

34/35 Church Street, Harwich. Short building report.

Listed II* List no. 1187884.

Map Ref. TM 25926 32710

INTRODUCTION

This is an imposing timber-framed house with brick façade of 2 storeys, roofed in plain clay tiles, also with attics and cellars all of three main phases with the original phase being of a T-shaped transitional house plan. The frontage range is orientated NW-SE and stands on the south side of Church Street. It consisted of two bays comprising of a hall and parlour with stair/stack bay and kitchen to the rear. The second phase relates to the addition of a stair tower and the third phase major changes to the layout of the house, extensions to the NW side of the rear range and the brick cellars and with the addition of a brick frontage façade.

PHASE I

The original brick cellar situated at the NW side under the parlour is built of narrow bricks in English bond. It contains numerous small niches with a larger opening into the base of stack that could have provided for a low heat source possibly using charcoal. Similar arrangements are found elsewhere for making 'clotted' cream. Described in the listing are the double chamfered spine





beams with flat section joists housed with soffit tenons and diminished haunches now much altered.

At ground floor level the later panelling covers any evidence of the earlier timber-framing but it can be said that the front was originally jettied. This is evidenced by the axial beam which with the under-building of the jetty is now offset whereas the axial beam at first floor is central. At first floor level the timber-framing is of primary braced form with the exterior originally



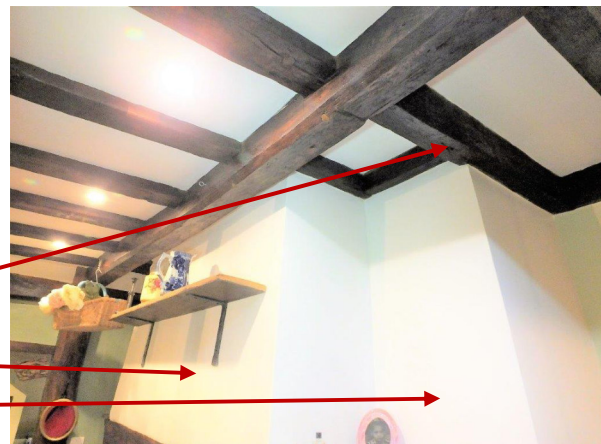
rendered. The primary braces are of heavy section and slightly serpentine in form and are pegged to the rear jowled storey posts and midrail with the upper and lower studs added. There are no braces present in the front section of close studded framing.

The stack/stair bay now contains hearths to the two ground floor rooms and first floor chambers. A cooking hearth to the rear kitchen also has a first floor hearth that is now blocked.

This area is possibly where the original stair was positioned alongside the main stack.

Main stack

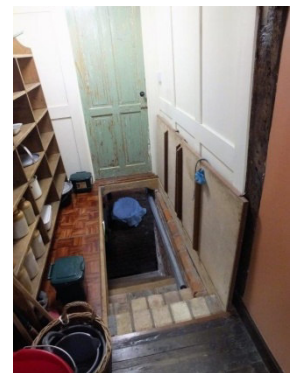
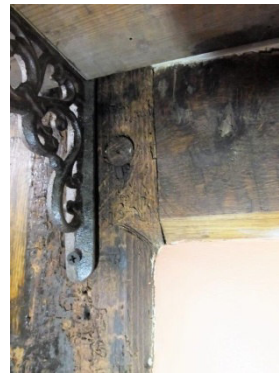
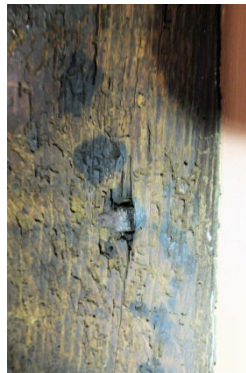
Later stacks



The kitchen in the rear range has the back wall replaced in modern blockwork but the NW wall is timber-framed. This has an original low door with fully pegged head, external chamfered jambs and broken off pintles in-situ is situated against the storey post at the N end of the cooking hearth. This opening would have given access to the wide external steps that accessed an original brick cellar below the parlour. A full



height door has been intruded into the original frame of the NW wall with unpegged head giving access to the now covered area and modified cellar



access. The chamfered axial beam has wide mortises for flat section joists but they now house narrow vertical joists.



