii) Character Areas

4.3 Although the conservation area is relatively small, there are two separate sub-areas, each with its own particular character. The first consists of the main street and the buildings closely associated with it. This also includes the tree-lined approach from the south. The second is Selworthy Green and the enclave to the east containing the Parish Church and surrounding cottages. From this more elevated part of the conservation area, are the striking outward views to the south contrasting with the otherwise encompassing woodland to the north and west.

Use of Materials - (i) BUILDINGS

4.4 Use of stone for building is widespread. In the main buildings; for example the interior of the Parish Church, the stone is dressed or carved, whereas many cottages, and especially farm outbuildings, are of stone rubble, sometimes combined with cob, and subsequently rendered. There are two main stone types; the soft-textured and orange to reddish-purple New Red Sandstone, and the much harder dark red-purple or grey-green Devonian sandstone. In Selworthy where the stone is exposed, there is a fairly even distribution of the two different types.

4.5 Much of the building stone would have been obtained from local quarries, which have long since closed, although several former sites in the vicinity can still be traced. There is, for example, a former quarry close to East Lynch, just over 1 km. to the east of Selworthy.

4.6 The equally important material, certainly in terms of visual impact, is rendering. This is a mixture of lime-mortar and lime-wash slobbered over the stone or cob. It is seen to best effect when in combination with thatch and the tall lateral chimney shafts, often supported on shouldered stacks. The lime-wash traditionally combines with a black tar-banded plinth. This is almost invariably constructed of stone and is essentially part of the foundations, even where much of the rest of the building is of cob.

4.7 In Selworthy, thatch continues to be the most common type of roofing material, but during the late 19th to mid 20th century there was some replacement with Bridgwater pantiles, double Roman tiles and similar variants, for example The Tithe Barn and Zeals farmhouse. Traditionally, thatch was long-straw wheat-reed. Until recent years, this was becoming unobtainable, with most thatchers preferring to use more durable water-reed, much of which is now imported from Eastern Europe. There is current research at regional and national level, to try and re-establish the wheat-reed tradition and produce a straw that matches water-reed in durability. In recent years The National Trust has been carrying out trials at Holnicote, and now produces enough straw from this source to carry out patching and re-thatching on its own cottages.

4.8 Historic windows in the conservation area are mainly a mixture of timber and metal casement with few, if any, sash windows present. Some cottage windows have forged iron frames, and there is a range of leaded light glazing patterns. Most of these are plain rectangular, but more decorative frames may be seen, as for example at Ivy's Cottage (page 4) and Rectory Cottages.

4.9 Most doors are constructed in a traditional plank and ledged form, some with fixed lights, and a



The use of mainly local natural materials is an integral part of the character of the conservation area.

Above left: window detail, including first floor oriel, set in gable of cottage, probably a 19th century conversion of a former agricultural outbuilding.

Above centre: another example of an oriel window, probably a picturesque embellishment added in the early 19th century when the “cottage ornee” style was popular.

Above right: the form and texture of stone walls, steps, and cobbles combined with timber is well demonstrated in this example at Selworthy Farm.

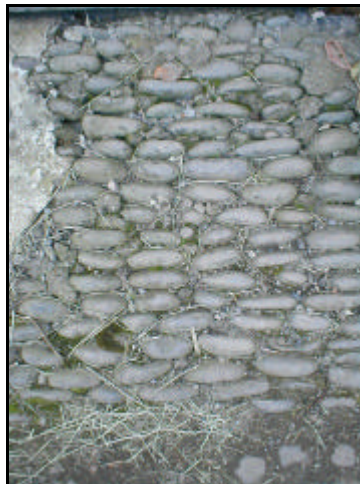


Right: the walls and steps to the church yard enhance the immediate setting of the church, whilst the pair of yew trees, (planted in the mid 19th century by Sir Thomas Dyke Acland) and the wooded backdrop are important to its broader setting.

