

**VERNACULAR BUILDINGS RESEARCH  
HENLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL GROUP**

**Parish/County:** Henley-on-Thames, Oxon

**Owner:**

**Street and House name:** No. 2 Bell Lane  
Listed as 'The Cottage'

**Tel No:** 574760

**Recorder:**  
Ruth Gibson

**Date:** 1.11.07

**Listing grade and entry text:** Gd II. *'Early 18<sup>th</sup> cent. façade  
But side gable rendered and part of bd. prob. earlier. Flint with red brick dressings and eaves cornice.  
Steeply pitched old tile roof and central chimney. Brick string course at 1<sup>st</sup> floor. 2 storeys, 4 bays. Lg  
sashes at first floor with moulded architraves and glazing bars and 1 small C19th casement with  
moulded frame. Ground floor C19th casements with segmental arches and cambered head linings. 6  
panel door.'*

**Known History:**

The 1878 OS map shows the building located in the much longer Bell Lane, which then still ended at the river. This might have been the case since prehistoric times. Interestingly Bell Lane also formed the municipal boundary between Henley and Bensington, perpetuating an ancient boundary which afforded both access to the Thames for water and transport. (The same situation applies at the south side of Henley in Friday Street, where this street forms the southern boundary between the town and Rotherfield Greys)



**North front elevation**



**The straight line in the brickwork off- centre right shows the former end of the oldest part of the cottage. Also note the difference in the brick work of the l.h. side, which is of an even red and with a smooth surface**

**Discussion of possible building date, datable alteration and additions:** the earliest part is a modest building of 1 ½ rooms on two floors, which had a substantial stack measuring 1.80m probably attached to the outside of the east wall. This is now located within the later eastern extension. The building is two storeys high with tall Georgian sash windows at the front. At the rear the roof slopes down in the form of a cat's slide which provides the small rooms at the back; the first floor room (now a bathroom) being built into the sloping roof to which only the large, later dormer now gives a good head height.

The building was extended to the east, carefully using the same brick and flint pattern of the existing cottage. There is still a straight brick edge above the present front door, which would first have formed the quoins of the eastern gable. The front door must have been relocated, but there is no sign of the original one.

The bricks of the earliest part of the house are hand made of 2 ½" thick and include some blue burned bricks; those of the later eastern part are very even, of 2 5/8" size and are clearly machine made. All flints are carefully knapped.

Internally too there are clear signs of different building dates, as there are steps down into the rooms of the earlier, western bay.

At ground floor level a step down into the western room leads into the one and a half -bay room with large inglenook brick fire place. Some remnants of timber framing remain and are exposed in the dividing wall at g.f. level and in the roof and visible part of the gable at first floor level, but the timbers are of narrow scantling and represent the period between complete timber framed buildings and fully brick built ones, when brick was still expensive and not used for internal walls.

The two large sash windows belong to the first floor bedroom above this room. This was clearly the best chamber or even a reception room and the bolection moulded fire place with its built-in display cupboard above the mantle piece emphasis its status.

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## Description

**Map ref., date of 1<sup>st</sup> map, type of plot:** The 1878 OS map shows the building subdivided into three, of a very similar shape as today, even with an outbuilding where the modern garage stands. The subdivision into three is not shown in the garden, so one assumes that the garden was used by all or that it was one house already. ( The ongoing work on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Census Returns may eventually throw some light on this).

The 1788 Fawley Court Estate map, which covers all of Henley, although only some properties were owned by the Estate, has a small rectangle in the approximate location, but no information otherwise.

**Type and use of building:** Dwelling house

**Plan form/position in street:** The front range runs parallel to the street, with later extensions at right angles to it.

**Description of front elevation ( height, windows, entrances, shop front etc):**

See List description above for details. The door is off-centre and must have been inserted once the house was extended to the east. There are two very large first floor Georgian sash windows ( 6 over 6 panes, no horns) the rest of the fenestration consists of 4 small casement windows. This is quite an unusual arrangement and indicates that only this one first floor room was important enough to be given the large windows.

**Walling material: (give brick sizes, bond, colour; timber frame type; render or stucco; stone types and finishes)** Flint walls, knapped and field flints between brick window surrounds and brick string course. Dog-tooth eaves.

**Roof shape:** Pitched and gabled front range with a large dormer at the back inserted into the rear catslide roof of the west range. The later eastern rear range has a hipped roof.

**Roof covering:** Tiles

**Chimneys: Location on roof and materials:** There is one central stack, which serves the main 'inglenook' fire place and first floor fire place in the west range. It was originally located on the outside east wall. A further stack is located in the rear east range; it was a large brick fire place projecting into the room, but has been cut back and has a modern repro inset. It would have served the central cottage, if the building was subdivided, as is indicated on the 1878 map.

