

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

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

**Street and House name:**

19b Hart Street  
Part of the Old White Hart courtyard inn

**Tenant:** Robin Bennett  
The Aktuel Translation Group

**Tel No:** 01491-411667

**Recorders:** OBR members

**OBR 57a Report:** Ruth Gibson

**Date:** 14.3.08

**Updated August 08**

**Listing grade and entry text: Gd II\***

19b was only listed in 1998, when the whole of the 'Old White Hart' was upgraded to II\* and it was recognised that this 2-bay building was part of the lodging range, which runs around 3 sides of the courtyard. For the full List description see Dept. for Culture Media & Sport Schedule dated 21.1.1998. The whole group is listed as late 15<sup>th</sup> or first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century with some earlier remnants and 18<sup>th</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> additions.

**Known History:** The history of 19b is closely linked with that of the White Hart, as it was part of its lodging ranges. The narrow 2" brick work, laid in English bond, which forms its outside, western wall continues along the whole length of the boundary walls on the west, north and east sides. Some of the buildings along it have been altered, but No.19b retains the brick work to its full height. No.17, now the 19<sup>th</sup> century shop front of Chancellors Estate Agents in Hart Street, lies directly south of 19b and its own rear timber framed range sits above this old brickwork. The present small courtyard between them was very likely also part of the long range, probably extending the original premises of the Old White Hart to the street frontage.

( See A.Cottingham 'The Hostelries of Henley' for a detailed account of its known documented history so far).



**No. 17**

**No. 19**

**21-23 Hart Street**

**Map ref., date of 1<sup>st</sup> map, type of plot;** The First Henley OS Map of 1878 shows the location very much as it is today on a burgage plot measuring some 75 feet in width and some 290 feet in depth. At the Hart Street frontage the plot is occupied by three different premises, very much as it is now, i.e. two shops at No.19 and one at No. 17. The former inn occupies Nos 21/23 Hart Street. The courtyard is bounded by continuous brick buildings on three sides with two archways; one giving access from the street, the other goes through to the second yard at the northern end of the plot. The street frontages have all been renewed and no original walling material is visible.



**No. 19b ‘Old Smithy’**                      **‘Old Stables’** ,    both are part of the former west range

### **Type and use of the buildings**

No.19b is a self contained two-bay, two storey building, most of which is occupied by The Aktuel Translation Group. It forms part of the west range of the former courtyard inn of the OLD WHITE HART. The rest of the west range is divided into offices belonging to Chancellors, Estate Agents, who also occupy the premises at No. 17 Hart Street.

The east range has been occupied by Zizzi, an Italian restaurant, after it ceased to be a PH in 1996, closed by Brakspear’s, its owners since 1826 (at first jointly with Benwell’s Brewery). It is not known at present when Nos. 17 and 19b became separated from the inn.

### **Plan form of No. 19b and its adjoining buildings:**

No. 19b is a two-bay building with its gable end facing south towards Hart Street. It is located near the southern end of the west range, directly behind the garden of No. 17 Hart Street, to which it may once have been attached. Its west elevation abuts the yard and the drive of the adjoining 'Catherine Wheel'.

**Description of external elevations: Fabric, roof type and covering, height, windows, entrances, shop front etc:** This building is a hybrid; brick built on the west, north and south sides and up to first floor level on the yard or east side as well, but above that level it supports timber framing and jetty beams, which carry the timber framed gallery. Part of the brickwork of the east elevation has been rebuilt in standard bricks, apparently blocking in a wider opening, thereby creating a new entrance door and two ground floor sash windows.

The original brickwork consists of narrow 'Tudor' bricks circa 2" thick, with variations from 1 7/8" to 2 1/8", laid in English bond in 1'5" thick walls (0.44 m measured at first floor window). There is some diaper work utilizing burn headers, best seen in the west wall of the northernmost range. ( Not part of this report)



The external brick built west wall of the former inn can be seen well along its whole length from the adjoining Catherine Wheel premises.

The hand made narrow 'Tudor' bricks are laid in regular English bond and continue along the entire length of some 150 feet of the former lodging range. The same type of brickwork was also used for the east and north ranges, which enclose the courtyard.