Below right: a section of dry stone retaining wall, showing the local method of laying the stones in either a vertical or alternately slanting form



Bottom left: part of the extensive cobbled yard at Selworthy Farm





*Cottage detail at Selworthy Green. **Left:** double-doors of opposed diagonal plank construction within a Gothic-arched frame. **Centre:** steps up to Clematis Cottage. This dates from the early 19th century and is in “cottage ornee style” which often included use of thatch. **Right:** entrance detail at Clematis Cottage, showing a vertical plank door with ribbed panels and edges. The variety of detail, here with ogee-headed openings, and diamond paned leaded-*

few have examples of what may be termed rustic Arts & Crafts detail, for example use of diagonal boarding, and others with ribs or studs. Few openings of late medieval origin survive. These had massive oak frames, and jointed with pegs or chamfered with stops. Their replacement is probably partly due to the extensive modifications made during the 19th century when “picturesque” features were added to many of the earlier buildings.

Use of Materials - (ii) BOUNDARY FEATURES

4.10 There are some stretches of boundary or retaining walls built of local sandstone rubble, usually roughly coursed and infilled with mortar. The alternative, also quite widely in evidence, is of the locally distinctive dry-stone pattern known as “dyking”. This is more commonly associated with earth banking and adds a pleasing contrast. Where walling forms a retaining feature to hedgerow banks, it can be prone to deterioration as a result of root spread when not regularly maintained. These local types of walling make a valuable contribution to the character of the conservation area, as well as providing a strong sense of enclosure or privacy in several cases.

4.11 As a village maintained by the National Trust from the estate yard at Holnicote, where many traditional materials are produced and stored, such boundary features as oak post and rail fencing and footpath stiles or gates are well-maintained with a programme of replacement using locally sourced materials where possible. A recent example is a new gate providing access to Selworthy Green from the south.

Use of Materials - (iii) GROUND SURFACES

4.12 Whilst Selworthy does not possess stone paved or cobbled surfaces as part of the street scene to the same extent as some neighbouring villages, there are localised examples, mainly in the form of steps and kerbs, for example bordering the church yard and at the Green. Though set apart from the most visited areas, there is one notable exception, at Selworthy Farm where there is a large cobbled yard surrounded by a historic group of farm buildings, probably laid out in its present form during the early-mid 19th century.



Newly installed gate and fence at the entrance to Selworthy Green.



Left: detail of cobbled yard at Selworthy Farm. Centre and right: further examples of dry stone walled banks within the conservation area.

5 BUILDING FORM & ORNAMENT

5.1 Much of the character of the village derives from the harmonious building materials and the informally arranged cottage groups with picturesque detail; also the manner in which gaps have been used to provide glimpses as well as direct views across open countryside. There has been no disruptive 20th century building. There are sequential groups of buildings rather than any strongly established building lines, whilst the elevated siting and whitewashed rendering of the parish church set against a wooded backdrop creates a recognisable landmark both from within the village, and from much of the surrounding countryside. Elsewhere within the village there is a pleasing intimacy of scale enriched by changes of level, including flights of steps, a varied street alignment, and a modest stream flowing alongside The Green and following the lane.

5.2 This informality of layout typifies a long established settlement pattern, probably of medieval origin. The Tithe Map (c.1841) shows that the layout has changed very little since that date. Isabel Richardson has researched the development of The Green and its association with Blaise Hamlet. This was built in 1809 for John S Harford of Blaise Castle. She writes: "Sir Thomas (Acland's) long association with J.S. Harford suggests that the idea of a Green with housing for his pensioners came from Blaise Hamlet. The design of the Green was partly determined by the existing village.. The architectural details such as thatched roofs, Gothic and Tudor arches, lattice windows and round chimney uppers all were probably inspired by the cottages and houses already on the estate, and from Holnicote House itself, which was very much in the picturesque tradition."

