

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

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

**Street and House name:**

'Old Timbers' 67/69 Friday Street

**Owner:** Sandra Moon

**Tel No:**

**Recorder:** Ruth Gibson

**Date:** May 2010

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

*'15/16<sup>th</sup> and later, form a group with No. 71 and 73, Barn Cottage'*

**Known History:** Part of Greys Brewery Maltings in 19<sup>th</sup> C, ( see sheet by A. Cottingham)  
No Census Entries apart from probably those for No. 71, (see 1901 ) which is shown as a dwelling in early photographs, unlike 67/69 which are shown without domestic doors or windows ( see below) from the earliest photographs in the 19<sup>th</sup> C to the 1940s.

**Map ref., date of 1<sup>st</sup> map, type of plot.** A linear plot, parallel to street, which runs back to the line of Henley town ditch behind the Hart Street burgage plots. Shown on 1878 Map with large malthouse attached at the back of No. 67.



**Plan form/position in street:** Four irregular bays; building continues east with two bays now forming No. 71 'Friday Street Cottage' at its eastern end. Beyond lies Barn Cottage, separated by a narrow c. 10/12 cm gap and clearly of a later building date. Only 67-69 are recorded and described here, although the building consisted originally of 6 bays.

**Description of the exterior of the building:** The south or street elevation: Timber framed with large rectangular panels and two long arch braces at first floor; some of the framing has been rebuilt/replaced with new timbers and 20<sup>th</sup> C. brickwork. However, three of the principal posts appear to have survived intact and these preserve very interesting and unusual details.

Those of trusses A, D & E have pilaster profiles, which are still visible despite being heavily weathered and worn. Short jetty brackets emerge from these pilasters to support the transverse joists of the jetty. The posts and brace together are c. 48 cm long, which means that if post and brace are of one piece, as they appear to be, the original tree trunk from which they were made, must have been very substantial, unless trunks with suitable projecting branches or roots were used. Posts D & E clearly have one rounded corner (facing each other) and one square corner

each as well as being heavily weathered, indicating an original opening with a long time of wear and tear.

However, there is evidence in the form of one large and several small mortise slots in the soffit of the jetty beam (although much of this is hidden by the modern garage door frame); the one in the centre appears to be the slot for a substantial post. The side faces of posts D and E also have empty mortises; again indicating the existence of former horizontal timbers. The jetty beam is chamfered here, another indication of a former opening? Or just a modest decorative detail, also noted at the jetty beam in bay I (see drawing ).

The windows, including the bay window, entrance door and garage door are mostly modern and replace the shuttered windows and large double plank door next to the entrance to No. 71 shown on the pre-renovation photographs. Although the bay is shown on the 1878 map as well as on early photographs (see below P.3).

The first floor is jettied, consisting of heavy scantling, flat laid joists of c. 20 cm by 10 cm ( 7 ½” by 4”) laid at circa 30 cm (1 foot) intervals.



View of jetty, post of Truss E, with pilaster and knee brace rising from it next to modern passageway and the door of No. 71.



Front post of Truss E with 70 cm large empty mortise and peg holes. Also note the rounded and weathered corner of the post.

The roof is tiled; there are two ridge brick chimneys. These date from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> C. when the building was converted from dilapidated store to domestic dwelling. In the attic the stack next to truss D has the date and initials A B 1951 scratched into its render.

At the visible part of the west gable, next to No. 65, one can just see part of a long arch brace at first floor level. A similar arch brace survives at the eastern end of the rear elevation, otherwise the rear retains little of the original framing, as much must have been rebuilt once the former maltings range had been removed and an extension had been added in the 1950s refurbishment behind bays III & IV. Part of Bay IV contains a narrow, modern passageway, which appears to have replaced the wider entrance behind double plank doors, discussed above and shown in the early photographs.

The 1940s picture below shows the building in a very similar run-down condition, probably condemned by now, as had been the case with Barn Cottage and the Thameside, Granary Cottage, before being purchased in 1925 from the Mackenzies by Lady Burke and subsequently repaired and modernized.



