

14 – 16 Church Street, Harwich. Short report.

List Entry Number: 1204067

Grid Reference: TM 26050 32604

A timber-framed building of three phases that would have originally consisted of a medieval central open hall with roof parallel to the street flanked by N and S gabled cross wings. Major changes and extensions occurred in the 17th century when a brick cellar and rear extension were built together with a roof raise to create prestigious first floor chambers. In the 19th century another rear extension completed the double pile plan which allowed the property to be divided with separate stairs and attic rooms lit by dormer windows into the front roof above the rendered façade.



PHASE I

This is constructed in the close studded timber-framed style of the area that would have had wattle and daub panel infill. The N cross wing is of two bays with a central partition as evidenced by the four empty mortises in the soffit of the transverse beam. The front bay now has the original jetty underbuilt with the N post containing a remnant of an arched head shop/workshop window in the mortise of the cut off jetty plate. This front room was accessed by a door positioned against the front wall of the hall/shop partition within the former cross passage. The rear bay would have functioned as the service room and was accessed from the hall by a door against the rear wall. The stud against the rear storey post has a mortise for a pegged flat door head. The ceiling is plastered so the joints to the five common joists cannot be determined although the pegs in the soffit of the transverse beam mark their position. The original position for the stair trap could not be determined.



Some framing of the S cross wing wall is visible from the present hall and shows that it was also originally jettied to the front. An intruded brick stack in the SW corner of the hall now covers any surviving evidence for the position of the door to the adjacent parlour. No. 14 probably originally performed the function of a two bay parlour at ground floor but there is only very limited evidence of original framing visible. The front jetty is underbuilt, the ceiling plastered and



the transverse beam covered.

Any evidence of surviving structure of the first floor walls to the medieval cross wings has been covered by later plaster.

PHASE II

The 17th century changes create a brick cellar under the parlour cross wing and hall, a timber-framed rear wing creates an L shape plan and roof raise to the medieval building allows for a prestigious first floor chamber to be created.

The brick cellars are built in English bond with bricks averaging 9¹/₄" x 4¹/₂"-4⁵/₈" x 2¹/₈" running under the hall and parlour. It is assumed that the original access was from the rear yard. The cellar to no. 14 is of great interest as tenterhooks have survived to each side of the transverse common joists. The tenterhooks are positioned at 8" (200mm) centres in a run of four that is 24" (610mm) wide. To date no specific purpose for this spacing has been identified.



The front wall of the central hall is re-built to align with the front of the underbuilt cross wings. A floor was inserted into the former open hall between the N and S cross wing walls but the axial beam and the common joists are covered in plaster. The floored hall was heated by a now much altered intruded lateral stack. Most of the rear wing structure is covered at ground



floor apart from a section of midrail. In the soffit of this are paired mortises, one rectangular and the other round the evidence of a moulded mullion window. In no. 14 the central transverse beam has been supported at the S end by a typical 17th century post with quadrant moulding, lambs tongue stop with end notch. A stack was intruded into the SW corner but this is now much altered and blocked at ground floor level.

Attached to it as a bressumer is a carved section of timber of continuous foliate design with central shield-like motif and the date 1606 with initial 'S' superimposed between the '6' and '0' with the initials 'TE' below.



It would appear from the configuration of the newly formed first floor chambers that the range 14-16 Church Street were still in one ownership allowing for a main first floor chamber to be made at the front of the building encompassing the parlour chamber and part of the hall chamber. Divided by the plastered axial and transverse beams the areas were decorated with central pendant and fleur-de-lys to the corners with intermediate Tudor roses. At present this chamber is divided between the two properties with a newly positioned partition between former cross wing and hall chamber leaving an area of plain plaster ceiling against the N wall.