One can just see part of one of the two long windows (the further one is now blocked) high up on the outside wall, which originally lit the two-bay hall.

The south wall is rendered and its uneven surface indicates alterations, part of which must have been the removal of a large chimney stack. The north wall is brick built, but the timber truss is exposed with brick infill between the members.

### **Internal evidence**

The two-bay building is now divided vertically and horizontally into several office spaces, but its original lay-out, that of one single open space hall, can still be read.

It has a central open truss and two closed trusses at the south and north gables. The trusses are of the tie beam, queen struts to collar and clasped purlin type, traditional to this area. They are set into the brick work, which is full height to the underside of the wall plate on the west side, but

only up to approximately half height on the east side, where it supports the jetty joists of the timber framed gallery above. The joists are set on edge and do not span across the building, but measure only 1.40 m and are tenoned into a longitudinal restraining beam.

The open truss still retains one of its long arch braces and there is evidence for the second one in the form of a deep mortice slot in the western post. Both posts, tie beam and brace are embellished with hollow chamfer mouldings on both sides. Just below the empty mortice slot is a decorative, carved corbel in the form of a group of three balls carved in relief. These may represent the device of St. Nicholas of Bari (in the form of three golden balls), who was the patron saint offering protections to travellers, in particular those embarking on sea voyages. ( See Avis Lloyd's detailed notes and scale drawings of the mouldings in the Appendix).



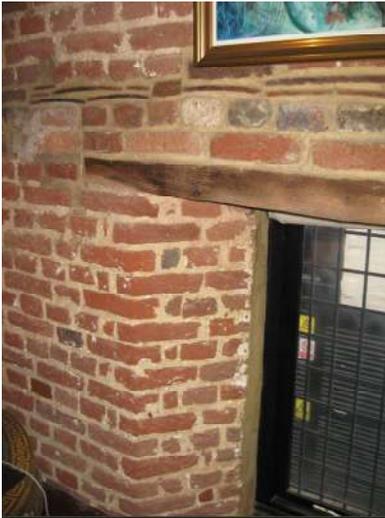
Carved balls as a pendant of the corbelled post, where it is set into the western brick wall. Empty brace slot above.



Hollow chamfer moulding in eastern post and tie beam, pt. of long arch brace just visible

The inner eastern wall plate has a scarf joint of the 'edge-halved and double-bridled' type, just north of the truss in the north bay. Examples of his type of ca. 1400 are quoted in Chris Currie's article in *Oxoniensia* 37 on carpentry in N. Berks and Oxford area (information from David Clark ), but their use probably extended over a long period.

There are two high level windows in the west wall ( 2.30 m above floor level), the northern one is blocked and only visible from a narrow loft space above the g.f. office in occupation by Chancellors in conjunction with adjoining offices. Only the southern window could be measured. It too has been altered; its central section has been blocked with modern brickwork and its former height of 1.40 m has been reduced to 1.10 m. It retains its original splays at both ends and would have been 2.15 m long originally with vertical mullions.



**Window splay with 3 courses of altered brick and tile work above a new timber lintel**

The brick outline of a segmental arch of the former fireplace, approximately 3,50 m wide, is partly visible in the south gable on the ground floor. It has a steep relieving arch above it (the top of which disappears into the ceiling). The bricks are of the same narrow c. 2" type as seen in the walls, but laid vertically in the two arches and tapered where the F.P. arch meets the brick jamb.



**Upper Floors:** The earliest upper floor consists of a gallery on the courtyard side, which may originally not have had a roof, as its rafters are inserted above those which make up the A-frame of the trusses. However, lack of nail holes on the rafter tops seem to suggest that they never carried tiles or any other roof covering and that both rafter sets are contemporary.



**Two sets of rafters visible in upper left of picture. The lower rafter rests on the wall plate putting strain on the ‘edge-halved, double bridled’ scarf joint creating a weakness in the structure.**



**Timber stud wall in the west range  
no sign of original door openings**



**Chamfered, mitred door opening in stud wall in the east range of the Old White Hart**

The gallery forms the first floor on the yard side, over which it jetties out. The wall between it and the hall consist of stout timber posts, tenoned into the wall plate above and the horizontal beam below, into which the floor joists for the jetty are also tenoned. A mid rail and narrow studs provided the support for a lath and plaster covering (now removed, but the nail holes survive), which once separated the gallery corridor from the open hall behind.

