

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

D R A F T

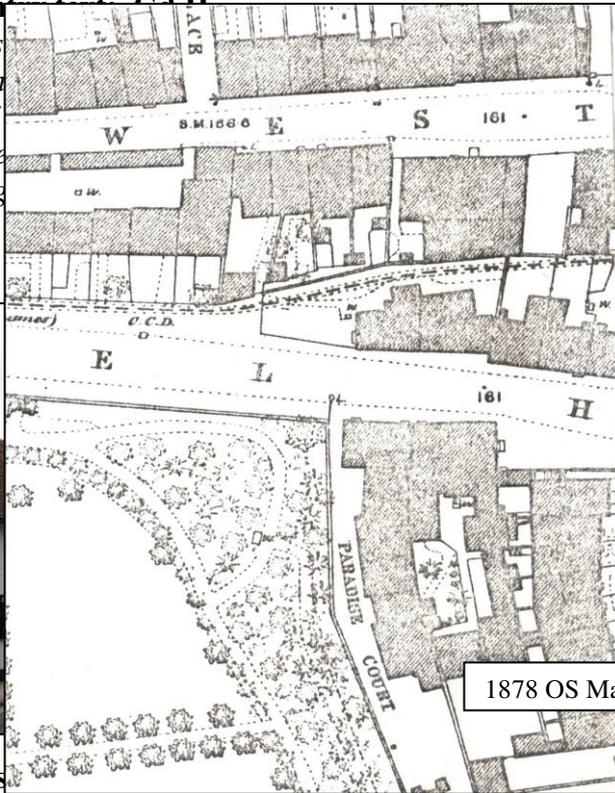
**Parish/County:** Henley-on-Thames, Oxon  
**Street and House name:** Friar Ctge. 36 Gravel Hill  
(part of 34-36 Gravel Hill)

**Owners:**  
**Recorder:** Ruth Gibson  
**Date:** 9.2. 2013

**Listing grade and entry:** Grade II  
*17<sup>th</sup> C and later. Poss. 17<sup>th</sup> C. Roughcast, central and rear gables. 1 1/2 storeys, 6 bays. 5 windows with shutters. 3 windows with shuttered gabled dormers. Long to rear.*



**South front of Nos 34 & 36 Gravel Hill**



1878 OS Map of HENLEY

Nos 34 & 36 Gravel Hill

**Maps:** The 1878 OS map, above, shows the building very much as it is today, divided into two cottages. It sits on a narrow plot, parallel to the street and is bounded at the back by a path, which also formed Henley's municipal boundary.

The 1780/88 Fawley Court Estate Map includes the historic core of Henley, but much is only schematically drawn, as only the areas in possession of the Freemans, lords of the Manor of Henley at that time, were of interest to them; i.e. such as Phyllis Court and the Bell Inn, here shown on the upper right hand part of the map. The cigar shaped upper market place is also shown, but only with buildings on either side of it, whether there were any in the central area is not clear at this small scale.



**Known History:** The building is located on the south side of what was the upper market place of the town. The earliest map of the area is that of the Fawley Ct. Estate of 1780/88. Whilst West Hill (now West Street) is shown as built-up on both sides, as is the south side of Gravel Hill, the north side of Gravel Hill is still shown as an open space on the map, apparently called 'Fisher Row Hill' on the map (*this needs checking on the original at the R&RM*)

**Description of the Building:** Only No. 36 has been visited so far, however it appears that this is part of a lobby entry house, running east-west parallel to street, with No. 34 being the other half.

Both Nos 34 and 36 have rough-cast, white painted walls, which hide any earlier walling material as well as earlier openings such as doorways. It has an old tiled roof, which is hipped at the western end. There is a central stack with two flues and end stack at each gable.

No. 36 consists of two ground floor and first floor attic rooms. It has a lean-to and small porch at the back; both are later extensions.

The door gives direct access to the ground floor room, which has a large inglenook type fire place in the east wall. The FP is brick built (2" bricks with a chamfered corner in the r.h. pier, the l.h. pier appears to be rebuilt in 2 1/2" bricks). There is an original exposed spine beam, with narrow chamfers and run-out stops at both ends. The FP bressumer has a similar chamfer, but is less clearly defined as it has sustained fire damage at the back through years of use. It also has a number of scorch marks on its face, probably accidentally made by rush lights or are they of symbolic significance?

The second room, formerly separated by a timber stud wall but now open-plan, is reached by a step up. This step as well as the empty mortises in the underside (soffit) of the transverse beam, which runs between the two bays are indicators that this was probably an end wall originally.

The FP in the end wall of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, western bay preserves no original features. A turned staircase rises from this bay behind a partition wall and timber door made from wide planks, traditional strap hinges and iron latch – all used throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which may help to date this extension.

On the first floor some of the original timber framing is visible. At the top of the stairs is a partition wall, probably formerly the end wall already noted at g.f. level, where the tie beam has been cut to allow for a doorway. In the small bathroom beyond part of the roof timbers are exposed; i.e. a purlin with pegs set 18" apart for the widely spaced common rafters (not visible). A straight wind brace connects the principal rafter to this purlin.



**Left:** Soffit of transverse beam with empty mortise where the wall timber post was removed. There are also a number of smaller mortise slots of former wall studs.

**Centre:** Chamfered brick corner of fire place pier. Unfortunately the c. 2" bricks have been given a heavy coat of paint, so that the details of this hand made building material can no longer be appreciated and analysed.

**Right:** Scorch marks on the timber bressumer of the main F.P.



First floor: rear/north part of the roof (visible only in the bathroom) with a substantial purlin and straight wind brace in the roof slope. The pegs, visible in the underside of the purlin, for holding the common rafters, are widely spaced and are strong indicators of a formerly thatched roof.

The partition wall between the two bays had its tie beam cut to allow for a door opening to be created, probably when the western bay and stairs were added to the existing timber framed building.



Outshut extension to the roof and small porch at the back of No. 36

**Conclusion – so far:** No. 36 appears to be the western part of a lobby entry house with its former front door in the centre, giving access to a small lobby in front of the chimney. A room to each side of the chimney would have been accessed from this lobby. The other half of the chimney/fireplace is now located in No. 34, but it is not known how many original bays exist there, as a long rear extension might indicate an L-shaped plan form.

The western bay or room at No. 36 seems to be a mid 19<sup>th</sup> addition, judging by the type of straight staircase with turned bottom steps, rising behind a partition wall. The location and bricks of the west gable chimney also indicate such a date. If No. 34 has been similarly extended, the present division into two cottages may be a response to the steep rise in population in the 19<sup>th</sup> C rather than an original division at the time of its first construction.

This building together with the oldest part of the ‘Row Barge’ in West Hill, which is also timber framed, appear to be the first two infill buildings, arriving c. 1600, of the space which had probably been designated as the Upper Market Place, when the town was planned and laid out in the 12<sup>th</sup> C. Its neighbours on both sides of Gravel Hill north appear to date from the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and are relatively late arrivals, changing the character of the townscape in a significant way.