It would appear that the shop/service chamber remained undecorated and the original position of the first floor wall is now marked by a transverse beam. It is suggested that in the 17th century alterations the stair traps in the cross wings were blocked. Access was then gained to the first floor by a dogleg stair in the rear section of the former cross passage/hall. The rear landing would have then allowed separate access to each of the chambers in the frontage range and the new rear chamber. To the front of the stairs could have been a closet accessed from the main chamber.

The ceiling of the rear chamber is also divided into quadrants with a central pendant surrounded by four foliate design lozenges with fleur-de-lys in the corners. The axial and transverse beams were also plastered and decorated with the boss/foliate lozenge and intermediate Tudor roses.

The 17th century roof runs parallel with the street and is of joggled side purlin style with elm principal rafters marked by narrow chiselled carpenter's marks. Some common rafters are reused from a crown post roof evidenced by the collar housings and there is also a reused crenellated timber amongst the ceiling joists.



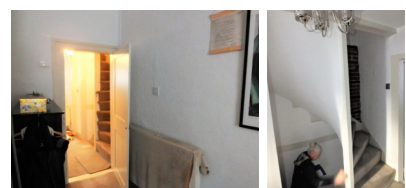
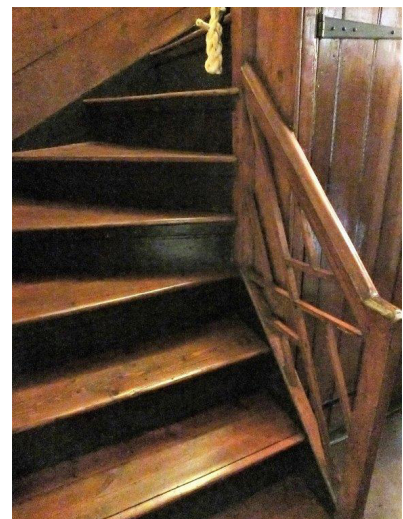
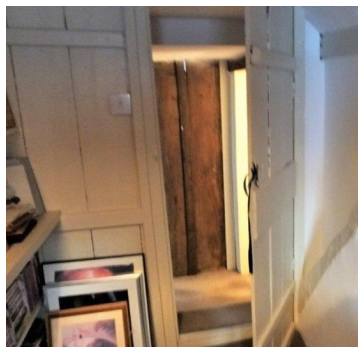
Both properties have reused 17th century panelling and no. 14 has a two board ventilated door with cut out 'S' design.