5.3 Most building ornament is unconsciously derived from the traditional building forms, and includes plain thatch with swept eaves. There are often small thatched hips over gables, and rustic porches or recessed flat-headed doorways. The tall shouldered chimneys, with round or square section



More examples of local vernacular detail. Ivy's Cottage (centre) is early 19th century. The other two examples are much earlier in origin, but have door and window detail that reflects the picturesque style introduced by Sir Thomas Dyke Acland.

shafts and the different types of chimney pot or smoke vent – are a special feature of the locality. Usually, ornament is taken a stage further, especially Gothic arched entrance doors or ogee-headed window openings. These are the defining architectural features of the Holnicote estate, along with a range of decorative glazing patterns using leaded lights.

6 CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

6.1 Most historic buildings, both listed and unlisted, are well maintained, and in good structural condition. There is a large proportion of timber or metal windows, mainly casements, and of entrance doors, most of which are ledged and braced. These can be difficult to date, but many frames survive in their original early-mid 19th century form, and where replacements have been made, they closely match the original; pattern. National Trust ownership ensures that the historic and visual integrity of even the most modest of traditional buildings will be appropriately maintained.

6.2 As previously mentioned (section 4) it is noted that the Trust is at the forefront of using traditional methods of repair such as use of lime-based mortars, lime-coated finishes, and wheat-reed thatching. It is now becoming more widely recognised, even among private owners, especially where cob construction is concerned, that highly finished plasticised renders, although considered more maintenance free than historic lime mortar and lime-wash render, may pose long-term structural problems. Such problems arise by preventing some of the natural rhythms of permeability, which the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings refers to as “allowing the building to breathe.”



The National Trust uses traditional methods and materials when undertaking building maintenance.

7 HISTORIC BUILDINGS

(i) Grade I Listed Buildings

7.1 The **Parish Church of All Saints** dates from the 14th century, although much is Perpendicular. An 1875 restoration, less drastic than most of the period, revealed wall paintings, much eroded. The church is built of roughcast over rubble with Ham Hill stone dressings. The ceiled wagon roof to the nave has ornate carved bosses, and that to the south chancel is especially fine with moulded ribs and a wall plate frieze. The wagon-roof in the chancel and north aisle is 19th century. A local wood-working class carved the bosses in the latter. There is some good 17th and 18th century fittings, including a pulpit of re-set medieval panelling with sounding board and hourglass. The oak-panelled gallery was added c.1750, and the Squire’s pew with canopied gallery over the doorway was erected in 1804. There are some fragments of medieval glass in the east window of the north aisle. The listing details refer to this church as “one of the finest in the county” and Pevsner in “The Buildings of England”, refers to the south chancel as its “great glory” and “unsurpassed in the county”. It is also the resting-place of Francis Eeles who was founder and first secretary of the Council for the Care of Churches.

(ii) Grade II* Listed Buildings

7.2 East of the south aisle of the Parish Church is a **churchyard cross** dating from the 15th century, having a three-stage calvary with a moulded plinth, dripstones and sunk quatrefoil panels with shields. The tapering octagonal shaft is broken at the top, but it is otherwise in good condition, and resembles a cross of similar date at Wootton Courtenay.

7.3 The former **Tithe Barn** is late medieval, the original building having been enlarged and now incorporating two cottages. It is built of local stone rubble with some cob and a double-Roman tiled roof. The front facing the lane is largely unaltered, having seven buttresses. A central moulded arch and a blocked

opening with hood mould and carvings depicting a pig, a sheep and a sheaf of corn, is described in the listing details as “a rare feature.”