Neither original door nor window openings can be found in it (unlike the obvious door openings in the east range with their mitred chamfers), although now access has been created in both bays. In the south bay it is clear that the opening was created by the removal of two vertical studs as well as the mid rail. Due to the floors, inserted at different times and at different levels, access is gained to the gallery by steps up from the south 1<sup>st</sup> floor room and steps down from the north attic room.

The space below the north attic room is occupied by a 1 m high loft area above the g.f. room (now pt. of a separate office), which is separated from the rest of this building by a later vertical brick wall. Just inside the low loft space one can see the back of the heavy beam into which the jetty joists of the gallery are tenoned. See photograph below left, taken from inside loft looking east. Below right the gallery ceiling joists seen looking up from the front door, which allows a view of both the short inside timbers as well as those on the outside, where they form the jetty, which is supported midway by the original brick wall.



Short ceiling joists, tenoned into the restrainer beam on the left hand side and supported by the 2" Tudor brick wall in the middle (with modern door frame below), thus creating the jetty for the external gallery above, which would have been used as a link between the lodging ranges.

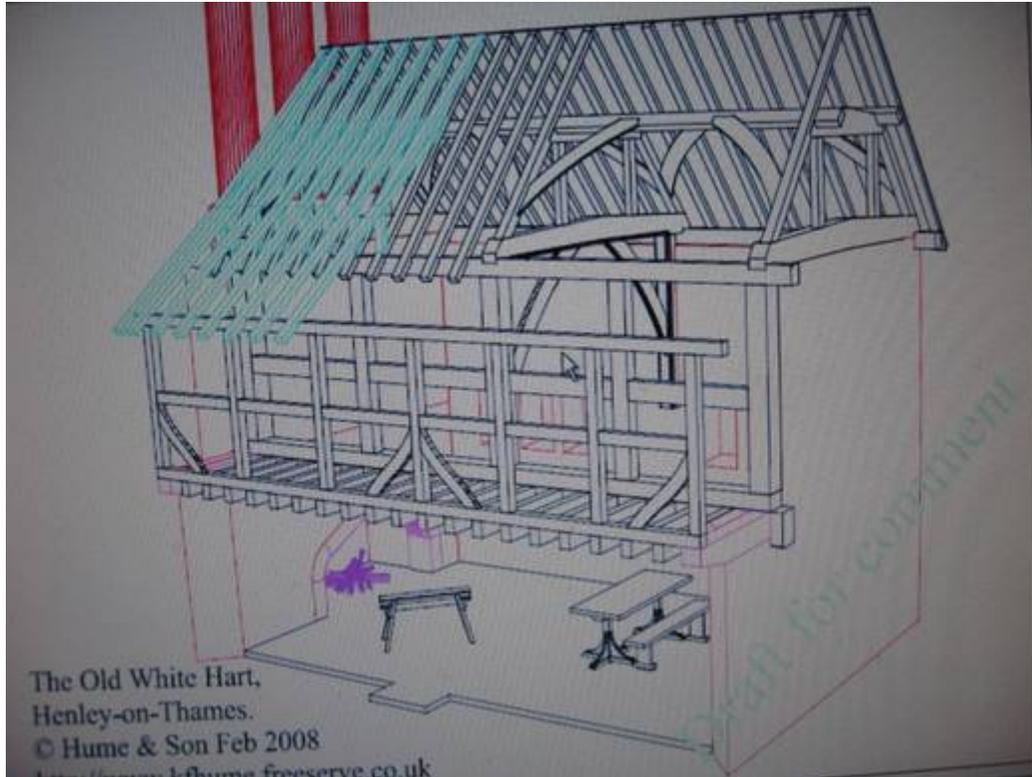
The internal ceiling timbers have been sand blasted clean and look new, but are the same as the black ones outside and date to 1530



Back of the restrainer beam into which jetty joists are tenoned and which supports the timber stud wall above. This has been dendro dated to 1530.

