

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

**Parish/County:** Henley-on-Thames, Oxon  
**Street and House name:** 58 West Street

**Owner:** Mrs. S.M. Jenner  
**Tel No:** 574218  
**Recorder:**  
Ruth Gibson  
**Date:** 9.1.08

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

*'19<sup>th</sup> century façade to earlier, probably timber framed house. Red brick façade with ornamental string at 1<sup>st</sup> floor. Old tiled roof. Rendered gable end. 2 storeys and gabled dormer. 2 windows, those of 1<sup>st</sup> floor early 19<sup>th</sup> cent. casements, modern glazing ground floor and additional window. Rear façade generally stuccoed with hipped gable'*



**South front of 58 West Street**

**The brick work hides a timber framed building, dating back to no later than the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. The house may originally have been wider, but the buildings on the r.h. side were demolished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to make way for better access to the rebuilt Adwell Square.**

**Known History:** This is one of the houses located on the north side of what was formerly called West Hill, which overlooked the upper market place area. It had been a shop until it was put up for sale in 1970. A photograph taken at that time shows a sign over the entrance door saying A.F Glen, General Store. It has no shop windows, but a central door between two tall, cross shaped windows. These had been altered by the replacement of the lower sashes with glass panels. It was obviously not a purpose built shop, but a dwelling house adapted for the purpose.

The present owner had the central door blocked up; the front door is now accessed from the passageway.

**Map ref., date of 1<sup>st</sup> map, type of plot.** The first OS map of 1878 shows the building on a very long burgage plot, directly adjoining the now demolished buildings to the east, which once fronted Adwell Square.

**Type and use of building:** Dwelling house, formerly a shop and dwelling house.

**Plan form/position in street:** The house consists of two bays of 2 ½ storeys, built parallel to the street with a one-bay, 2 storey, cross wing located behind at right angles. There is a through passage on the east side. Other single storey rear extensions have been replaced with a modern extension in the early 1970s. Photographs of these were taken and retained by the owner as part of the history of the building.

**Description of front and side elevations ( height, windows, entrances, shop front etc):** See Listing Entry above. The uneven surface of the east gable shows, that an adjoining structure has been removed. A painting of 1904 by Lucy Cooper (original in the Mayor's Parlour in the Town Hall), indicates that the front elevation had a rendered finish with a parapet wall, hiding the roof. However, it is not possible to be certain that the painting is absolutely correct, although the houses at 60, 62 & 64 are accurately depicted.

**Description of rear elevations:** The two-storey rear range has a hipped roof. All roofs are now tiled, but their steep pitches, rough rafters and hip are indications that they were probably originally thatched. All the fenestration is modern.



**View of the rear elevation with the 1970s single storey in front.**

**The door on the left is the rear door of the cross passage, which would originally have been shorter, just serving the front bays, but was extended when the rear wing was added.**

**The hipped roof of the rear wing is visible behind the 20th century single storey kitchen extension.**

**On the left the brick and flint burgage plot wall.**

## Internal evidence

**Cellar:** None

### **Ground Floor:**

The ground floor is divided into a narrow cross passage and living accommodation. The front living room (formerly the shop) and the rear room now form one open-plan living space, the dividing wall and stack having been removed during the renovations of the early 1970s. Parts of the former rear timber framed wall have been retained as a screen and there are steps up between the older part of the house and the rear extension, necessary to accommodate the sloping ground. The floor level of the former shop in the front was considerably lower, i.e. at street level, but has been raised to create a level floor. A few steps lead up to the 1970s kitchen.

The passageway has two modern doors back and front and it slopes up to the back. Only a wattle and daub panel, discovered during the 1970s renovations in its left (west) side wall shows that this was and still is timber framed. The wall is in the front section of the house. Three oak staves and woven hazel rods with some remnants of daub are visible. This is clearly an original wall, which shows that the cross passage is also an original feature of the house.