Are they replacements or is the axial beam reused? As all the other ground floor joists are covered a comparison



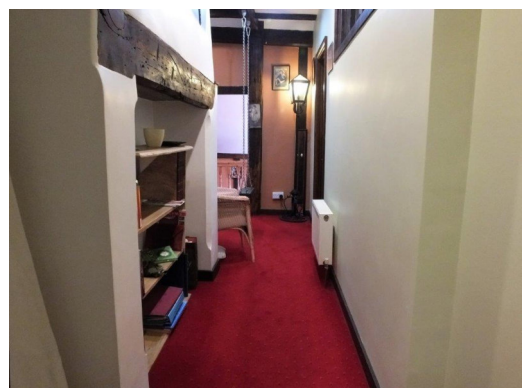
cannot be made. The mantle beam over the wide cooking hearth is chamfered with a mason's mitre at each end so that the chamfer is carried down the brick jambs. The mantle beam contains a number of burnt candle protection marks. The stud spacing of the rear range is 1' 10" at ground floor level and 2' 0" at first floor and appears to be of close studded style. Given the extent of frieze window at first floor level primary bracing would not be practical.

At first floor the frontage range contained two chambers with the NW parlour chamber originally accessed from the SE hall chamber. Until the later stair tower was built it is suggested that the stairs were located in the space now taken by the hall and hall chamber stack.

There is a marked difference in the hierarchy of the hall and parlour chambers. The hall chamber has simple chamfers to the axial beam, wall plate and tie beams whereas in the parlour chamber these elements are decorated with double roll mouldings. The parlour chamber is



also heated by a hearth with elaborate stone surround decorated with carved strapwork, grotesques, foliage and jambs with moulded vase stops. The kitchen chamber defined by the jowled storey posts to the rear of the stair/stack bay was originally heated by a hearth at first floor. In the close studded SE wall are the remnants of a frieze window with moulded mullions. With the rear wall now rebuilt it is not possible to say if this window



was replicated along the rear wall, with a central oriel or even returned along the NW wall as here the evidence is covered. However given the number of moulded mullions reused in a modern borrowed light it is safe to surmise that there was a longer length of frieze window.