This is the view from the shallow, only 1 m high loft above the northern bay (now used as part of Chancellors office), but formerly the northern half of the two-bay open hall and clearly visible from its floor; therefore it has a chamfered edge.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION



### **3-dimensional drawing of 2-bay hall by ©Ken Hume for O.B.R**

**NB. This is a cut-away and therefore the low, front brick wall, which supports the jetty joists is missing**

We now have the confirmation that this two-bay range as well as the north and east ranges were all built in 1530 or thereabouts, as a number of timbers taken from the jetty beams, posts and the timber framed wall, which separates the chambers from the gallery in the east range, have all got a felling date close to 1530. All this framing relies on the brick construction of the walls; the bricks are therefore contemporary, representing the earliest known example of their use for the construction of a building in Henley. (See separate detailed report by the Oxford Dendro Laboratory)

What still remains a puzzle is why this hall was constructed using medieval detailing, such as the hollow chamfer moulding and the arch braced truss. The large fire place and stack in the south wall made the hall, open from floor to apex, unnecessary. However, open halls were still in use and being built long after their original purpose, that of creating a central hearth around which the household revolved, had gone. This is the conclusion Roger Leech comes to in his article in VAG Volume 31, 'The Symbolic Hall: Historical Context & Merchant Culture in the Early Modern City'. Custom, prestige and symbolism all seemed to have played their part in perpetuating the existence of such large rooms well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Mid 17<sup>th</sup> century probate material of Henley certainly still confirms the existence of many halls. The inventory of inn holder John Dolton, taken in 1683 (which has been traced to the 'The Bear' in Bell Street) records a hall with tables, chairs and a fire place, but nothing else in it. The comfortable items of furniture such as leather chairs, a court cupboard, as well as five musical instruments and a gaming board were now found in 'Ye Parlour'.

It is possible, that the timbers of the trusses come from an existing building or that an archaic style was used on purpose. For example:

1. The hollow chamfer mouldings of the tie beam, main posts and single, surviving arch brace are similar to three dated mid 15<sup>th</sup> century examples in Linda Hall's 'Period House Fixtures and Fittings', page 157. Avis Lloyd, who carried out scale drawings of the mouldings here says that these 'hollow chamfer and fillet mouldings were ubiquitous in the later medieval period and in use over a long chronological period'. She suggests that the three balls, carved in relief may have represented the device of St. Nicholas of Bari, patron saint of seafaring travellers.
2. The 'edge-halved, double bridled' scarf joint may be of early 15<sup>th</sup> century date.

South Oxfordshire and in particular the Chilterns are known for early brick production. The brickworks at Nettlebed, first documented at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, are only 5 miles away and later there were many others, closer-by. High status brick buildings of the early 15<sup>th</sup> century exist at Ewelme in the form of the 1430-40s almshouses and school and in 1416 at Stonor.

The brick bond at Ewelme is somewhat irregular, as are the brick sizes, when compared with the brick work at the Old White Hart, built a hundred year later using more regularly shaped bricks, around 2" thick and laid in regular English Bond. The same bond and similar brick sizes were used at Greys Court, only some 3 miles from Henley. These bricks were also used for the construction of a long lodging range as well as for a service building, the impressive wheel house, both dendro dated to 1578 and 1584 respectively.

It is a surprise to find out that the brick walls of the Old White Hart lodging ranges pre-date those of the building campaign by Sir Francis Knollys at Greys Court by some 50 years. In both we find the use of burnt headers in diaper work.

Another surprise comes from the fact that the vertically laid ceiling and jetty joists have been so positively dated to 1530, which overthrows the reliance placed on stylistic evidence with regard to the size of joists and the change in using the timbers from flat laid, then square laid to vertically placed joists over time. The fact that they are laid vertically as early as 1530 is certainly unusual, not seen in other Henley buildings this early, but which certainly makes it necessary to use joists most carefully as a dating tool. Granary Cottage, dendro dated to 1549, at Thameside certainly still has square laid joists, which shows that different carpenters were relying on different traditions.