### Internal evidence



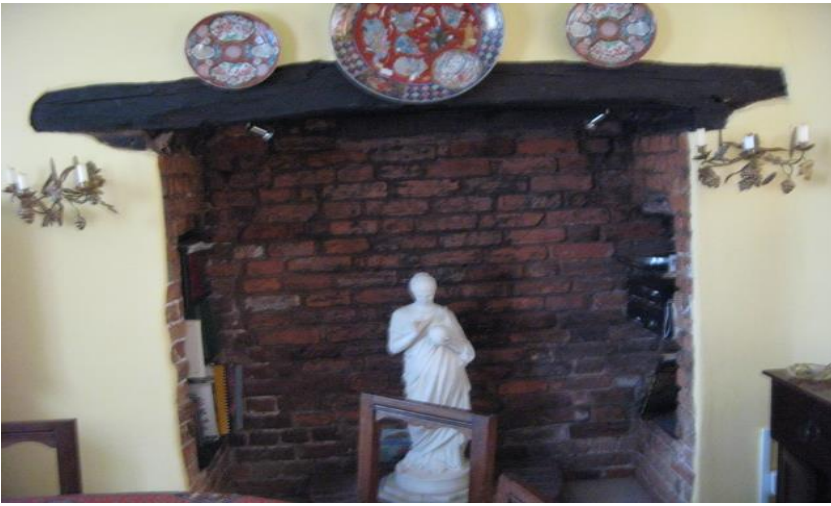
#### Cellar:

Brick lined, brick floor. Accessed now from below the modern stairs in the left hand/eastern bay of the main house; formerly the access was from the ground floor area between stack and front door. The companion ladder next to the fire place in the cellar is still in situ.

#### Ground Floor:

Now a 4 room house, originally a house with one and a half rooms on each floor, with external stack attached to the east wall, which serves three fire places. The house has since been extended to the back and side. It is attached on the west side to a large brick built, barn-like structure of late 19<sup>th</sup> century date, judging by the brickwork (interior not inspected ).

**Fire places: (location and type)** One inglenook type brick fire place with timber bressumers, built against the eastern wall of the front room in the west range without projecting into the room. The bressumer appears of second hand timber, as it has a large mortise in its centre. It has probably been in its present use for a considerable time, as the deep chamfer at the back is heavily sooted. The two brick cheeks have tall recesses, probably for the storage of kindling.



**Ingenook with timber bressumer with deep, sooted chamfer in western front room.**



**Fire Place in western bedroom**

Its bolection moulding indicates a date between 1690 and 1730, when this type of moulding was particularly popular. (Linda Hall 'Period House Fixtures & Fittings 1300-1900, P181). The corner cupboard set into the space where traditionally an overmantle or large panel for a picture would have been located, is an unusual feature as it is built into the chimney breast, and may be a later addition. This room must have been designed to be a reception room rather than a bedroom, again a very much 18<sup>th</sup> century fashion, especially in houses, which accommodated a business use on the ground floor.

The second ground floor room F.P. is in the back room of the east range; this had originally projected a great deal into the room, but has now been cut back and rendered as its brick work was not attractive.

**Stairs: (location and type):** Rebuilt, turned stairs, now located in the front entrance hall, the eastern bay. According to the owner the stairs were formerly located in the back room (now the kitchen) of the western range.

**Roof structure:** This is only visible in the first floor rear room of the west range. Here the roof slopes down in catslide fashion and some of the timbers are exposed.



View of part of former outside gable wall of west range, now inside the bedroom of the later rear extension.

The timber studs sit on the wall plate, which has been cut to create an access between the new bedroom and bathroom. The latter used to be accessed from the front room through a now blocked door. ( Verbal information by the owner )



**On the left hand side one can see the sloping principal rafter of the catslide roof and the purlin, which has been cut where the dormer was inserted (extreme left). The purlin is supported by a queens post from below. The stud wall on the r.h. side separates this back room from the much larger front bedroom, which occupies about 2/3 of the floor space and has tall sash windows instead of a sloping ceiling.**

## **Conclusion:**

The western part of the cottage has many traditional features such as the brick string course, dentil eaves, window architraves as well as the first floor fire place surround, all of which suggest a building date in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The bricks as well as the carefully knapped flint work are of excellent quality, unusually so for such a small building. It is possible, that it was larger, but that part of it was later replaced by the eastern, adjoining front range in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from the machine made bricks, all details are carefully matched, with the exception of the first floor windows, which are very different in the later east half and lack the symmetry, which was such an important part of Georgian buildings.

The visible timbers inside are of narrow scantling and show a shortage of good timbers as well as the waning of carpenter's skills, something one does associate with the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The ground floor fire place bressumer too is of no particular quality and lacks such features as chamfers and stops, which earlier, 17<sup>th</sup> century ones would have had. However, it may be a replacement, something which happened if the old timber had become too damaged by the heat.

The house started off as a small, early 18<sup>th</sup> century house with large external stack originally, doubled in size in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Was it once in the ownership of Fawley Court and originally constructed to accommodate estate staff on this important river access leading directly to the wharf, marked in 1788 as 'Mr. Freeman's Wharf'? The 1878 map still shows a large wharf with boat building sheds and a steam saw mill there.

The extensive research into the documentary history undertaken at present by the Victoria County History Project may throw more light on the beginnings and inhabitants of this cottage and we will, hopefully, be able to add another paragraph to this report.

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