**Internal lay out and details:** The modern entrance door leads into **Bay II**, which is now the entrance and staircase hall and is the narrowest bay of the building measuring only 2.62 m. Part of two ceiling joists has been removed on the east side to create the stair access, but c. ½ m was retained at the front and secured with a trimmer to ensure the survival of the jettied upper floor. The transverse beam of Truss C forms the stairwell wall on the east and the mortise for the former tenon of the cut axial beam (central ceiling beam) is visible in its centre. Part of the axial beam still exists on the west side of the entrance hall and is now supported by the stair structure.

It is also at this point where the transverse beam appears to have a scarf joint (see drawing & photograph below). The ends of this joint are damaged and appear to have moved, making it necessary to support the beam from below. This repair may date from the time when the modern stairs were inserted (during the 1950s work), but may also predate this and be an earlier repair. Putting a mortise into a scarf joint, if that is what it was, is an altogether unusual arrangement and needs further investigation to properly understand what went on here.



Bay III, g.f. east face of wall, Truss C. The axial beam which supports the ceiling joists is tenoned into the transverse beam. Below this sits an additional beam giving support to this damaged area. Also see r.h. photograph for west face of wall.



Truss C, west face of wall, Bay II. Close-up of the 6 cm deep, empty mortise of the former axial beam. Is this located what appears to be a scarf joint of the transverse beam? Additional support beam below. Also note chamfer in beam soffit.

**Bay I** to the west of the entrance hall is the largest room in the house measuring just over 4 m. The mortises in the soffit (underside) of the axial beam in the centre of the room indicate that it had been subdivided. On the north face the axial beam and the north side ceiling joists show some disturbance, some joists are narrower than the otherwise c 20 cm wide joists seen throughout much of the building.

The underside of the jetty plate of the front/south wall is visible where the bay has been built out; here a number of empty mortises show the former framing of the g.f. wall. Of particular interest is a long, narrow groove located at the inner side of the beam, (see drawing and photograph). This indicates the existence of former timber panels or narrow planks; was it a double skin wall? Was the inner face panelled? And does this mean it was a windowless room?



Soffit of jetty plate in Bay I. The 20mm deep by c 15 mm wide groove runs along the whole of the visible length, although it has been widened by a large shake. Next to it, on the outside or south side is the empty mortise and peg of the former post.

The brick fire place built against the west gable wall is modern.

**Bay II** now accommodates the hall and staircase. See above description.

**Bays III and IV** now comprise the dining room and modern garage plus narrow side passage between No. 69 and 71. Whilst all ceiling timbers are hidden in the garage, those in the dining room are exposed and show the same quality and pattern seen in the other bays. Only the area adjacent to the 20<sup>th</sup> C. fire place shows alterations to the ceiling joists. The spine beam here has a narrow, 4 cm wide chamfer. The features of interest in the front wall of **Bay IV** have already been described above p.1 & 2.

At **first floor level** Bay I is differently divided from the g.f. layout. Together with part of the narrow Bay II (which contains the modern staircase and landing) two bedrooms were formed. Their dividing walls are constructed from narrow studs, placed in a kind of fan shape between transverse joist and tie beam above. (See drawing of Truss C). These raking struts are quite out of character with the large scantling timbers of the main elements of trusses, main wall frame, wind & wall braces and ceiling joists.

At trusses C and D there is clear evidence of former arch braces and studs, indicating original dividing walls to close off Bay III; these timbers were probably removed so that the rear corridor could be created for access to all rooms from the new staircase. Only the framing of the west gable wall at truss A retain large square panels, consistent with a medieval building date.



Left: Cut tenon of former wall brace in rear wall post of Truss C.  
Right: west gable wall of truss A showing original stud of large rectangular frame.



**Attic:** Unfortunately none of the roof timbers of Bay I or II have survived. They have been replaced with modern rafters and there is no indication where the original principals and bay divisions of bays I and II may have been.

However, trusses C and D are extant together with purlins and wind braces, although all common rafters have been replaced. The two trusses have side purlins, tenoned into the principal rafters just above the collars. These have a slight camber and are supported by two slender queen struts. The top of the collar of truss C has a shallow groove and its soffit has the empty mortises of former staves for an infill panel.



Truss C, looking west into Bays I and II

**Bay III** Truss D, looking east into Bay IV, note slipped purlin tenon.

Both trusses show heavy sooting on their inward looking faces; the outer faces are clean. Both collars have mortises for staves in their soffits showing that both had been closed trusses for the purpose of containing smoke, i.e. a large smoke bay or heated room of c 3.10 m width above the jettied first floor.