**Summing up:** Although both the brick and timber work of the jettied gallery seemed to indicate a 17<sup>th</sup> century building date, the evidence from the dendro work gathered from all three parts of the lodging ranges is unequivocal in its conclusion that they all belong to one building campaign of around 1530/31; it must have been a truly innovative structure in Henley.

As it has not been possible to get any firm dates for the timber frame of the open hall trusses or its rafters, one can but assume that the hall framing was either re-used from a previous building, or that its design and detailing is based on an earlier tradition to achieve the desired effect, that is to retain the feel of an open hall at a time when the medieval one in the south/east front range had ceased to fulfil this function and had made way for the large carriage archway. This has ever since served travellers and their means of transport to gain access to the spacious accommodation within the two enclosed and secure courtyards.

## **Mouldings and decorative embellishment on central truss of open hall**

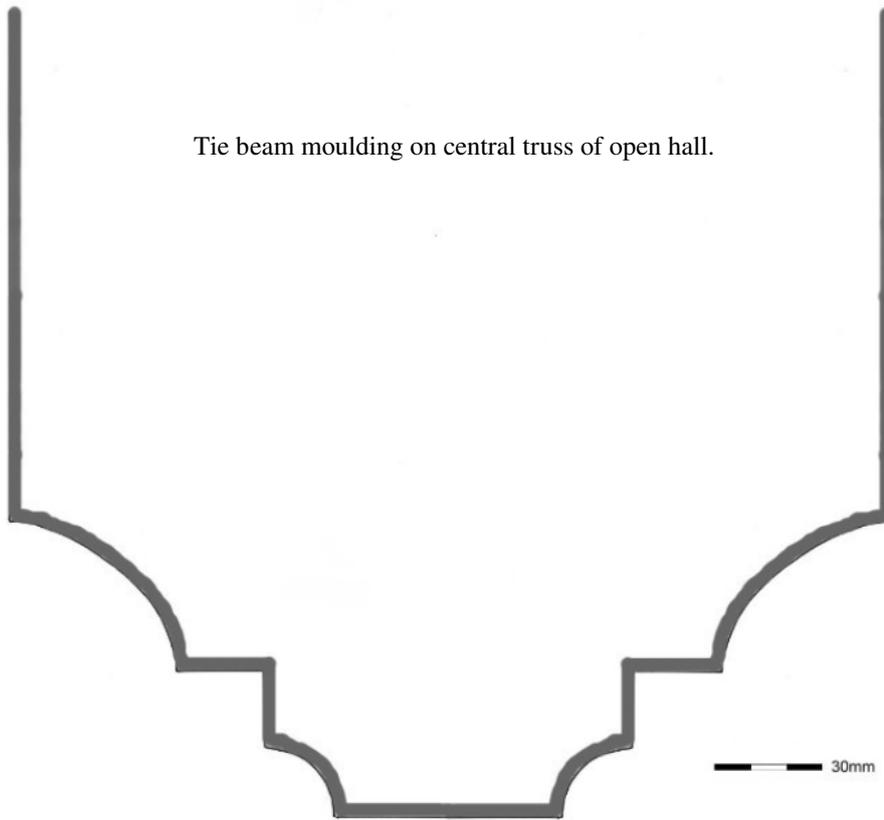
The posts, tie beam, and single arch brace are each embellished with carved mouldings. The tie beam (Figure 1) has a hollow chamfer, step, second hollow chamfer and fillet to both the north and south of the underside of the beam. The post at the east end of the truss (Figure 2) has a similar arrangement, but with an extra step before the first hollow chamfer, and the fillet is diminished in scale. The single arch brace on the east side has a simple chamfer and fillet (not illustrated).

The post at the west end of the truss follows the east post's mouldings until it reaches the empty mortice for the missing arch brace when it is given a different treatment, with a simple hollow chamfer and fillet (Figure 3). The grammar of all four mouldings is broadly the same, but these timbers may not be in their primary context, for either some alteration appears to have taken place or there has been an element of structural movement within the truss.