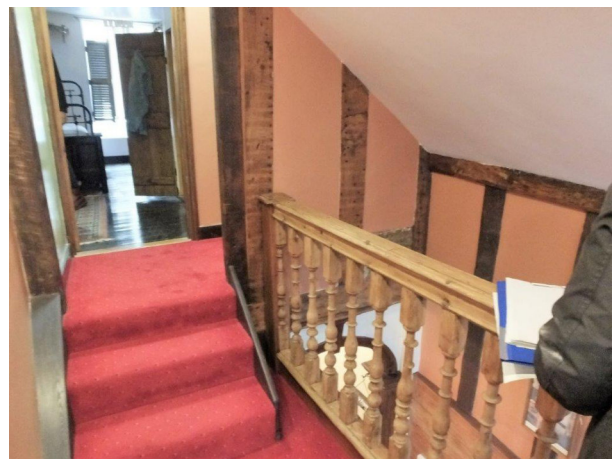


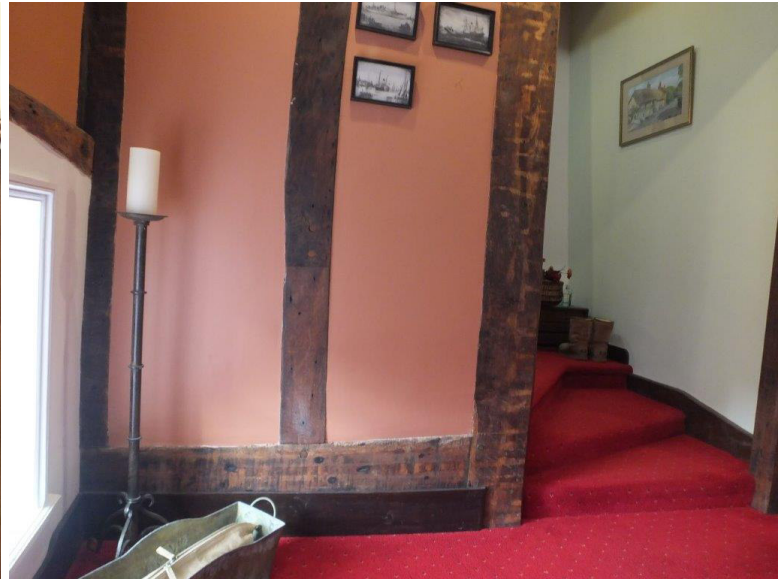
The present roof form is of side purlin framed into principal rafters with deep board type collars and where exposed within the rear extension there is evidence for windbraces to the central truss. Carpenter's marks can be seen scribed to the rear face of the principal and common rafters.



PHASE II

This represents the addition of a spacious stair tower set in the SW corner of the original T-shaped form. It is built in the traditional close studded style of the area with lean-to roof form. Alterations to the way the house was used would have been minimal other than the creation of new openings to the hall and kitchen chambers, steps to accommodate changes in level and an addition to the original stack to provide





hearths to the now heated hall and hall chamber. The external walls of the SW corner and SE wall of the rear range have evidence of carpenter's marks where the studs are now exposed within the enclosure of the later stair tower. The exposed studs



show that the building was originally rendered by the evidence of regular nailing for lathing and slight bleaching from the lime render. Suffolk houses were generally rendered over earlier than in Essex but then it was usual to expose the main structural

frame timbers. This does not happen here. The corner panel has a section of original wattle and daub infill exposed.

PHASE III

This makes the most changes to the layout and appearance of the house from Church Street. The rendered frontage with jetty is replaced with a mid 18th century brick façade in the latest Flemish bond with moulded brick modillioned cornice, raised brick string course and centre of frontage stepped out. It has an elaborate doorcase, six panel door and vertical sliding sash windows.



The original brick cellar is extended to include a barrel vaulted wine store under the hall and another under the pavement and road at a lower level to act as a coal store with coal hole in the pavement. Stub walls taken up to the vaulted brick roof provided controlled storage for the loose coal. The original open stairs to the cellar are now enclosed within a two storey lean-to roofed extension to the NW of the rear range.



Vaulted roofed wine cellar with originally a lockable door from the main cellar



View up to infilled coal hole from pavement.
Main store beyond



Entrance from main cellar down to coal store.

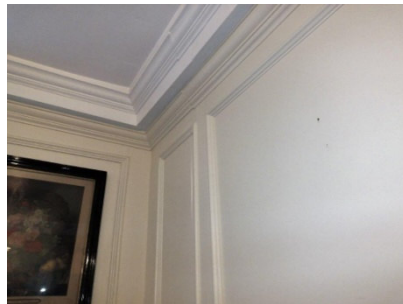
Internally a partition was inserted into the hall bay creating a panelled passageway against the SE wall with an elaborate semi-circular arched entrance with moulded imposts giving access to the stair tower. The newly formed room, entered from the



passageway was finished in typical painted pine panelling with folding shutters to the windows. The ceiling was plastered and the axial beam boxed in. The original over mantel painting, said to be in store at the time of listing has been replaced with a copy by the current owner. Access between the hall and parlour is still maintained



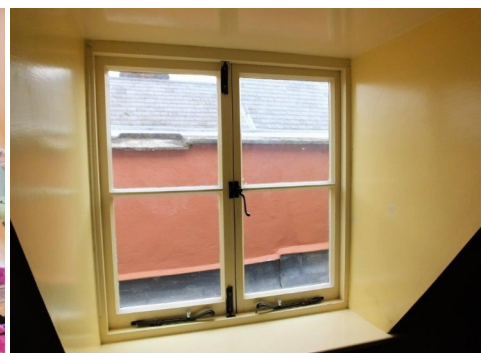
with an additional door in the rear wall giving access to the new NW extension. The parlour has also been finished in painted pine panelling with plastered ceiling and boxed in axial beam. The pine fire surround has been infilled with brick reducing the opening.