Top face of collar of truss C with groove just off centre

Sooted wind brace in the north wall roof of Bay III with principal of truss C just visible on the left. Pegs and peg holes in the purlin showing the location of the original rafters.

**Discussion and Summary:** This is a long building of 6 bays, running parallel to the street, indicating that there was no shortage of space, when it was built, nor shortage of high quality timbers. However, the question for what purpose or by whom it was built remains.

Its jettied upper floor constructed of large, flat laid joists supported by substantial scantling jetty plates and posts which include pilasters and integral brackets, indicates a builder/owner of means. The existence of a second, internal panel wall, which is only visible in the exposed part of the jetty plate in Bay I, but may have existed in other walls too, tells the same story. However, there are virtually no decorative features on the internal timbers, only narrow, utilitarian chamfers in the main ceiling beams. There remain no signs of a traditional medieval plan form of hall, cross passage, service and private rooms, although the narrow Bay II may have served as a cross passage and also as access to the two rooms in Bay I. The subdivision of Bay I may represent the service end with buttery and pantry. (Another example of this arrangement exists at No 45 Market Place, where there is also evidence of a groove for possible panelling behind the front stud work, thus creating very strong front walls in both cases).

Bay IV may have been designed as an entrance passage between street front and back yard, but the evidence of former timber framing in at least part of the south wall vertical posts and horizontal jetty plate throws doubts on this. The use of this bay as a passageway may have been a later adaptation for the purpose of creating a better access for wagons and this may account for the weathered appearance of the posts.

No original stairs nor windows survive. The irregular ceiling joists at the back of Bay I may be an indication of an earlier staircase here. The windows of the early photograph show small, shuttered openings as well as some first floor, blocked doors. The windows could have been original openings with some mullions still indicated on a photograph in a g.f. window. The large first floor openings must have served as hoist doors, but are they an original feature or were they inserted when the building was used for grain storage and as part of the maltings of Greys Brewery in the 19<sup>th</sup> C ?

The central smoke blackened bay III is a mystery, but of great interest, as it indicates a use other than storage. The raking struts of the timber framing in the cross walls indicates that these are later, pos. 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> insertions, although the existence of former arch braces and associated wall studs at C and D show that earlier room divisions existed. This is also confirmed by the evidence for the closed trusses of C and D as seen in the attic.

Have we got a first floor hall with open hearth supported on a jettied timber floor?  
Did it have a domestic or commercial use? Could it have been the heated first floor hall which gave accommodation to a merchant, who lived 'over the shop'?

Or could this also have been the forerunner of the malt kilns with cone shaped tops we have found in later Henley buildings? Unfortunately the common rafters do not survive and with them all evidence for smoke vents or other indicators of malting such as is described by Dr. Plot in 1677, i.e : '*... malt kiln are so thriftily contrived that the kiln holes are placed in the backs of their kitchen chimneys so that drying their malt with wood the same fire serves for that and all the other uses of their kitchen besides.*' It seems possible that much of the early malting may have been carried out by using existing buildings and improvising the stage of the malting process, when the germination of the sprouting barley was stopped by exposing it to heat. The construction of a purpose built malt house at the back, shown on the 1878 OS map, may suggest a similar, but small scale use of the front range previously. Dr. Plot indicates that all kinds of arrangements were used for malting the barley in the 17<sup>th</sup> C.

The very length of the building, 20.50 m, 6 bays originally, all with upper floors and no evidence of early chimneys except the four-flue one shown in the early photographs at No. 71,

shows that the main purpose of the range was a commercial one. However, this does not preclude residential accommodation. Unfortunately No. 71 has been much altered and was certainly used for residential accommodation in the 19<sup>th</sup> C (Census Returns and photographs). This may have always been the case and it may have served as accommodation for the manorial steward or tenant. The whole building range, including Barn Cottage and Granary Cottage at Thameside were certainly in the ownership of the Mackenzies of Fawley Court in the 19<sup>th</sup> C, who were the successors to the Freemans, formerly manorial lords of Henley. The value of these large commercial buildings, close to the river, was obviously the reason for them being owned by the manorial lords; the same goes for Baltic Cottage on the south side of the street in R.Greys parish, which is connected with de Greys of Greys Court through 15<sup>th</sup> C. documentary evidence; later on it was owned by the Stonors and this was still the case in the 19<sup>th</sup> C. (Tithe Returns and Stonor leases of Baltic and Grays Wharfs).