(iii) Grade II Listed Buildings

7.4 There are two main groups of listed buildings in the village. The former comprises those that front the main street, and the latter group surrounds Selworthy Green. All in these two groups are thatched with roughcast render over stone-rubble and cob, and many have the typical shouldered lateral stacks with tall round shafts. Entering the village from the south-west is an asymmetric pair **no. 1 Lower Cottage and Greenbanks**. The listing details indicate these are 17th-18th century and were altered in the mid 19th century, but the Trust’s own survey suggests they are a planned pair and were built 1855-57. They have ogee-headed casement windows and chamfered semi-circular headed doorways and plank doors. Adjoining is **Selworthy Cottage and wall abutting on south front returned to road**. This probably dates from the 18th century, but was much modified in the early-mid 19th century into the picturesque style encountered widely on the Holnicote Estate with ogee-headed and lancet lights, a two-light oriel above the porch, with an ogee-headed ribbed inner door. Beyond is a further pair, **nos. 1-2 Rectory Cottages**, but prior to that a farmhouse. The Trust’s survey discovered smoke-blackened thatch indicating medieval origins, but from the 17th century was a three-room house with a cross-passage. There is exposed cob on the rear elevation, and a heart and fleur-de-lys motif pargetted into the rendered front. The listing details describe this as “a rare survival of a probably once common form of decoration on vernacular cottages.” A projecting slate-roofed bay with a three-light wooden casement, probably early-mid 20th century, is a former shop.

7.5 On Selworthy Green, in the lower corner are **Bow and Westbourne Cottages**. The National Trust survey found these to be a late medieval house (1450-1550) of Hall, Parlour and Cross Passage with a Lower Room beyond. There is evidence of extensive smoke-blackening to the jointed cruck roof timbers. This is earlier than the probable 17th century given in the listing details. The former hall, open to the roof, was most likely ceiled and the front stack, and possibly the bread oven added before the end of the 16th century. It then became a farmhouse until the early 19th century, when picturesque features were added, including split oak trunks supporting a porch roof, and the usual embellishments of gothic or ogee-arched window frames, a bow window and leaded-light windows. **Ivy’s Cottage (estate no. 68)** is early 19th century, single-storey with two main rooms, and of irregular shape with an almost circular porch on the south-west corner. This is one of the two cottage ornee additions when the Green was formed, and has the ogee-headed features that typify 19th century Acland detailing. In a central position is **Periwinkle Cottage** another former farmhouse, dating from the 17th century, and two-cell with cross-passage and outshots. The two-storey picturesque porch was added c.1828. The right outshot has a reset window with trefoil-headed lights, and decorative spandrels.

7.6 At the top of The Green is a linked pair. To the left, **Clematis Cottage**, one and a half storeys is



Left: The Parish Church is grade I listed and a fine example, mainly of the 14th-16th century. Right: The former Tithe Barn is grade II listed and dates from the 16th century or earlier.*



*Listed Buildings in Selworthy. **Left:** Gable end of the Tithe Barn with cinquefoil headed two-light window, probably late medieval. **Centre:** Lorna Doone, Selworthy Green has late medieval origins with evidence of smoke-blackening to roof timbers **Right:** rear of Periwinkle Cottage with projecting lateral stack. It is possible that before the formation of Selworthy Green, this was the front elevation.*

the second thatched cottage or nee built around 1829, and now incorporates a National Trust shop. Isabel Richardson comments that these vernacular revival cottages, although echoing Blaise Hamlet to an extent, have created a lighter result, which sits in the countryside very happily. The adjoining cottage, **Lorna Doone**, is what remains of a former medieval open hall house, probably dating from the 15th century. The jointed-cruck construction has smoke-blackening to some roof timbers. It is truncated with only the higher end of the former open Hall and adjoining parlour. Although the cross-passage survives, the lower room has been demolished, possibly when the adjoining cottage was added. The ceiling and front lateral stack were added in the late 16th century.

7.7 To the north-east of the Parish Church, **Zeals** is a further late medieval jointed cruck cross-passage house, dating from the late 15th-early 16th century. Apart from being ceiled in the late 16th century, its original plan survives largely in tact. There are also timber (plank and muntin screen) partitions and a rear stair turret. Proximity to the church and green, also ensures it is an important element of the historic built environment. Within the church yard are two listed 18th century **family chest tombs** just to the east of the chancel. Finally, the **former Rectory** somewhat hidden from view, was much altered and extended in the late 19th century, and again in the mid 20th century when it was converted to two private dwellings. It is 16th century in origin, the early part was L-shaped with a stair turret and two external stacks. The listing details mention that an “early-mid 19th century model at the Old Rectory shows (the) house prior to alterations... a rare example of a vernacular house with a model surviving from (a) previous century.”