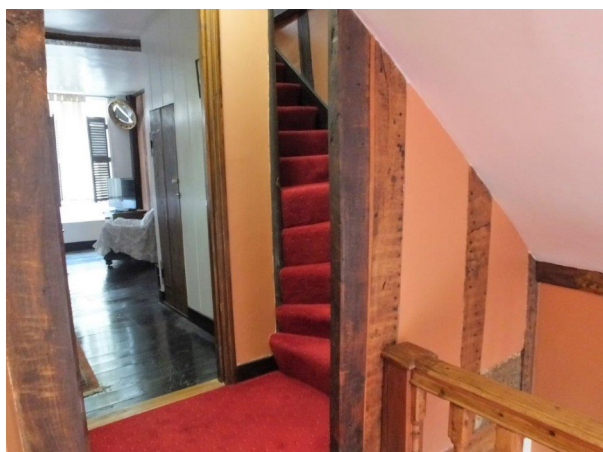


At first floor a new access is made into the parlour chamber from the new NW extension which then allows for winder stairs to be constructed with lobby in the rear W and S corners of the frontage range. These give independent access to two newly created attic rooms in the frontage roof lit by



dormer windows behind the parapet. The purlins are exposed with very deep 'board' type collars mortised





South end. Entry from stair tower to main range and inserted stair up to attic



Entry to attic room from stair at the south end.

and pegged into the principal rafters, the outer pair at each end being inset from the flank walls. This roof suggests a possible remodelling when these major changes to the building take place. (Inset flank wall principal trusses have also been noted in St Osyth parish on buildings of a similar 18th century age.)