It is therefore likely that these buildings, close to the river, but not in the commercial market centre of the town, were owned by manorial owners as they provided safe trading and storage facilities for exports as well as imports in a very advantageous riverside location.

‘Old Timbers’ and ‘Friday Cottage’ were built from high quality scantling oak with the capacity to accommodate heavy storage goods upstairs, well out of the way of possible floods, but at the same time are not ostentatious. Apart from the moulded pilasters and integral brackets, as well as modest chamfers, there are no decorative mouldings or evidence of former decorative features, however there is the long groove, evidence of the sophisticated ‘double wall’ in Bay I.

The side purlin roofs, which gradually replaced the medieval crown posts in the 15<sup>th</sup> C, represent an advanced form of carpentry. All this seems to confirm that they were not wealthy merchants’ dwellings, but very likely had some accommodation, which appears to have included a first floor heated room.

A building date of the early to mid 15<sup>th</sup> seems likely. Unfortunately the fast and purpose grown, high quality oak used in this building does not contain enough tree rings for dendro dating purposes.

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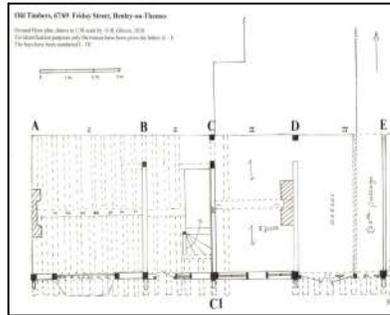
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**67-69 Friday Street, Henley-on-Thames**  
**Grade II**

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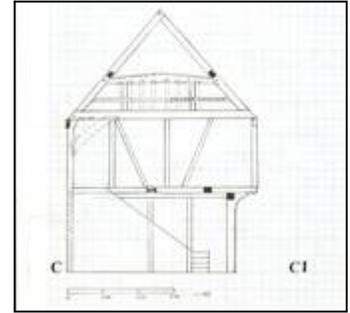
Owner: Ms Sandra Moon



1940s



Ground floor plan



Section at C –C1

**Notes on the history of the site:** 18<sup>th</sup> C documents connect it with grain storage, malting and Greys Brewery opposite. The 1878 OS map shows a long malt house attached to the rear. Owned by the Mackenzies of Fawley Ct, former lords of the manor of Henley, until condemned and sold in the 1920s, repaired and turned into a house in the early 1950s.

**Notes on architectural details:**

- 4 unequal timber framed bays of a formerly 6-bay building
- Bay I is the largest bay; it was formerly divided into 2 rooms
- Bay II could have been a wide cross passage with access to the 2 service rooms
- The two worn posts of Bay IV also indicate use as a passage
- The original front posts have carved pilasters and integral jetty brackets
- Flat laid joists 4” by 8” closely spaced
- Mortises and panel groove in soffit of front jetty beam for internal panelling confirming that this was a building of quality.
- At truss C at modern stairs: Scarf joint with mortise? of former axial beam
- On the first floor Bays I and II form two bedrooms and the staircase and are unlike the g.f. lay-out; former bay division is not clear in the roof as it has been replaced
- Evidence of arch braces and studs at trusses C & D north side; otherwise narrow raking struts in all dividing walls
- Most of the roof has been rebuilt, but trusses C & D survive. Both were formerly closed and show sooting and charring on their inside faces, particularly heavily charred on the principal rafters .
- Tenoned side purlins, cambered collars, queen struts, wind braces survive in bays III & IV and show the original roof construction

Probably a mid 15<sup>th</sup> commercial building of exceptional quality timbers and detailing, constructed for the entrepot trade with storage and some accommodation, unless the two eastern bays (No 71), which are part of the same building, have always been the residential part. It is shown as such on 19<sup>th</sup> C. photographs as well as the above one dating to c. 1940 and was then the only building in the row with a stack, domestic doors and windows. It also has a rear timber framed extension, later than the front range, but probably of 17<sup>th</sup> C. date, indicating early changes, probably to improve the accommodation.