

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

Parish/County: Henley-on-Thames

Street and House name:

Owners: Mr. & Mrs. B. Triptree

Ancastle Cottage, Gravel Hill

Recorder: Ruth Gibson

Date: 4.5.07

Listing grade and entry text: **Grade II** '15th/16th. *Timber framed house with colour washed, brick infilling. Old tiled roof with central chimney. 2 storeys and attic. East front symmetrical with 3 reproduction casement windows, with leaded glazing, on each floor. Small 18th cent. wing adjoins, with modern entrance door. Finely sited at the top the hill*'.



Rear jetty with corner knee brace, now enclosed by a later extension.

Known History: Formerly in the ancient parish of Badgemore (called Begeurde in Domesday of 1086, whilst Henley does not get a mention), the house occupies a commanding position on Henley Hill above the former Upper Market Place area of Henley. In 1802 on an estate map and survey it is documented in the ownership of J. Hodges, Esq. of Bolney Court. The building is then simply called a Cottage & Garden, occupied by Henry Chipp. The Henley Tithe Returns of 1843 show that it was still the property of the Hodges, i.e. Frederick Hodges, and let to William Dearlove and another as a house and garden.

(NB Previous ownerships need investigating to get an idea of who built it and whether it had land attached to it, as it looks very much like a farm house, rather than a town house. The Hodges ownership probably goes back into the 18th century and it would be useful to find out, who owned it and the land around earlier)

Building date, datable alteration and additions: This is a typical lobby entry house, but with a jetty at the back, which in itself is an unusual combination. Whilst the lobby-entry plan, with its central stack and heated rooms on two floors represented a great advance in living standards and was very popular throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the jetty was on its way out by 1600.

The use of timber framing of good quality and the construction of a jetty on the up-hill – not the town side – is unusual in itself. Jetties as well as the close studding still visible in the upper part of the rear wall were an important part of displaying the owner's wealth. Apart from this, jetties often helped to overcome problems of limited space in crowded town centres, as well as being an efficient way of giving more strength to the upper floors. Most upper floors project over the street, or over two streets, if on a corner site, certainly where they could be seen. Here the jetty could only be seen by travellers approaching Henley from Rotherfield Greys. May be there is a connection with the manor of Greys or other landowners such as the Oveys of Badgemore ? Certainly the use of circa 1 5/8" to 2" bricks, which we see in the construction of the large central stack, was very much in evidence at Greys Court where Lord Francis Knollys was busy adding brick ranges to his medieval house in the 1570 to 80s. Bricks were still a luxury item in the 16th and 17th centuries, but an absolute 'must-have' for a stack in the centre of a timber framed house in an area without natural stone.



East elevation of Ancastle Cottage, the central window has replaced the former door

The lobby entry plan, which is the construction of a house with a central half bay to accommodate a stack to heat rooms at each side, was a revolutionary step in the modernisation of house buildings in prob. the last quarter of the 16th century and became the wide spread standard house plan throughout the 17th century. Not only did fire places and stacks replace the open hearth in the hall, many stacks had been added to exterior walls of halls throughout the late

15th and 16th centuries, but with this new plan form a whole house could be heated and rooms accessed individually, giving privacy as well as comfort to its inhabitants. Living standards rose, as did the birth rate!

The two spaces in front and behind the stack served further useful purposes. A front door, instead of leading directly into the hall, up to then the main living space, and creating draughts, was now inserted into an enclosed space with doors to the parlour on one side and into the kitchen/living space on the other. The second space behind the stack accommodated a winder or newel stair to the first floor chambers, which again was a huge step forward in the creation of privacy, as each chamber could be accessed individually. The attic too, usually used for storage and possibly for living in servants, could be accessed directly from the kitchen.

Combining the evidence of Tudor bricks, the jetty and close studding, all seemingly belonging to C16th building practises together with the evidence of the lobby-entry plan, which is known as early as 1536 in gentry houses, but only became increasingly popular from the late 16th century onwards, a building date between 1580 and 1620 is stipulated. The Listing Entry of 15th/16th century is unlikely to be correct, as it ignores the plan form of the building as a dating tool. However, it would be very interesting to get an exact date for this building through dendrochronological investigating.

Map ref., date of 1st map, type of plot: Corner plot on the road out of Henley, called Henley Hill, now corner of Gravel Hill and Paradise Road. It is shown on the 1878 O.S Map with a short rear extension. The 1843 Henley Tithing Map shows only the original rectangular building, in occupation by Wm. Dearlove & another, owned by Frederick Hodges

Type and use of building: Dwelling house, formerly a cottage, very probably built as a farm house.