PHASE III

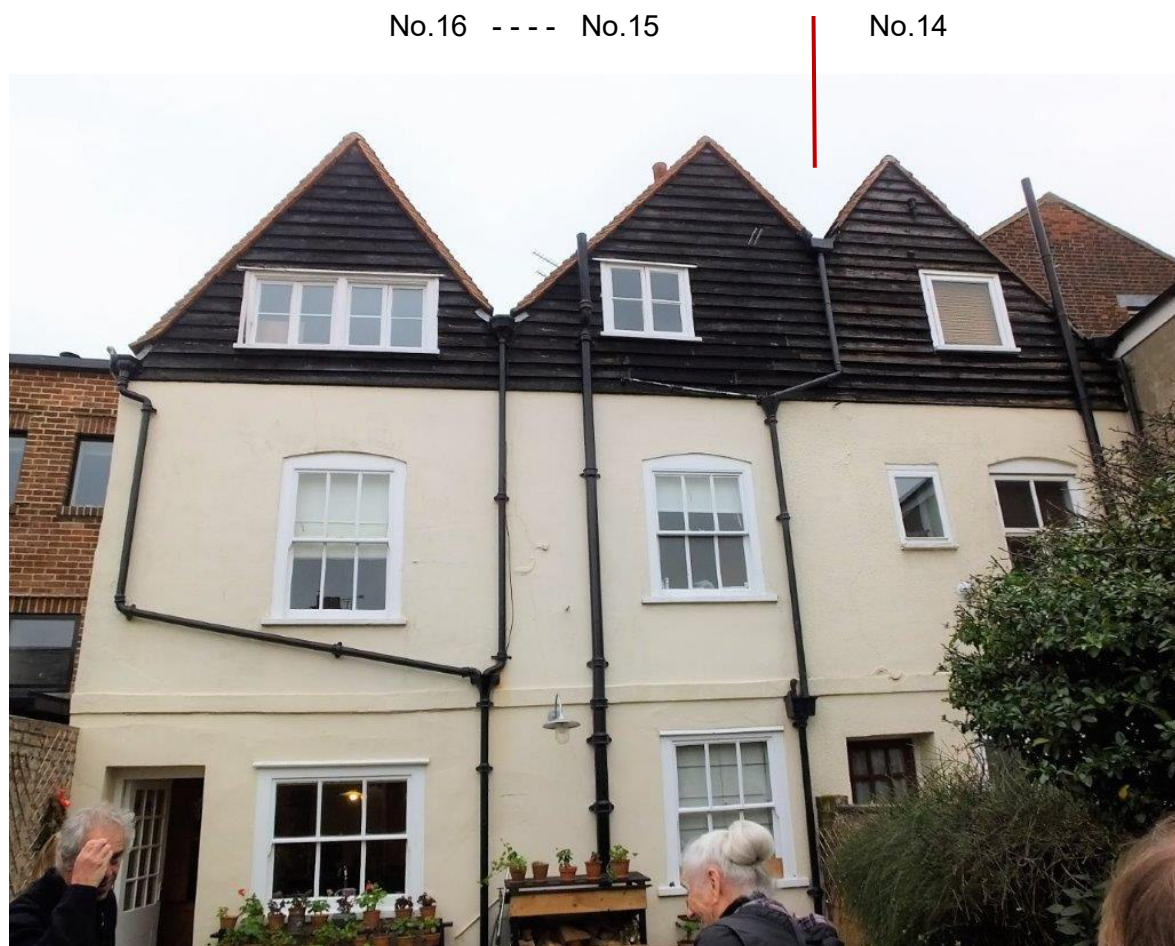
A linked gabled extension to the rear turned the 17th century L plan into double pile allowed it to be divided into two properties. This meant major changes to the first floor plan by the division of the main chamber and flooring over the former opening for the dogleg stair in the frontage range. A new partition widened the former shop/service chamber and meant the demolition of the partition that created the 17th century main chamber.

Winder stairs were then positioned into the new linked gable extension giving access to first floor, attics and cellars. The stairs to the attic in no. 14 are lined with reused plank and muntin panels. No. 15-16 has an unpainted chiniserie handrail to the lower flight of stairs.