(iv) Other Key Buildings

7.8 Almost all of the few remaining buildings within the conservation area can be considered to fall within this category. Most noteworthy is **Selworthy Farm**, a significant group of late 19th century farmhouse, with former abandoned farmhouse to the rear dating from the 16th century with jointed crucks. Large stone jambs and quoins in a fireplace suggest an early chimney, possibly one of the first in the area. The existing house, built 1883-4, rendered with a roof of Bridgwater pantiles, is fairly plain with large casement windows. More significant is the group of farm buildings, forming a rectangular plan around a cobbled yard. The thatched barn, including a south-facing lean-to frontage with round section stone pillars probably dates from the 18th century. The east range, a former cowshed and stable is early 19th century, with the remainder dating from the late 19th century.

7.9 East of the Parish Church is a mid 19th century cottage pair, **Vale View** and **Church Cottage** which appear to replace earlier cottages. They are built of stone with slate roofs, and have Gothic arched porches with coped gables. Unusually, there are three bee alcoves on the front wall, and all these features are in dressed stone. Somewhat set apart, their character barely resembles that of other domestic buildings in Selworthy.



Examples of unlisted buildings in the conservation area. *Left:* Selworthy Farm consists of one most complete groups of buildings, spanning a period from the late 16th-late 19th century. *Centre:* Barn and Little Barn Cottages maintain the vernacular tradition but actually date from c.1920s. *Right:* a building tradition of the Holnicote Estate from the 19th century onwards involves the use of split pine logs for outbuildings.

7.10 Close to the former Tithe Barn is **Cross Acres** which appears to be a 19th century conversion of a former stone outbuilding with a tile-hung canted bay oriel window. At the southern end of the conservation area, in a secluded position, **Barn and Little Barn Cottages** are an early-mid 20th century thatched Arts & Crafts pair with metal casement windows, eyebrow dormers and a projecting hipped north-facing gable.

8 LANDSCAPE AND TREES

8.1 There is a strong link between the built and the natural environment, and the main landscape elements of significance to the character of the conservation area are as follows:

- (1) the setting on the slopes Selworthy Beacon with extensive views towards Dunkery Beacon and across the eastern edge of Porlock Vale from several vantage points.
- (2) the local dominance of Selworthy and Croft Plantations comprising a mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees, believed to have been planted around the mid 19th century, by Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, 10th baronet.



The landscape setting of Selworthy is both intimate and extensive. *Left:* much of Selworthy Green is enclosed by a backdrop of trees *Centre:* The view from the church porch at Selworthy is widely recognised as one of the finest in Britain. *Right:* several footpaths lead from the conservation area into surrounding countryside. This one leads past Selworthy Farm towards Allerford.

- (3) the intermediate undulating landscape features extending towards Porlock Bay to the west.
- (4) a small stream running through the village that forms a visual and, at times, aural feature within the conservation area.
- (5) the inherent quality of the built environment, including distinctive vernacular detail, extensive walled and banked boundary features, and the use of natural stone surfaces. There is an intimacy of scale with cottages informally juxtaposed, especially on Selworthy Green. This early 19th century planned layout, incorporating earlier cottages is a noteworthy example of the paternalism of the landed gentry, which was widely employed elsewhere at that time, but rarely in such picturesque style.



Above: the small stream is a noteworthy feature. Below: The southern arm of the conservation area contains a mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees. These form an attractive feature on the main approach to the village.

Some trees and tree groups within the conservation area may be becoming over-mature and are likely to require periodic health checks. This especially applies to trees within the southern part of the conservation area which overhang the highway.