Plan form/position in street: Two and a half bays, built gable end onto Henley Hill, parallel to Paradise Road, of 'lobby-entry plan'. It has a lean-to extension at the back in the form of a catslide roof. Half of this was overbuilt by a two-storey kitchen extension (said to have been a dairy) with room above, probably in the late 18th or early 19th century.

Description of front elevation (height, windows, entrances):

A two-story and attic, timber framed house of 2 ½ bays. All windows are modern replacement leaded lights. The central bay is occupied by the stack. Did its front door formerly occupy this central space?

Walling material:

(give brick sizes, bond, colour; timber frame type; render and finishes) Timber framed, of square framing at the front, close studding at the back. Brick infill now, painted white. The house is jettied at the back/west side, now hidden inside a later lean-to extension.

Roof shape and covering: Pitched and gabled; old clay tiles

Chimneys: Location on roof and materials Massive, 4-flue brick stack rising through the apex, in central half bay. Original to the house plan, but the external stack has been rebuilt in probably late 19th century bricks (of standard size and uniform texture, unlike the 'Tudor' bricks seen internally).

Internal evidence

Ground Floor:

A typical lobby entry house plan. There is one bay either side of the stack with a lobby in front giving access to both main rooms. The former kitchen to the left (south) and the parlour to the right (north). Formerly a stair case was tucked behind the stack, with access probably from the kitchen niche to the side of the stack. Now the 20th century stairs are located in the rear wing. A lean-to at the back was probably built quite early on, as the jetty beam ends and knee brace show little signs of weathering. This lean-to would have served as a storage area and scullery, but now serves as a corridor at the northern end and at the southern end has been incorporated into the former kitchen by the removal of part of the original timber framed back wall.

The ceiling joists in the former kitchen are square, measuring approximately 5 ½ “ by 6”, tenoned into the axial beam measuring approximately 9” by 11”, laid on top of the jetty beams. Some joists have carpenter’s marks, but they do not appear to be in sequence and could have been re-ordered when the room was altered, i.e. when the rear wall was removed. The narrow chamfers are also not consistent, indicating changes.

The former parlour ceiling also shows signs of some changes, as the centre of the broad axial beam probably used to support a cross transverse beam, rather than the narrow joist, which is there now. This would have formed an impressive arrangement of two large beams forming a cross in the ceiling, thereby distinguishing the status of the parlour from that of the kitchen.

The two-storey rear wing at the north-west corner of the house is built into and over the lean-to which is probably of late 18th or 19th century date. It has brick and flint walls and some slight internal framing on the first floor. It was reputedly a dairy and the fact that it was built into the hill side, offering good insulation and keeping the interior cool, make this a likely use.

Fire places: (location and type) : There are 4 F.Ps., one to each room. All are located in the centre of the house preventing heat loss. The 2 g.f. fire places still have their original brick work of circa 2” narrow ‘Tudor ‘ bricks. The smaller first floor F.Ps. have been altered and modernised. The g.f. fireplace in the former kitchen appears best preserved, although not all features may be original. It has a domed, brick built bread oven on the l.h. side with a small warming space below (for proving the yeast dough and keeping the kindling dry) and a niche for a bench or more likely a place to keep food hot on the r.h. side. The timber bressumer has a narrow chamfer and run out stop at the front and a deep chamfer at the back, which has been heavily charred over centuries of use.

Stairs: (location and type) The stairs were probably originally located at the back of the stack, built against its brick work from the g.f to the attic. The present main stairs from g.f. to first floor, which appear to be of 20th century date, are located in the north/western rear extension, The straight stairs to the attic rise in the northern bedroom, accessed from the rear corridor; they are probably of 19th date.

Upper Floor: This consists of 2 bedrooms, either side of the stack. The F.Ps. in both bedrooms have been modernised, but their location is very likely original. The lobby in front of the stack, which would have allowed access between them, is now a bathroom. A straight staircase to the loft has been inserted in the northern bedroom, accessed from the corridor within the 2-storey rear wing.

Attic: Roof structure – trusses, special features if any

The attic is used for bedroom accommodation. The roof trusses are exposed and show the 2 purlins which are clasped by the collars of the queen strut trusses in both gables of the building. The 2 collars at either side of the stack bay have been cut to allow unhindered access into both bays. This has led to the purlins pulling out of their scarf joints and bowing. Struts have been inserted to support them and to prevent further movement. The space behind the stack (on the west side) is not accessible and may still contain remnants of the former stairs.