DISCUSSION

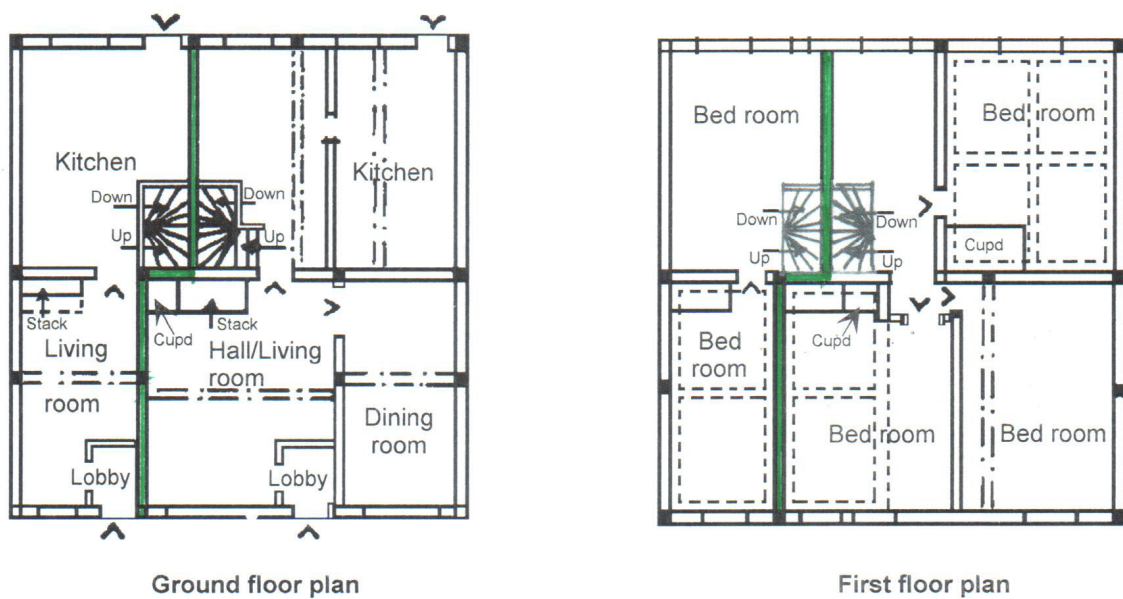
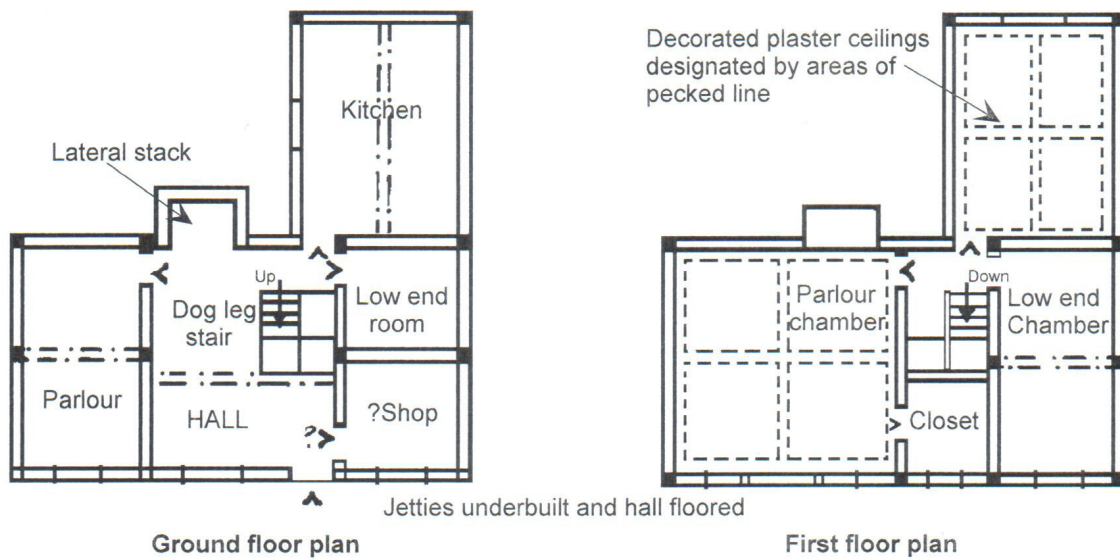
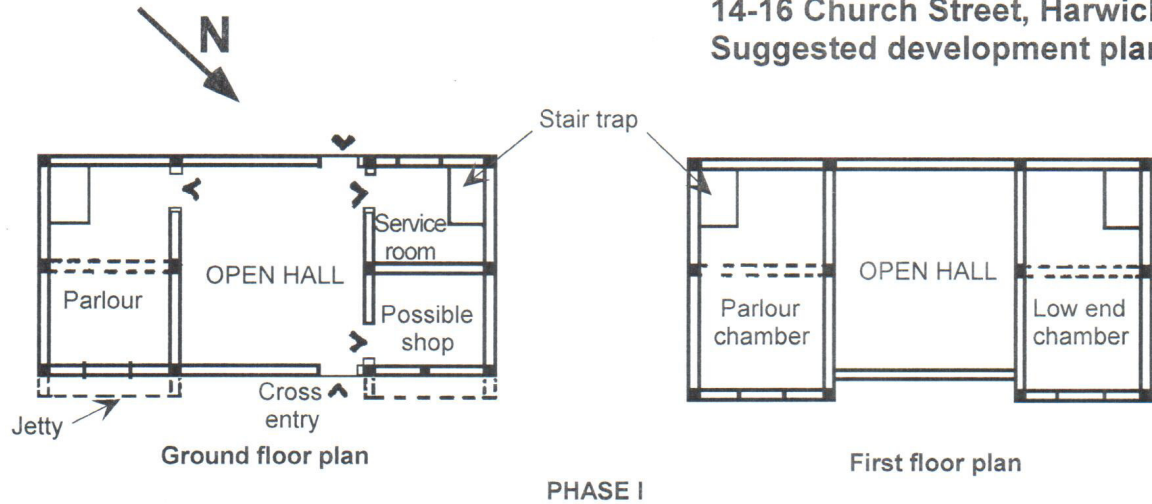
The phase I medieval building would have accorded with the typical gabled street scene of Harwich with the low open hall sandwiched between the gabled cross wings. The evidence for the arch headed shop/workshop window shows that there was originally some form of commerce associated with the building. This element must have been profitable in the 17th century to consider the expenditure of building the new brick cellar perhaps to extend the commercial activity. The status of the building also changed dramatically with the prestigious decorated first floor chambers to the front and new rear wing. The final phase adds more living accommodation allowing the building to be divided. This was achieved by dividing the main first floor chamber back to the former limits of the parlour chamber and blocking off part of the cellar. Winder stairs were positioned in the new linked gable rear extension giving access to the first floor, cellars and attics. With the flooring over of the 17th century dogleg stairs the service and hall chambers were reconfigured.