DISCUSSION

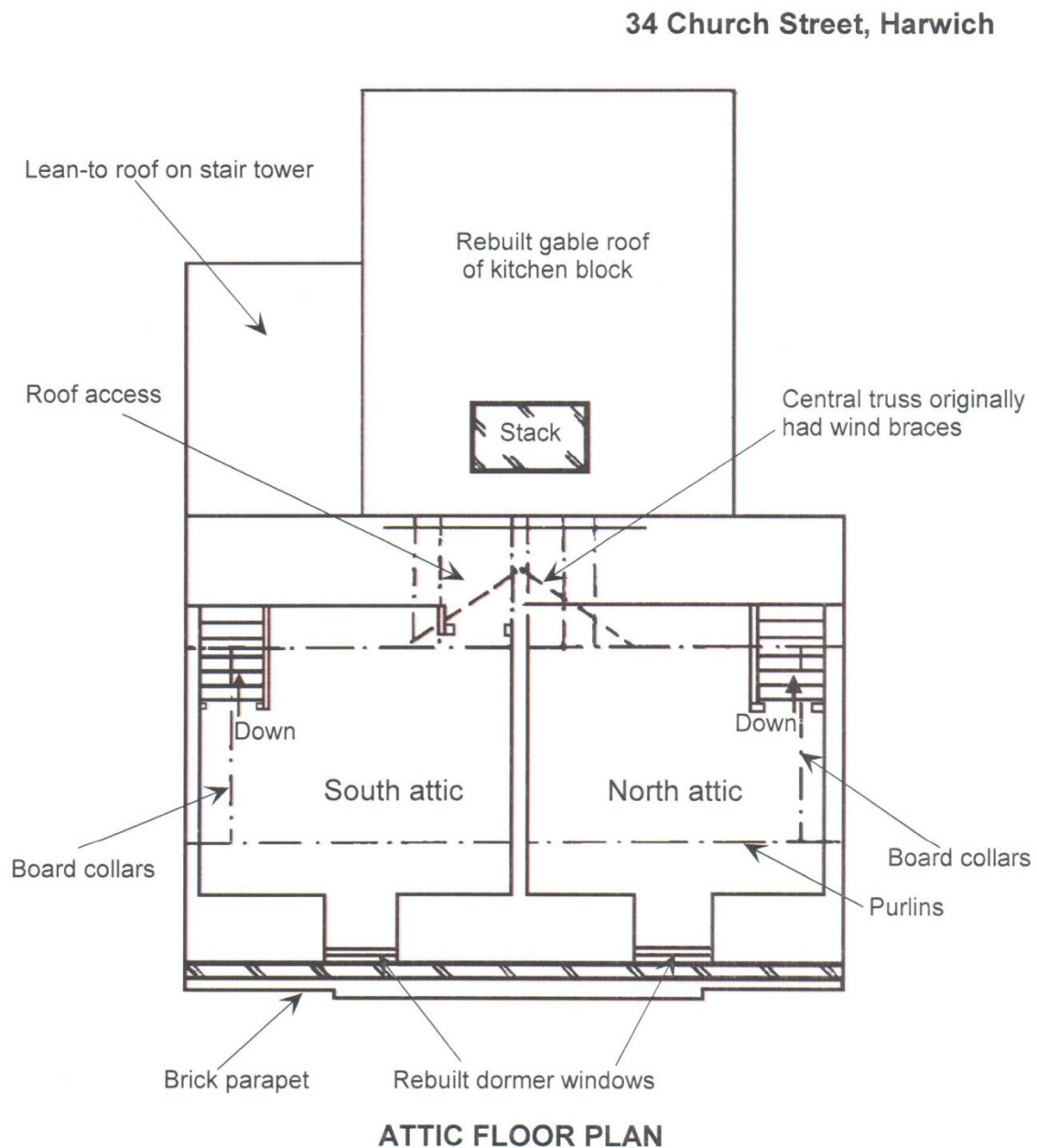
Due to the major changes the original access to the building cannot be determined. The list description accords a date of mid to late 16th century to the original build and notes that the long serpentine primary bracing is probably a very early example. However there are no other significant dating features such as floor joist or scarf joints to support it other than the double roll mouldings in the parlour chamber. In the frontage range of The Red Lion, High Street, Colchester, a site owned by the Dukes of Norfolk heavy curved braces have studs moticed, tenoned and pegged into the top and bottom. This is a very early form of primary braced timber-framing dated by dendrochronology to 1475/6. However the date for change from close studding to primary bracing is more usually around 1600 making this building an interesting candidate for possible tree-ring dating with the original frame possibly somewhere from late 16th century to early 17th century.

Of interest is the urban plan with kitchen to the rear (similar to 4 East Street, Coggeshall) the carved stone surround to the first floor parlour chamber fireplace and the fenestration to the kitchen chamber. A side extension to 26 King's Head Street has similar frieze windows that would have looked over a possible garden area. Without the later development of West Street the kitchen chamber here could have enjoyed extensive views perhaps over a garden or open area to the river.

