

ornamental finials of terracotta which also serve to render the roof watertight at a vulnerable point. Dwellings are on the upper floor with outside staircases. Work connected with vine-growing and also the preparation and weaving of hemp cloth was carried out on the ground floor and provided the peasant farmer with a supplementary income.

Inside the dwelling, access to the loft was either by wooden stairs (*échelle de meunier*) set against the wall facing the fireplace or by a winding staircase within the gable wall opening beside the fireplace (*cantou*). The latter sometimes contained a bread oven and a laundry copper (*bugrade*), while the sink (*boschio*) might be in a little scullery (*bassiero*). Niches in the walls were put to various uses. There was sometimes a larder (*chambrille*) on the north side in which food was kept; one of the rooms might be raised over a semi-basement with several steps leading to it either indoors or outdoors.

The main outbuilding was a barn-cum-byre which could be one of two types, from Limousin or Auvergne, the latter found predominantly in the area bordering on Auvergne and dating from the time when cattle-farming replaced sheep-rearing. The Limousin barn consisted of two separate animal sheds separated by a threshing floor. Over each animal shed there was a wooden floor (*barge*) resting on a beam structure (*cornadis*) with manger racks into which the hay was pushed from the floor above. The Auvergne barn made use of a difference in ground level, or contrived one by building a ramp (*tirant*) up to the barn which was situated directly above the animal shed. Often there was a double ramp.

In southern Haute-Vienne and northwestern Corrèze, barns were huge, oval-shaped and covered in thatch, with a principal rafter (*coupe*) running from ground to ridge at each end. The Limousin barn had a thatched roof carried by pairs of curved principals (*corba*) rising from ground to ridge. It consisted of two separate animal sheds.

Other farm structures included the pigsty, outside bread oven, chestnut drier (*dédier*), a covered well or a water-raising sweep, a vine-grower's shelter (*gabie*) in the Brive area, and a dry stone hut in the Montagne. MARIE-PAULE DUPUY

2.III.5.j Loire (France, WC)

The Loire region is in fact the term for the last quarter of the river's course. It covers the old provinces, from north to south and from east to west, as follows: Maine, the Pays Nantais, Anjou, Lower and Upper Poitou, Aunis, Saintonge, Angoumois.

Geologically, the region is a corridor (the Poitou gate) joining the sedimentary Paris and Aquitaine basins between the substrata of primary rocks, the Armorican massif and the Massif Central, thus determining a contrast between the *plaine* (with open fields) and the limestone plateaux on the one hand and the granite *bocage* (with hedged fields) on the other. There are sporadic alluvial and marshy areas along the coastline: from north to south these are the Grande Brière, the Breton Marsh and the Poitevin Marsh.

As everywhere, natural and geological resources provide the local building materials. Originally these materials were wood and clay (which can last quite well in some interior partition

walls), but there exists more evidence of the next stage, with stone rubble, usually granite or limestone, used for building. Dwelling houses and sometimes their outhouses are often coated with a mix in which clay or sand predominates depending on the region.

Door and window surrounds are made of wood, quarry stone, brick (in the *bocage* areas), or dressed stone (in the *plaine*, the plateaux and the Charente basin).

The primitive roofing material, of vegetable origin (thatch, rush and heather), can still be found along the coast and in some outhouses. It has given way to slate in Maine, Anjou and the Loire valley, flat tiles (upper Maine, white Anjou, the Poitou area close to Berry region, and the Charente area close to the Perigord region), and in particular half-round tiles, from the southwest of the Loire to the south of the Charente and along the coast.

The dwelling house is seldom built over a cellar except where a chalky subsoil is available, when the excavation of the cellar provides building materials; elsewhere, a hole is dug in the ground next to the building site. From that hole, stone material is extracted. Later, after the house is completed, the remaining hole is filled with water and used as the farm's pond.

The original house consists of a single room with a fireplace at the gable end – the bread oven standing behind it on the outside – and a sink near the entrance door draining to outside. This room may have its depth doubled by a wash-house or a hen-house. In poor regions, it is lit and ventilated only through the upper part of the door, placed on the sunniest side wall and consisting of two half-doors one above the other.

Often, however, this room also contains a window and an opening to light the roof area. When the roof area becomes a granary, access may be through this opening by way of an outside ladder. If a larger house is subsequently built beside the first unit, that unit becomes an outhouse.

If the dwelling consists of two rooms, the first is still called the house (*maison*), or the room with the fire (*pièce à feu*); the other room is known as the fine room or parlour (*belle chambre*) or the cold room (*pièce froide*); as it has no fireplace, it is used as a room for leisure or to impress guests, never as a *chambre* in the usual modern French sense of a bedroom. It might be used to store rare or valuable foodstuffs, or commodities not in frequent use. In Maine and Anjou it is often on the first floor and could be used as accommodation for the proprietor or master (*maître*) visiting his tenant farmer.

Access to this *chambre* is either straight from the *maison* or by way of a central passage into which the entrance door opens,



See also
1.IX.3.n Linhay (England)

House with central
corridor and extension
on left. Poitevin plain,
Loire region.