Rear of property showing the way the roofs were configured to gain maximum height with the building divided into two separate properties.

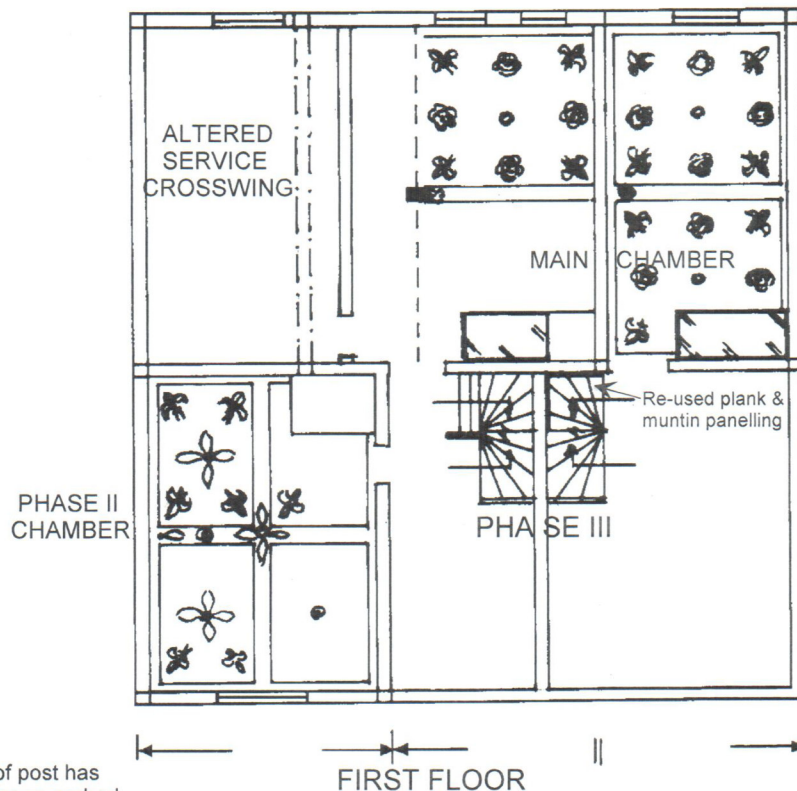
Elphin & Brenda Watkin. February/April 2020.