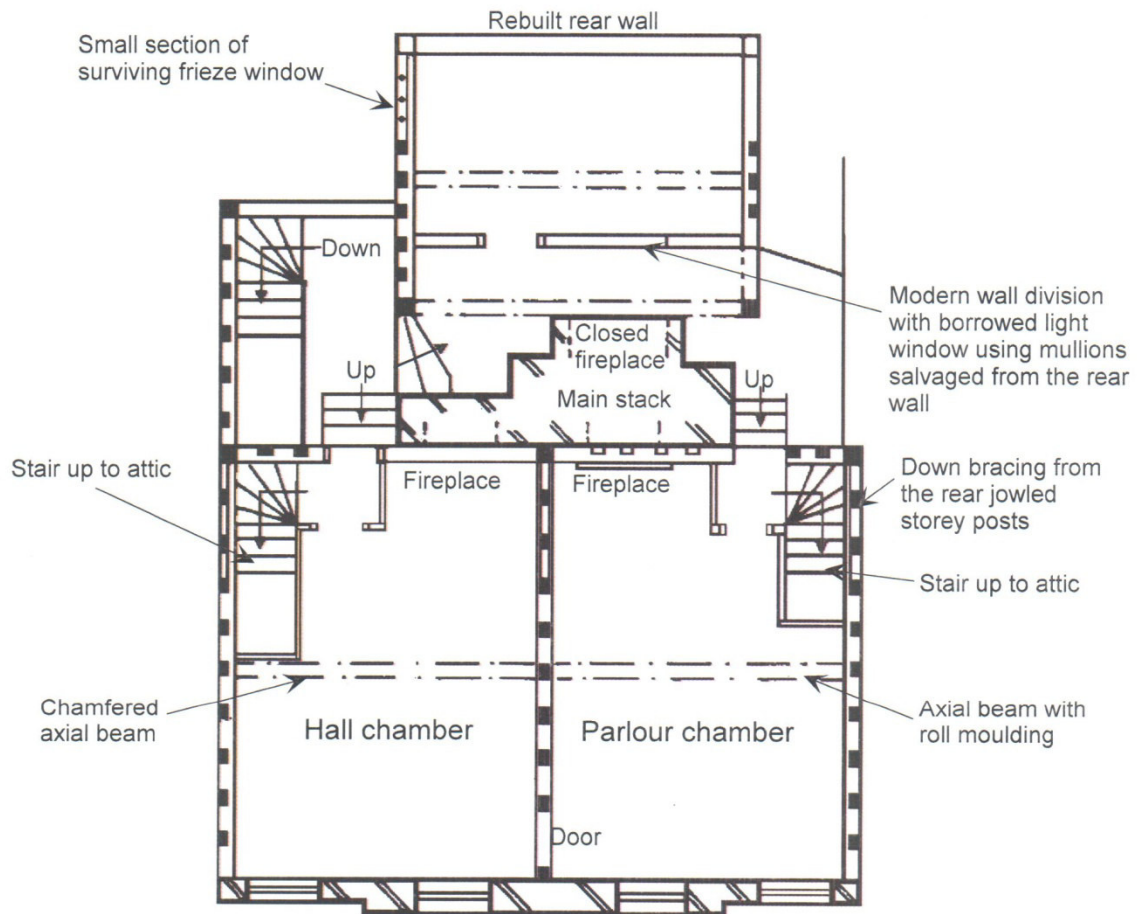
The 18th century sees a major investment into the modernisation and upgrading of the earlier house to perhaps accommodate the changing status and expectations of the owners. It is interesting to compare this outcome with The Alma and 26 King's Head Street. Here the original 15th /16th century building was of extremely high quality but by the late 18th century any changes to layout and exterior were minimal.

Here former out buildings were being demolished so that a state of the art 18th century brick house could be built facing onto East Gate Street. This was eventually incorporated into The Alma Inn. This appears to be showing more of a change in use of the site rather than the pure upgrading as seen in Church Street.

