





## Cover Picture

*A Porlock Cottage Interior* Frederick James Shields ARWS (1833–1911). Watercolour; 6.30 in × 11.02 in. (16 × 28 cm), c.1865.

Courtesy of Sarah Colegrave Fine Art, London

Not quite so sugary as many a mid-nineteenth-century cottage watercolour, this small painting is full of interest. From left to right the furnishings start with a wickerwork cradle with the simplest of patchwork coverlets draped over it. The cradle was made from young willow shoots, or withies, boiled and dried so that they can be worked without breaking. This form of wickerwork was common in the West Country, especially Somerset, as there were plenty of reed beds and willows growing along the multitude of waterways, hence basketmaking was

important to the county as it was in Norfolk. Behind the cradle is a rather indistinct settle that looks as though it has been cobbled together from old panelling, or at the very least quite altered from its original shape.

The horribly warped door has a cheap rim-lock, probably in a tin-plate case, and a simple wooden latch. By the door that leads up to the first floor is the remains of what looks distinctly like a Yealmpton Windsor chair very like one illustrated on p. 79 in Gabriel Olive's *Farm and Cottage Furniture in the West Country* published by the RFS in 2002. Missing all of its spindles and one back leg, it is still doing duty as a piece of furniture. Next to the chair is a cricket table with a well-shaped deep 'Tudor arch' apron. The floor looks as though it is made from oddly shaped stone flags but it is also possible that it is a decaying pounded mud floor. Odd items of clothing hang from pegs, as does a tin-plate lantern, above the chair.

The artist was Frederic Shields who was born in Hartlepool in 1833 in extreme poverty. Starting as a commercial engraver he studied at night school in London and Manchester. He was much enamoured with the Pre-Raphaelites and, indeed, became a close friend with Rossetti and Madox Brown.

Shields visited the West Country in the early 1860s and his diary records going to Porlock on the North Somerset coast in January 1862 and that is the probable date of the watercolour.

*Treve Rosoman*