14-16 Church Street, Harwich Suggested development plan

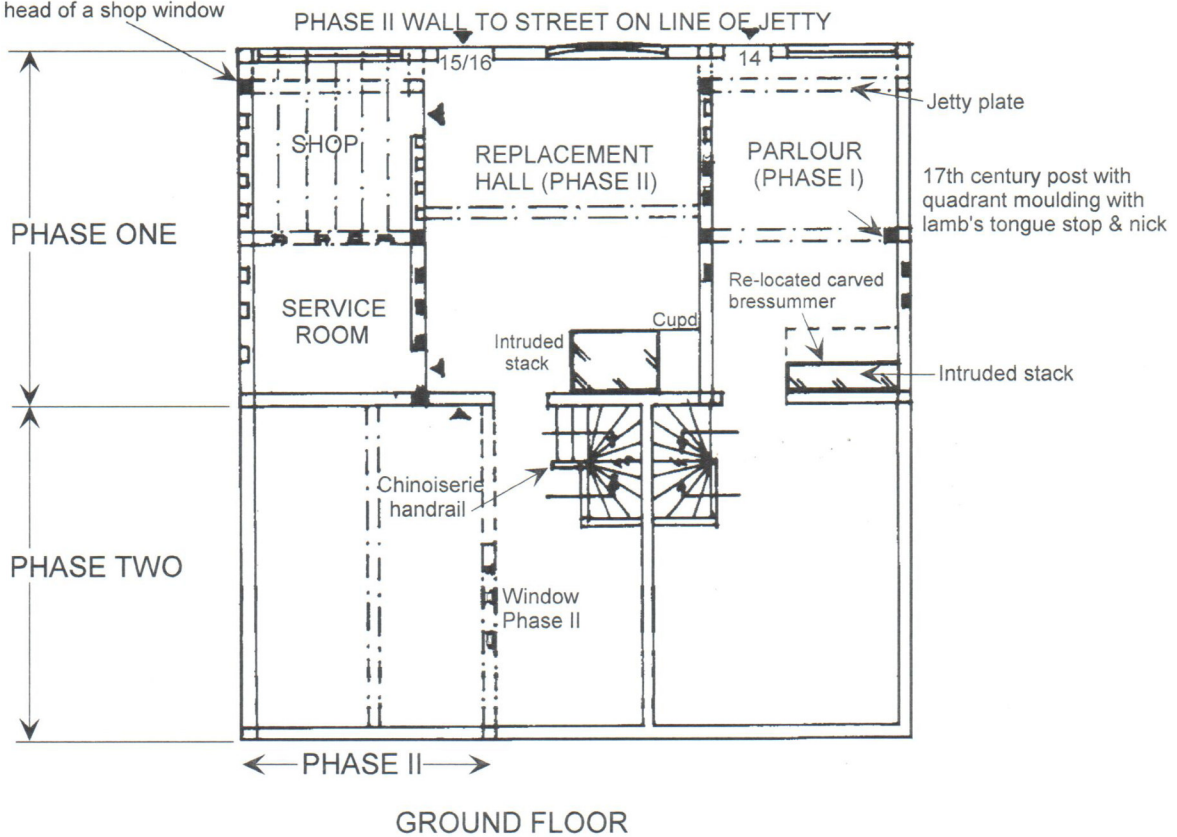




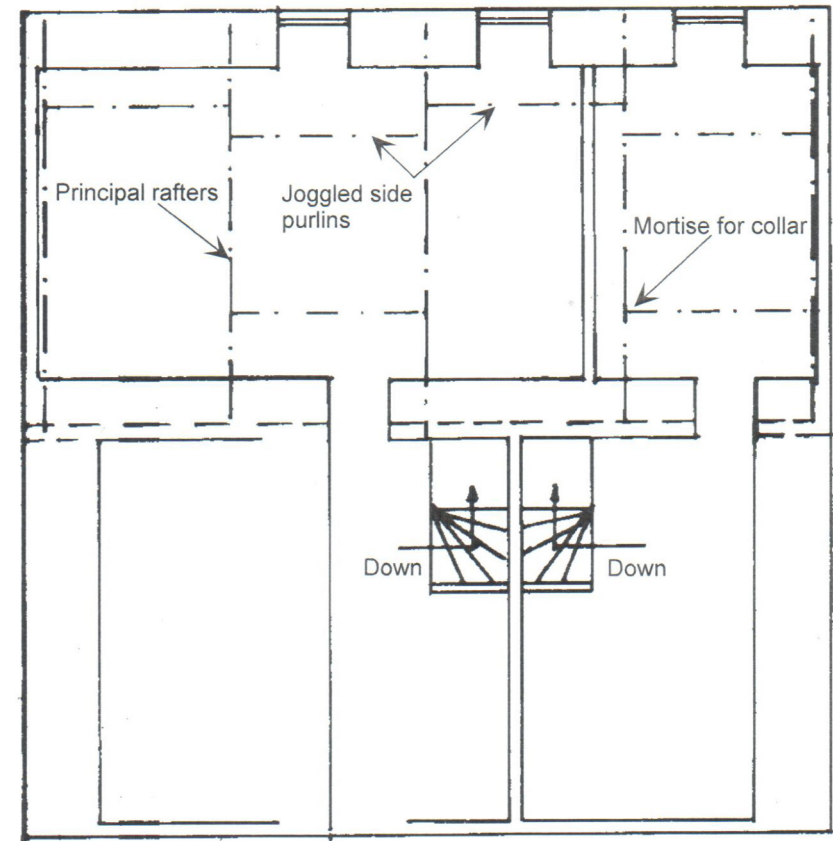
14-16 Church Street, Harwich Ground and First Floor Plans



