

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

Parish/County: Henley-on-Thames, Oxon
Street and House name:
Old Ship House, Wharf Lane

Owner: Mrs. A. McDowell
Tel No: 577305
Ruth Gibson
Date: 13.5.2010

Listing grade and entry text summary: Gd II

'18th C. facades, originally 2 houses. Stucco façade, old tiled roof, southern half of 2 storeys, northern half of 2 storeys, basement. Doors with decorative low relief carved heads above'



Front/east elevation of the historic ranges



Rear/west elevation of the 2 medieval bays

Known History: It was part of the Fawley Court Estate in 1821 and is shown on the 1853 Sales Map together with Wharfe House as 'The Ship PH'. Its first named landlord in c. 1724 was a George Hawkins; last owner/landlord H.E. Hobbs from 1871-97, after which it closed. (For details see A.Cottingham, The Hostelries of Henley)

Map ref., date of 1st map, type of plot.

It is shown on the 1878/9 OS map as two linear buildings running parallel to the street; the northern part is clearly wider than the southern one. This represents the still existing situation, clearly showing that the northern part is a later and wider building. In the 20th C. a further extension was added to its north gable.

Description of the building:

The stuccoed exterior of the front elevations conceals the original walling material and construction methods. The earliest, southern part is a timber framed building of good quality and traditional design, although not all the framing is now visible and may have been replaced in part. No original windows or doors can be seen. The rear elevation retains most of its framing including the central wall post complete with its raising 'scotch' (recess for props during construction) and all timbers are heavily weathered.

Internally too the framing is well preserved. The ground floor dining room has exposed cross shaped ceiling beams, but no exposed joists, and a brick fire place with narrow timber bressumer. At first floor level the former outside north gable can be seen at the stair well. Here

the corner post with jowel head supports the wall plate on its back, the tie beam and principal rafter above are jointed and pegged together in a traditional lap-dovetail assembly. All are heavily weathered demonstrating that this was the end gable of a stand-alone building for centuries before the c. 1700 extension was added (see photograph below on the left)



The first floor room has a central, cambered tie beam with crown strut and two raking side struts (these may be later additions added to strengthen the truss) to the collar; this also appears to have a camber but its top is hidden under the inserted ceiling. The collar supports clasped purlins. Originally the room was divided into two as the mortise holes for studs in its soffit (underside) still show.

The taller and wider northern section of the house is said to be constructed of brick and flint, hidden under the later stucco. All ground floor windows are Victorian type sashes, whilst the first floor ones have casements. Most of the middle ground floor room has a purpose built basement under it with access opening from the street. Internally the head height for this only fairly shallow basement room has been achieved by a raised first floor level, reached by three steps from the entrance hall. This seems very much part of the original design and suggests that it was built to house the beer barrels for the public house, which may have started as an ale house selling home brewed beer from the smaller, earlier building. The reception hall has a large, brick built fire place with much of its brick flue exposed and was probably the public bar with private or snug bars in the rooms above the basement.



Raised Corridor above basement giving access to two small rooms as well as the staircase to the earlier part of the house. This present staircase and its access are modern alteration from an earlier, turned stair rising directly from the ground level. The timber studs probably formed the support for a lath and plaster wall separating the lower corridor access to the private quarters from the public house space.



North gable wall in the 18th C. part showing straight cut struts in the gable and rafters up to purlin level. The principal elements of the construction are still the same, i.e. tie beam, collar and clasped purlins, but the timbers are narrower and appear mechanically sawn. Wind braces are no longer used.



Truss with tie beam and long, curved wind brace supporting the here invisible rafters in the medieval part of the house

Conclusion

The southern two-bay timber framed building may have been a small, self contained house, but the quality of its surviving framing suggests that it may once have been part of a larger house. Its north gable was certainly the end wall, exposed to centuries of weathering before the north extensions was added. Unfortunately none of the original windows, doors or fire places have survived, although the present brick fire place may be original to the building, just much rebuilt or repaired and altered. It now has the look of a 17th C. fire place whilst the building appears to be much earlier, probably of mid 15th C. date.

There are several other buildings in the town, which have similar trusses with a single crown strut truss standing on a cambered tie beam and substantial wind braces also being present. Although we only have two securely dated examples (of 1443 and 1454) others are known locally of similar dates. This type of roof structure represents an interim phase between the medieval crown post roof and the queen strut truss, which became ubiquitous in the 16th C and continued to be used well into the 18th C.