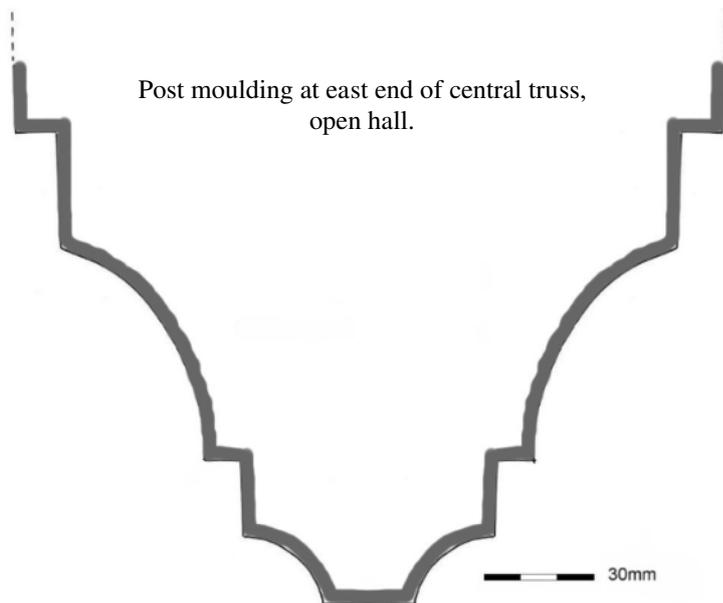
The use of the hollow chamfer and fillet moulding was ubiquitous in the later medieval period and one which was in use over a long chronological period and, as a result, it is not possible to apply moulding analysis to ascribe any meaningful date range to these timbers. The decorative treatment of the timbers in the central truss is, however, consistent with a former use of this building as an open hall for dining and entertaining higher status travellers frequenting the medieval inn.

Beneath the empty mortice on the west post is a decorative 'corbel' (photograph), which is carved in relief. The carving is of a group of three balls which may represent the device of St. Nicholas of Bari who was believed to offer protection to travellers and who retained this association, in conjunction with St. Christopher, before the former became associated with Christmas and children. Interestingly, both saints are commonly represented in artistic form as intercessors in late medieval chantry chapels, although the journey in these cases is connected with the after-life. St Nicholas is presented in some Renaissance art accompanied by three golden balls; if the three wooden carved balls in the corbel were intended to represent the saint then it is likely that they were originally gilded.

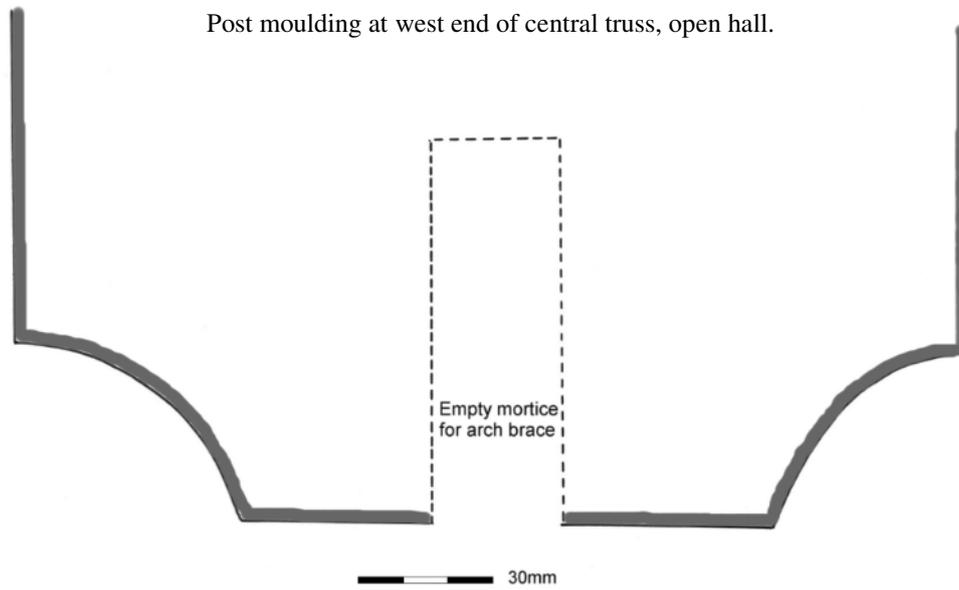
**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**



Decorative feature of three carved balls on corbel in central truss.