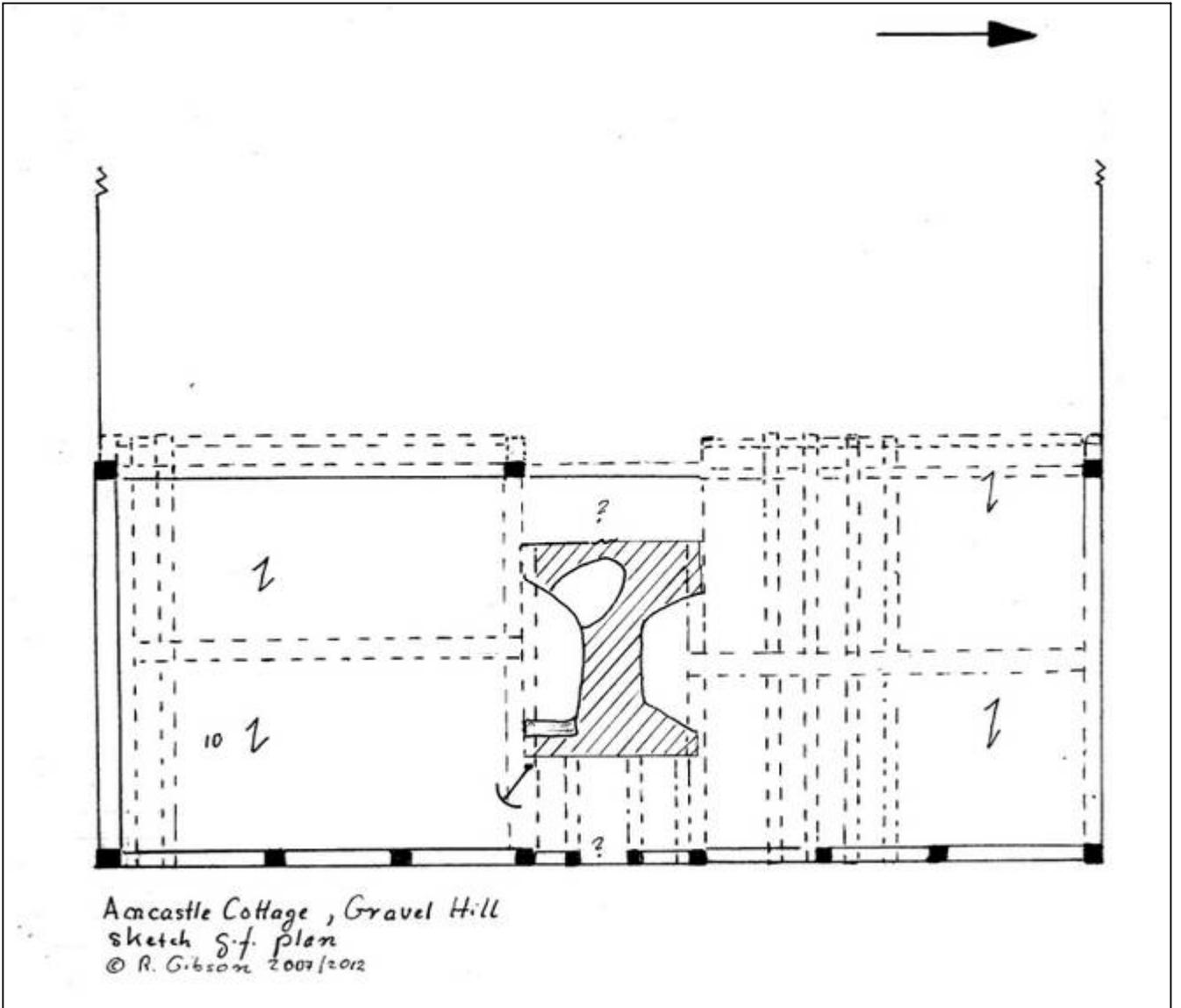


Attic showing cut collar in front of the stack on the right, supported by a queen strut, bowing purlin on the left with modern supporting strut in the south bedroom beyond the stack

Conclusion and Discussion: This is a fine example of a compact Tudor house with its four fireplaces heating the 4 principal rooms of the house. The fact that it presents its best face, i.e. the close studding of the first floor and jetty on the western up-hill view to the traveller coming from Rotherfield Greys rather than to the town's upper market place, is a strong indicator of its affiliation with that parish and possibly with its lords, the Knollys' of Greys Court.

It appears to have been built as a farm house of quality, which lost its land and status to near-by Paradise Farm, still in the same ownership, but serving as labourer's accommodation.

The Knollys are known to have owned much land in the area and created new farmsteads, probably also near-by Lower Hernes, built in 1567. Other evidence of landownership here on the edge of Henley parish is the will & inventory of husbandman Philip Aveye of 1662 (ORO ref 2,1,3). It describes him as the tenant of William Knollys of Rotherfield Greys. He had a 999 year lease for a cottage (a small 3-room hall house) and about one acre of ground '*adjoining land called Bodgeares (Badgemore) on the north and the highway leading from Henley to Graies on the south*', with other words just north of the main road out of Henley.



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