

The Old Swan House, 14 King's Head Street, Harwich, Essex.

Introduction

This building is now integrated under one roof with a parapet to the front façade. Three main phases of build were identified in the frontage range. The building can be described as being of alternate rebuild and it appears to have started as a single crosswing open hall house. SE-Hall-NW as viewed.



Building

The present crosswings are of different ages with the listing according a late 15th century date to the SE crosswing. This is of three bays, timber-framed in oak in the typical close studded style of the region and was formerly jettied to the front. A doorway, now blocked, with the arched head removed and wall painting above would have given access to the front bay either from the outside or the open hall depending on the position of the early hall. This doorway is positioned in the side wall of the crosswing. No other doorways could be determined due to the insertion of a stack when the open hall was rebuilt and the intrusion of a later stair. The transverse beams are now plastered so that where floor joists were visible the type of joint could not be determined and the roof structure had been lost to the 19th century re-roofing. This means the loss of valuable dating features. A panel of daub with a scratched chevron design is preserved in the rear bay. This could have been an original finish or it could then be finished with a thin coat of lime plaster. Carpenters assembly marks in the form of typical Roman numerals, made with a race knife, were visible on the rear wall now covered by the 19th century rear extension. They marked the six wall studs for the first floor above the mid rail and empty mortises marked a lower register of seven studs.



At first floor level of the SE crosswing the remnants of a timber-framed front gable show that there was a central oriel window. Unjowled storey posts have empty mortises for arched braces showing that the front chamber was of at least two bays. It was not possible to determine if the rear bay formed a separate chamber. From the closet to the front of the stack in the rebuilt hall part of a trenched tension brace is visible showing that external bracing was used in the crosswing. A small section of guilloche pargetted design from when the timber-frame was covered over has been preserved on the rear gable by the later extension.



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The NW crosswing is also of three bays of similar framing style, originally jettied to the front and now has a passage way intruded through the ground floor on the NW side. Evidence survives in the form

of empty mortises for a former partition to show that the rear bay was a separate room. This was entered from the hall by a door adjacent to the partition. An empty mortise next to the storey post is for a door post and the opening is emphasised by a mason's chamfer on the soffit of the mid rail. The front room would have been accessed by another doorway, to the front of the partition, constructed in a similar way. Some carpenter's assembly marks were apparent to the upper register of studs. These appeared to have been made with a carpenter's knife rather than a race knife. The central transverse beam of the front room has a deep chamfer with run out stops. The storey post in the passage way has a jowl helping to support this transverse beam. Floor joist joints could not be determined as the ceilings were plastered. This also prevented the identification of a stair trap position as in the SE crosswing although both crosswings would have had independent access to the first floor.



Inner wall of NW crosswing. Door



Passage cut through crosswing



At first floor there is evidence that the front chamber had been decorated with wall paintings. Surviving remnants are on exposed rafters of original roof. The storey posts were a mix of unjowled and jowled but the division of bays was uncertain. This crosswing was of



lower height than the hall or SE crosswing and as such some of the original roof structure was preserved when the roof was rebuilt. This consisted of paired collared rafters with some of the front collars still containing the pegs that would have held the collar purlin in place showing that a crown post roof had

existed. As with other buildings the crown posts and collar purlin have been removed.

As most of the frame has been regularly coated in black paint no weathering lines could be determined from the former low open hall.





A full two storey hall with stack bay has been slotted in between the two crosswings, spanning from front to rear. Previously jettied to the front the hall is divided by two axial beams one with ogee mouldings separated by a central flat fillet and the other beam is a replacement. These beams frame the stack which would have been central in the bay with a lobby to the front and stairs to the rear. The impression would have been of a long wall jettied building of lobby entry design.

The fireplace facing into the hall would have had the cooking hearth whilst that to the SE would have contained a smaller parlour type hearth. A passage way has now been created through the stack connecting the lobby to the former stair area. In the rear wall against a decorated jowled storey post is a surviving 'frieze' window with surviving ovolo moulded mullions that would have been set against a larger window, possibly an oriel with another 'frieze' window beyond.

At first floor the hall chamber has an elaborate plastered ceiling. Unfortunately the form of fenestration to the front wall could not be determined but it is suggested that it was possibly an oriel window flanked by 'frieze' windows. The rear wall had evidence for a central window. The hall chamber was heated with the fire surround having a four centred arch with sunken spandrels. The hearth has a modern brick infill. The area to the front of the stack probably formed a closet lit by a 'frieze' light and the original stairs to the rear of the stack. The roof was rebuilt to form attics in the 19th century.