Elphin & Brenda Watkin. April 2020

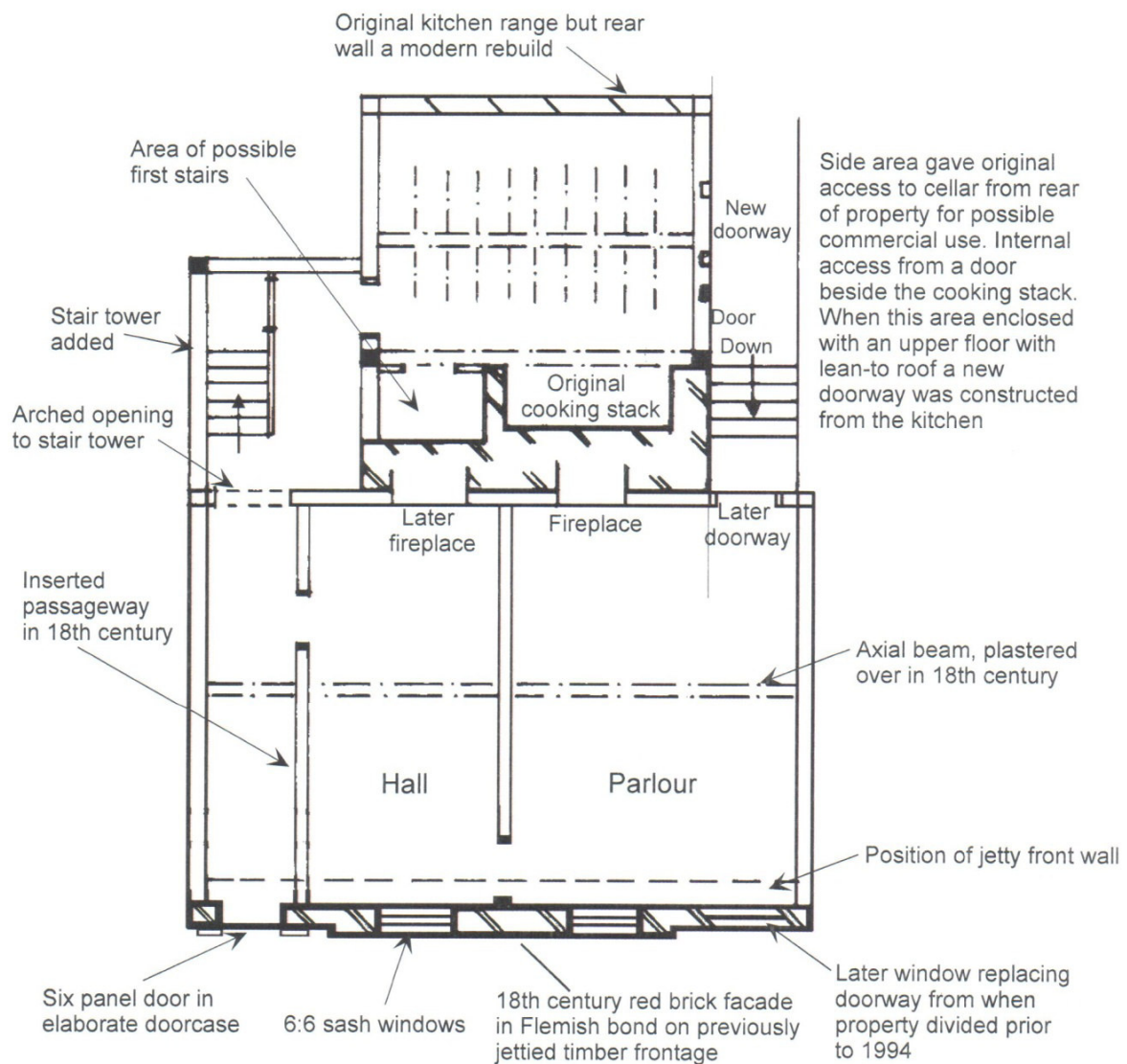


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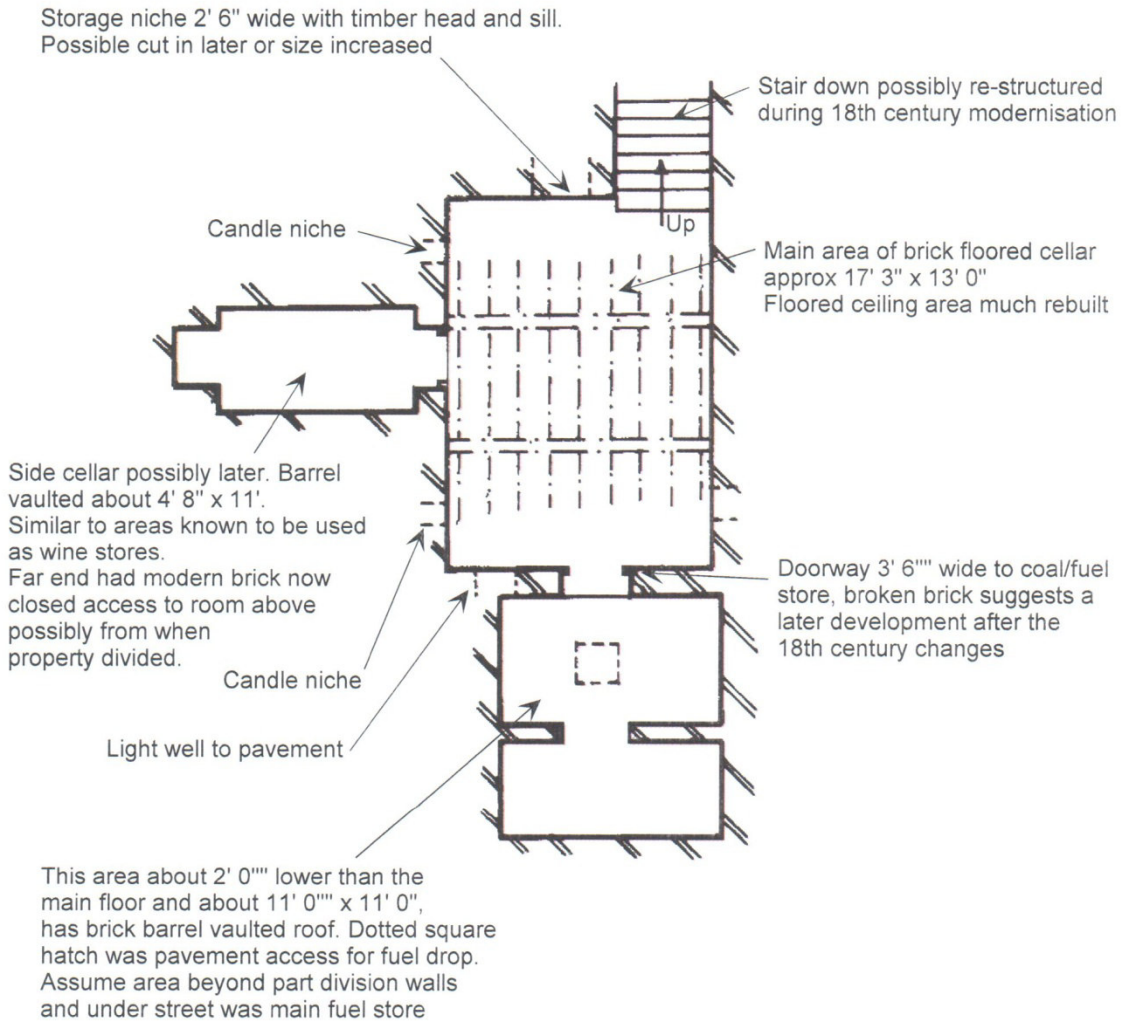
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

34 Church Street, Harwich



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

34 Church Street, Harwich



CELLAR FLOOR PLAN

ADDENDUM.

A digitised sketch by Dave Stenning dated 1990 from an ECC archive has thrown further light on the fenestration of the rear range before the re-building of the rear wall in block. The ground floor had a frieze light in the NW wall adjacent to the rear corner post. There are also frieze lights either side of the central stud of the rear timber-framed wall. At first floor the rear and NW wall are shown to be fully studded with the extant frieze light being the only fenestration to the kitchen chamber.

It also suggests that the rear wing is added. However with the primary braced construction a very stable frame results across the rear of the frontage range. When extensions are added with an open truss it is extremely unusual for the open truss not to have bracing. The lack of bracing gives more credence to the suggestion that the original build was of T-shaped transitional plan form using the stability of the main frame for the rear wing.