8.2 Historically, Selworthy had several orchard paddocks, only one of which survives (see section 3.4). The considerable extent of planted woodland to the north of the village covering the slopes of Selworthy Beacon were planted by Sir Thomas Dyke Acland at some time in the early–mid 19th century. It is worthy of note that Sir Thomas, 10th baronet, applied for a lease of Exmoor Forest from 1814, and acted as forester on behalf of the Crown and was accountable to the Commissioner of Woods for any profits made. These woodlands, a mix of deciduous and coniferous trees are indicated in the Local Plan as “Category 3 Woodland” classified in Section 3 of the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act of 1985. They have a natural beauty “(that) is, in the opinion of the NPA, particularly important to conserve,” and also forms an important backdrop to the conservation area, in its broader landscape setting.



8.4 The strong sense of enclosure the wider landscape provides is further enhanced by extensive stone walls and hedgerow banks, which are important on the approaches to the conservation area, as well as within the boundary itself.

9 DETRACTIONS AND VULNERABILITY

9.1 As might be expected in settlements of exceptional quality, largely managed by the National Trust, there are minimal factors detracting from their historic character or visual appearance. With very little private ownership of land or buildings, the Trust is able to maintain almost complete control of land use and any proposals for development are likely to remain extremely limited. There is, in common with other places popular with tourists, the risk of visitor pressure becoming an issue, but this does not appear to be posing any special problems at present.



Damage to footpath surface due to water erosion

10 KEY LOCAL FACTORS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

10.1 Sections 3.1 to 3.4 of the Exmoor National Park Local Plan Draft Deposit (published October 2001) contain important principles concerning the conservation of buildings and settlements. Proposals for any new development, restoration of existing buildings or features, and enhancement projects, should include consideration of these principles, which are expanded upon in the following sections. Since Selworthy is not a “Defined Settlement” in terms of Policy S1 of the Exmoor National Park Local Plan, the village and its setting are therefore defined as “Open Countryside” where strict planning regulations apply.



Surface improvements could be made in several locations within the conservation area.

10.2 Most 19th century and earlier buildings in the conservation area have retained their original features and strongly represent the local vernacular style. Most are grade II listed, and even non listed buildings often have considerable historic and architectural quality. A good example is Selworthy Farm, where there are remains of a late medieval farmhouse, and a large group of farm outbuildings surrounding a cobbled yard. Virtually all buildings are exceptionally well cared for and maintained, even though a few have become redundant of their original use. The National Trust is at the forefront of reintroducing traditional building skills, especially the use of lime-wash, and uses other craft skills in maintaining its buildings. (Section 4).

10.3 The following are guidelines that the Exmoor National Park Plan endorses when considering any alterations, repair or restoration to buildings within the conservation area. In the case of Selworthy, where the care and maintenance of the historic built and natural environment is to an exceptionally high standard, not all of the following will necessarily apply.

(i) Buildings in the Conservation Area

- **In considering proposals for any new development or redevelopment involving existing buildings or structures, it should be borne in mind that stricter safeguards against any form of demolition in conservation areas have recently been introduced. Historic signage should be maintained, as far as possible, in its original state. Any new or reinstated signs should respect the original forms including use of cast-iron lettering or traditional sign-writing**
- **Existing features of quality that typify the historic built environment should be retained. Any new development within the conservation area is likely to be extremely limited but where it does occur, it should echo the existing in terms of scale, height, proportion and use of traditional methods of construction, including openings and any boundary features.**
- **Existing stone boundary and retaining walls, and existing banks, and footpath only access should be safeguarded, where possible, especially those that identify the historic street and plot layout pattern of the earlier settlement.**

(ii) Features

- **The conservation, and where necessary, the repair of walls and/or historic railings, and timber fencing is considered important. Where appropriate consider using additional timber or ironwork that reflects the local craft traditions.**



Another example, where improvement to the cobbled surface could be made.