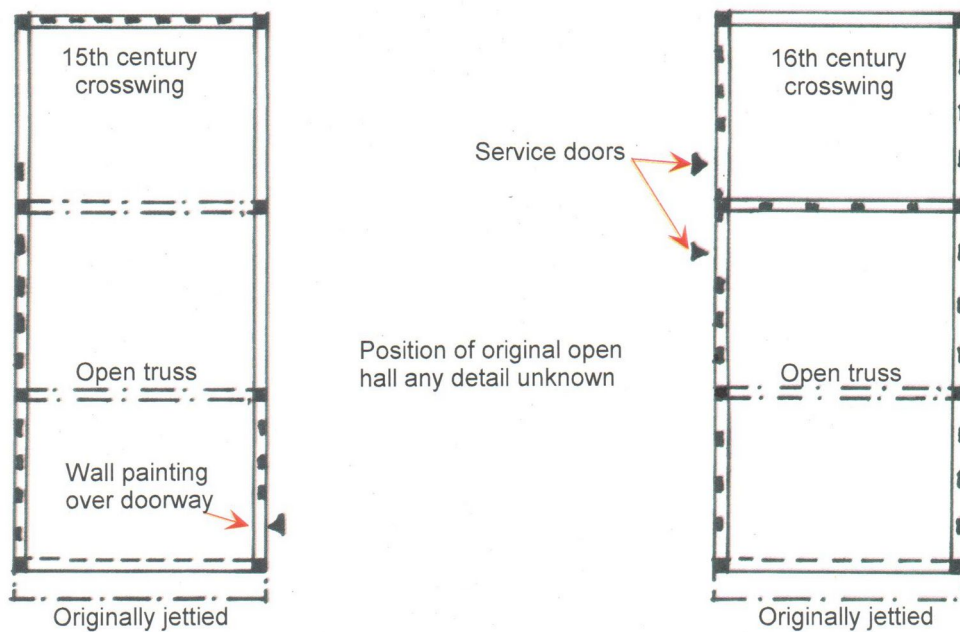
Discussion

Although it has been confirmed that the building is of alternate rebuild the most difficult task is to:

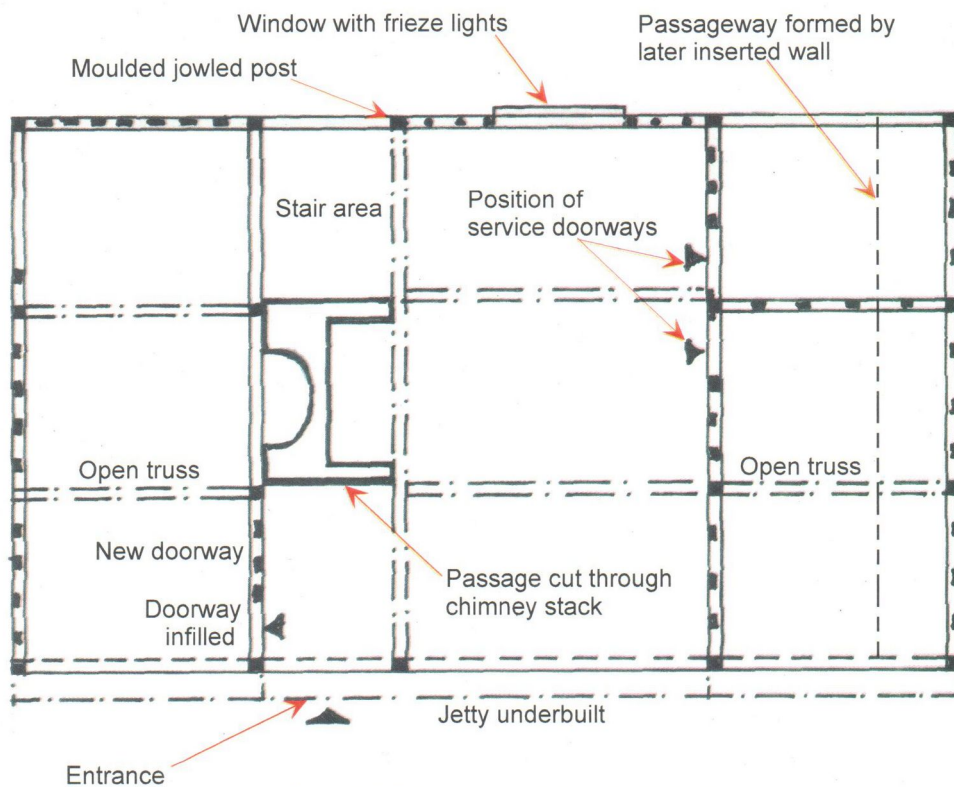
1. Conclusively define the earliest crosswing due to the lack of visible dating features.
2. Define the depth and position of the open hall in relation to the flank walls of the crosswing.
3. Confirm any bay divisions and stair trap positions in the crosswings.
4. Define the low and high end of the open hall and function of the crosswings.