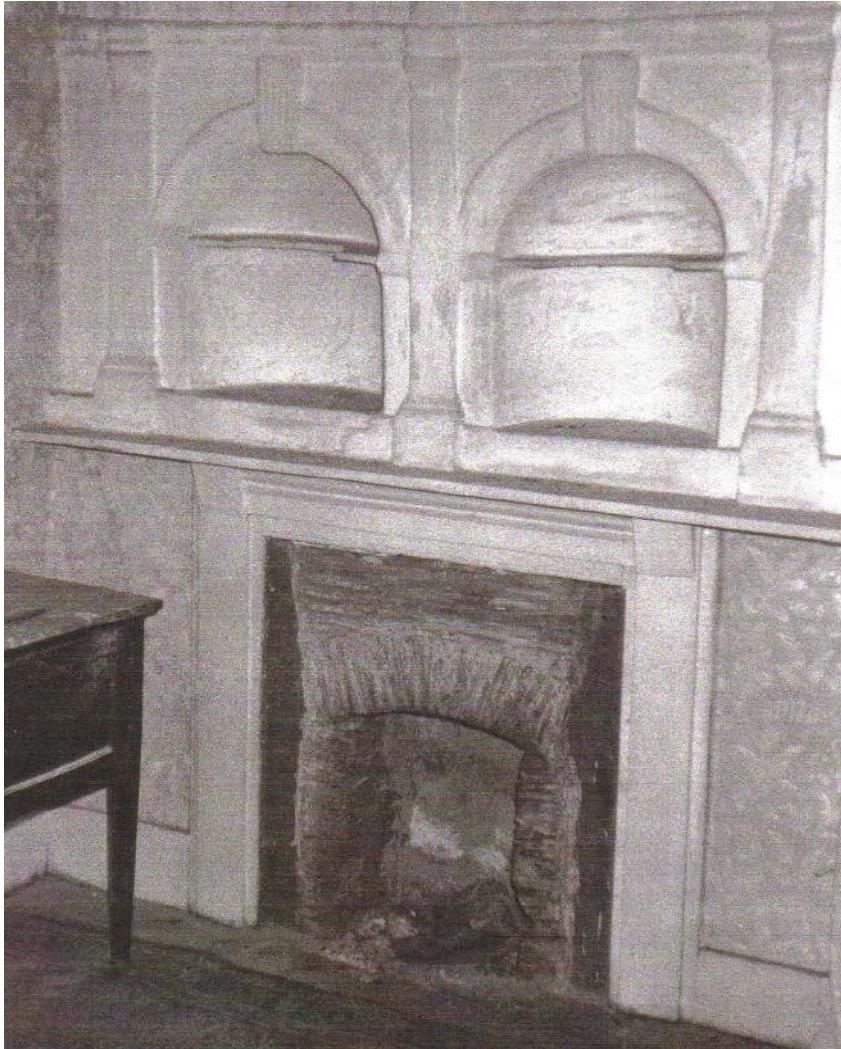


**Wattle & daub panel in wall of cross passage is evidence of the building's age. The cross passage may once have been part of a larger house, which extended further to the right or east where the entrance to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Adwell Square is now located.**

**Upper Floors:** The first floor retains most of its original lay-out; i.e. two front rooms ( one now a bathroom and landing) and a rear bedroom. The stack between the two has been removed and only a photograph of a fire place with what appears to be a Jacobean overmantle remains.

The two niches of the overmantle set in a framework of classical pilasters have small curved shelves; these would have been used for the display of valuable objects. In the Sales Particulars it is described as located in Bedroom 1 'a brick fireplace with wooden display mantle'

The fire place surround is of a later date and does not match the carefully crafted work of the over mantle. It is of course possible that the Jacobean overmantle is not original to the house, but was brought in from somewhere else. Its first floor location is not unusual, as first floor rooms were often important as reception rooms, especially if the ground floor was used for work purposes. It would have been served by a large stack serving 3 fire places in 1970 ( Sales Particulars), which was removed in the 1970s.



**Jacobean overmantle in the first floor bedroom of 58 West Street, Henley, photographed before its removal in the early 1970s, before the house became a listed building.**

**If original to the house this feature would date the building to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.**

**Attic: Roof structure – trusses, special features if any :** The front attic has been converted into a small bedroom. The queen strut trusses are visible at both gable ends; in the central one the collar has been cut to allow access between the two bays. To strengthen the truss two upright posts have been inserted. They are beautifully turned and carved timbers, possibly either newel or bed posts. Since they are re-used they do not help with dating the building.



The rear loft is accessed from an inspection hatch. Its hipped roof has a collar supported on the purlins and some irregularly spaced studs. The rafters are made of split timbers, jointed at the apex, but much repaired, renewed and altered.

The bedroom doors are planked and ledged with long strap hinges and may be original, as dated examples come from mid 17<sup>th</sup> to mid 18<sup>th</sup> century houses.



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century brick re-fronting still encases a timber framed building, of which little is visible with the exception of the wattle & daub panel, set between solid oak uprights in the wall between the front room and cross passage and some studs in the former back wall of the rear wing.

One cannot really date the w&d panel, but it is unlikely that it is later than mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. The long strap hinges of the plank doors as well as the photographic evidence of the first floor fire place, which looks Jacobean, point to a building date in the early/mid 17<sup>th</sup> century; that is if the over mantle was original to the building.

The plan form is interesting, as the existing cross passage appears to be an original feature of the house. It is possible, that the two bays, which include the cross passage, were once part of a larger house. Unfortunately the buildings on the east side, which once fronted Adwell Square, were demolished without having been previously recorded. The Lucy Cooper painting of 1904 shows a large, hipped roof brick building to the east, projecting forward of the building line of what appears to be No. 58. Unfortunately it is not possible to clearly identify No. 58. Although one can see the two tall first floor windows, the front wall appears to be rendered and continues up and ends in a parapet, hiding the tiled roof completely. Also there appears to be a wall in front of the house, in line with the neighbouring projecting stairs at Nos. 60/62. This agrees with the projection shown on the 1878 OS map in front of all three houses. Did all three houses have external front stairs or did the wall in front of 58 serve another purpose?

Another question is whether No. 58 had a rendered front, often used to protect as well as conceal earlier timber framing? And what was the purpose of the low front wall shown on the painting? It was certainly too tall to be just a front garden wall. Unfortunately this Cooper painting raises more questions than providing answers about the earlier appearance of the building.

What is certain is that the building has undergone several profound changes in its appearance, but still preserves essential parts of its timber framed fabric and plan form. This puts its construction date into the period when the upper market place area was much more open, probably containing mostly stalls and animal pens (see the Freeman Estate map of 1772/8, which however does not give a clear picture of the area ), although the 'Row Barge PH' on the south side of the street too retains old timber framing, especially in its south elevation, i.e. the side overlooking the upper market area. This proves that it too would have been built well before the map was drawn up at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Ruth Gibson, BA, IHBC**  
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