

**THE KINGS ARMS BARN
MARKET PLACE
HENLEY-ON-THAMES**

This 'barn' started life at the very end of Queen Elizabeth's long reign in 1601/02 as a stable to the former inn and public house called the 'Kings Arms', one of several stables serving the inn on the long burgage plot behind it, which had been laid out when the medieval town was founded in the 12th century.

The building was first used on the ground floor to stable the packhorses of visiting traders, then the coach horses of travellers and lastly the big dray horses of Brakspear's Brewery. The last eight dray horses were stabled here until 1947.

The first floor was probably used in part for the storage of hay and fodder for the horses and in part for the accommodation of stable lads and carters and anybody else, who could not afford one of the five bed chambers in the inn itself, which are documented in an inventory of the premises taken in 1775 by its tenant Edward Goodenough.

Whilst the late Elizabethan building date was established through tree-ring dating by the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, the evidence for the stalling of small pack horses comes from an archaeological excavation of the floor area by the Henley Archaeological and Historical Group. This was carried out before the building as well as the old pub were bought from Brakspears and thoroughly repaired and given a new lease of life by the Henley Town Council. Stout timber plank kick boards, which separated two double stalls from each other, were then still in situ in the western section, but had to make way for a stair case and WCs. However, if one looks carefully one can still see the heavy timber planks on the left hand side of the new stair, where they are used as a kind of balustrade. The cobbled floor has also been carefully preserved, as have the timber mangers in the eastern room (now the Tourist Information Office). Before the staircase was built the only way up to the hay loft was by a wall mounted ladder through a narrow ceiling hatch. Although the hatch has been closed with the new floor boards above, the ladder is still there on the left hand side if one enters the building from the courtyard of the Old Kings Arms.

During the restoration evidence for the possible existence of an external staircase was found and the modern timber fire escape stair takes its place. There were and still are several first floor doors which may have been accessed by a kind of external walkway or balcony, but they may equally and more probably have served as hoist doors for the upper floor storage areas.

At first floor level one can see all the details of a traditionally framed building including the carpenter's marks (for those with good eyesight or binoculars!) on the rafters near the apex. The fact that they are in numerical order shows that the roof structure has not been altered since it was first assembled after having been carefully prepared on the ground in the carpenter's yard or workshop.

The evidence of original windows as well as subdivisions into probably two small and up to four larger compartments seems to indicate a use other than just a hay loft. Evidence for subdivisions comes from the arrangement of the trusses (the main timbers in the

shape of an A-frame, which hold up the roof) and the fact that there are still empty mortises in the underside of some of the horizontal beams (the ties and collars). These empty slots and holes would once have been used for fixing the studs and wattles of a dividing wall; there may even have been a loft above in part of the building. One dividing wall, made of wattles and daub (clay and straw), still exists midway through the building giving an idea of what the first floor might once have looked like. It would certainly not have been the one large, open space, which welcomes visitor now and serves as a friendly meeting and functions room, but several compartments crammed with fodder, goods and people, without any form of modern comforts or heating except for the warmth coming from the stabled horses below.

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