- Ensure the retention and enhancement of any historic street furniture
- Encourage retention of the character of existing entrances, including gate piers, and associated period timber or metal gates.
- Ensure necessary protection of all natural stone paving, cobbles, kerbs and gulleys, both as part of the highway and where in private ownership. Consider where such materials might be employed in any resurfacing or enhancement schemes. Materials from local sources should be used whenever possible.
- Seek to retain or reinstate all existing period windows, doors, and cast iron rainwater goods. This includes the typical 19th century decorative estate features, and any examples of early 20th century Arts and Crafts tradition, for example, decorative window glazing and forged metal window and door catches.
- Although unlikely to become a problem in a village largely managed by the National Trust, it should be noted that the National Park Authority can consider introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction where boundary features, for example, stone or brick walls, and openings are under threat. This also has the potential to effect control over the potential installation of UPVC windows and doors, inappropriate roof materials, external cladding, and use of exposed block-work.



Thatch and lime-washed render at Selworthy Green

(iii) Historic Setting and Landscape

- Before any change of use or alteration takes place, ensure that consideration is given to the historic importance of any existing building, including outbuildings and non-residential uses. This also includes the previous history and present significance of any small outbuildings located to the rear of the main street frontages.
- Although existing trees within the conservation area appear to be healthy, older specimens would benefit from periodic health checks. Where limited further life is detected, measures may need to be taken to plant young trees of a similar or suitable alternative species. These could be gradually introduced to replace older specimens. Some fast growing garden conifers, such as Lawson’s Cypress, can strike a discordant note in a historic setting and should be avoided in an environmentally sensitive location.
- There is an important relationship between the setting of buildings in the conservation area and the associated topographic and landscape features, for example the 19th century plantations of Sir Thomas Dyke Acland on the slopes of Selworthy Beacon. Attention is drawn to the Local Plan Objectives for Woodland, one of which is “to gain a deeper understanding of Exmoor’s trees and woodlands through a comprehensive programme of research and survey work derived from the Exmoor Woodland Research Strategy.”



The two local sandstone types. The softer red, needs an equally soft lime-based mortar to avoid more rapid deterioration.

(iv) Use of Traditional Materials

- Encourage re-pointing of stonework using suitable mortar mixes, ideally with a lime base. Cement rich mortars and raised or “ribbon pointing should be avoided. This is especially the case for some of the softer types of sandstone.
- Where appropriate, steps should be taken to re-discover supplies of

natural materials, preferably from their historic source or equivalent, and to encourage the development of skills in their use.

- **More fully research the development of the early settlement, the sources of natural materials used in building construction, and whether former sources of stone or slate might become re-established. The initiative of the National Trust in producing wheat reed thatch from historic varieties grown locally is acknowledged.**

11 IMPORTANT POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

11.1 Selworthy probably most exhibits the special character of the villages of the Holnicote Estate and provides an object lesson in appropriate conservation of modest vernacular buildings that collectively add enormous visual character to the broader landscape setting.

11.2 It is considered that in the light of the survey of vernacular buildings conducted by the National Trust in the 1990's, there is a case for making amendments and possibly some additions to the statutory list. This is especially so where additional historic evidence of the early origins of buildings and previously unrecorded historic building features, especially of interiors, has been revealed.

11.3 There is potential for modest enhancement schemes, to protect over-stressed areas from visitor pressure and natural wear and tear. This could include carrying out further repair of some walls, and the repair of damaged footpath surfaces, for example to the south and west of the Parish Church. It is suggested that the use of traditional paving or cobbles for ground surfaces could possibly be re-instated or extended.



The extensive cobbled yard at Selworthy Farm

11.4 The visual impact of the wooded slopes enclosing much of the village has a special relationship with the setting of many buildings, and should be considered as an area of associated landscape that is integral to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

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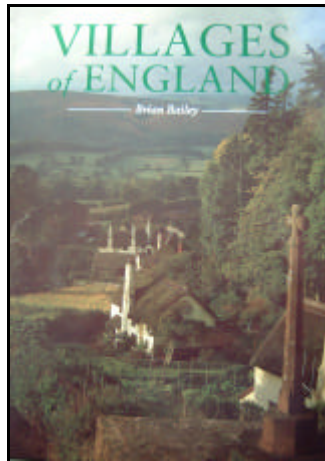
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*Selworthy is regarded as one of
England's showpiece villages*