The rebuilding of the hall range changed the building from the medieval tripartite plan form to lobby entry. It is assumed that the stack bay was situated against the high end crosswing so that the back to back stack would heat parlour, hall and parlour and hall chambers. This would then make the painted chamber in the NW crosswing an unheated chamber in the low end with the cross passage to the NW side of the hall. From the evidence available at present it is difficult to define the original use and function of the crosswings. They do not conform to the standard text book layout but given the interesting layout of 24-26 King's Head Street were crosswings being built to a specific design to accommodate diverse activities?

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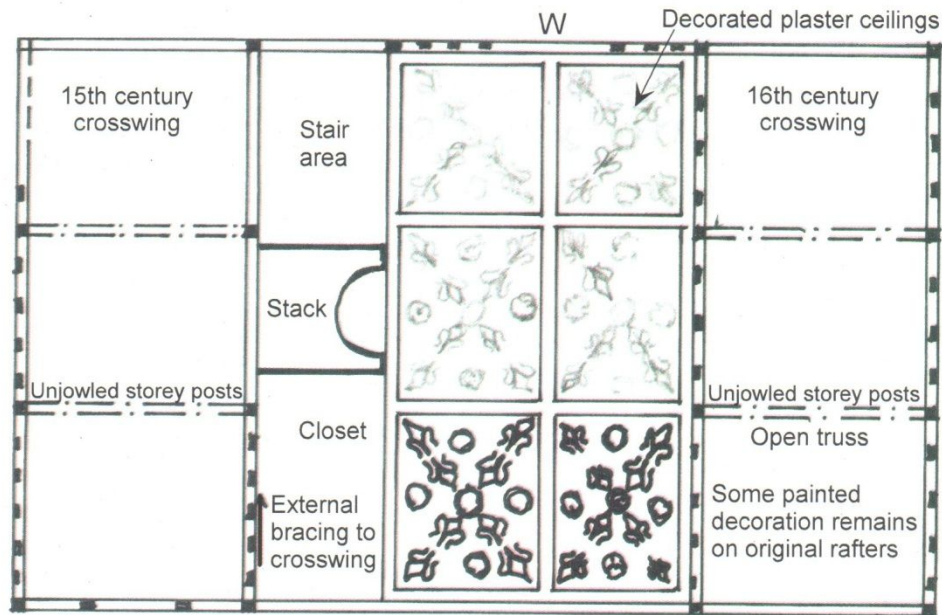


GROUND FLOOR PLANS

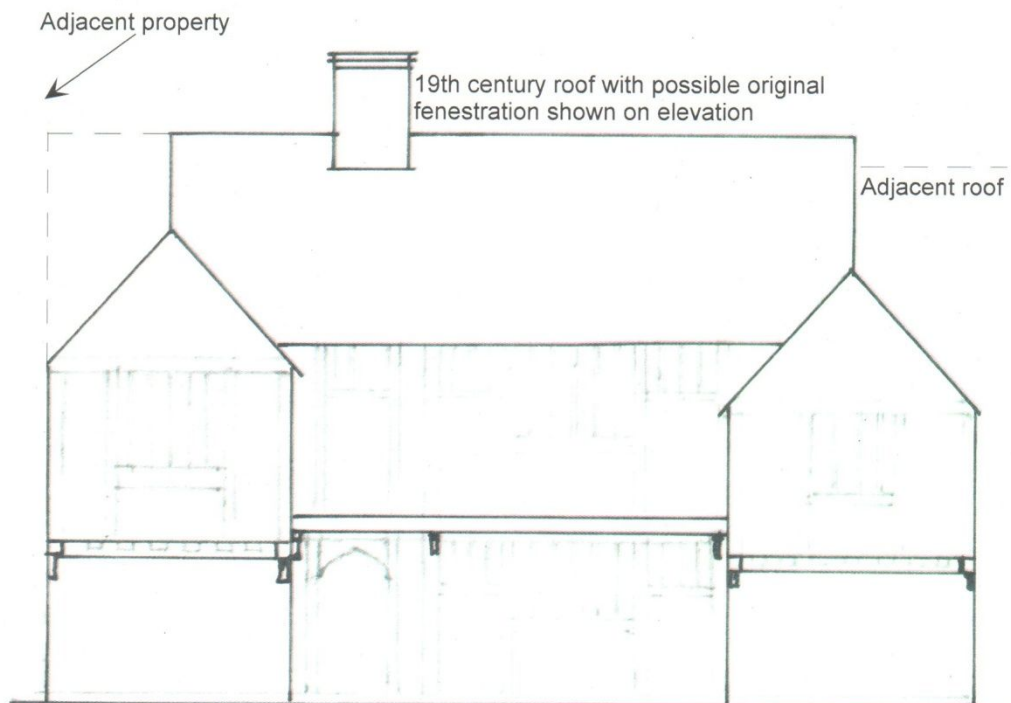


Ground floor plan with rebuilt hall

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FIRST FLOOR



Possible 16th century elevation but ignoring the raised 19th century roof