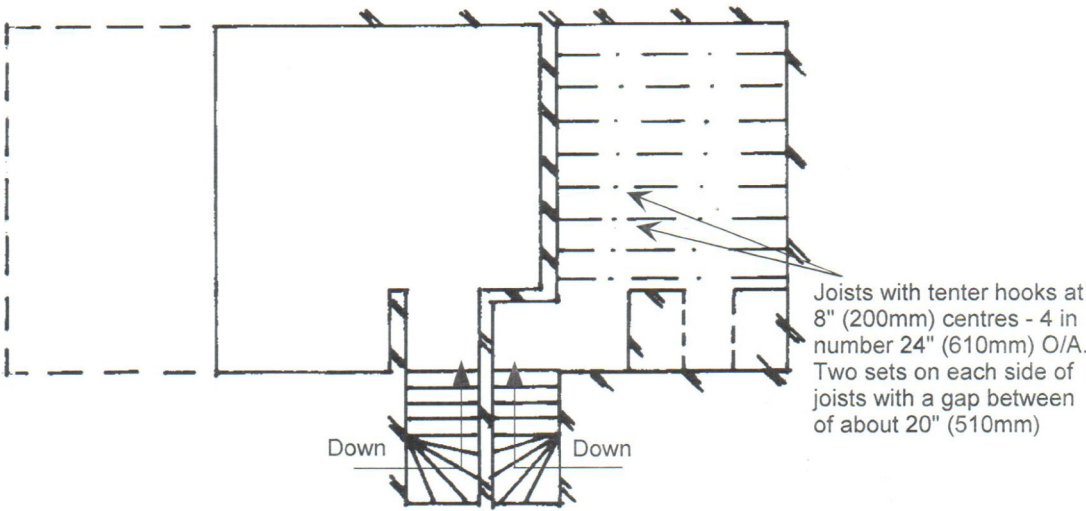
Remnant of post has evidence for an arched head of a shop window



14-16 Church Street, Harwich
Attic and Cellar Floor Plans



PHASE II REAR EXTENSION
ATTIC FLOOR



CELLAR UNDER PARLOUR