

Two Timber-Framed Houses at El

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A TRAGIC feature of the urban growth of Greater London is its disastrous effect on the historic vernacular architecture of the home counties. Towns, villages and hamlets have, and are, being torn apart to make way for modern development. Middlesex in particular has suffered badly and its heritage of timber-framed buildings is now comparatively meagre.

The writer has recently been engaged in a survey of the pre-Victorian buildings surviving in Elstree, both on the Hertfordshire and Middlesex sides. The village comprises ribbon-development alongside Roman Watling Street and is bisected at right angles by the county boundary. Up until 1964, the village had survived largely intact, being much the same as it was in 1873¹, with a wealth of fine houses on both the east and west sides of the High Street. Wholesale demolition in the latter half of the 1960s resulted in the loss of 22 pre-Victorian buildings, nine of which were of timber-framed construction. Most of the buildings demolished were situated on the Hertfordshire side of the village, however, two (one of timber-framed construction) were on the Middlesex side and were demolished in 1969².

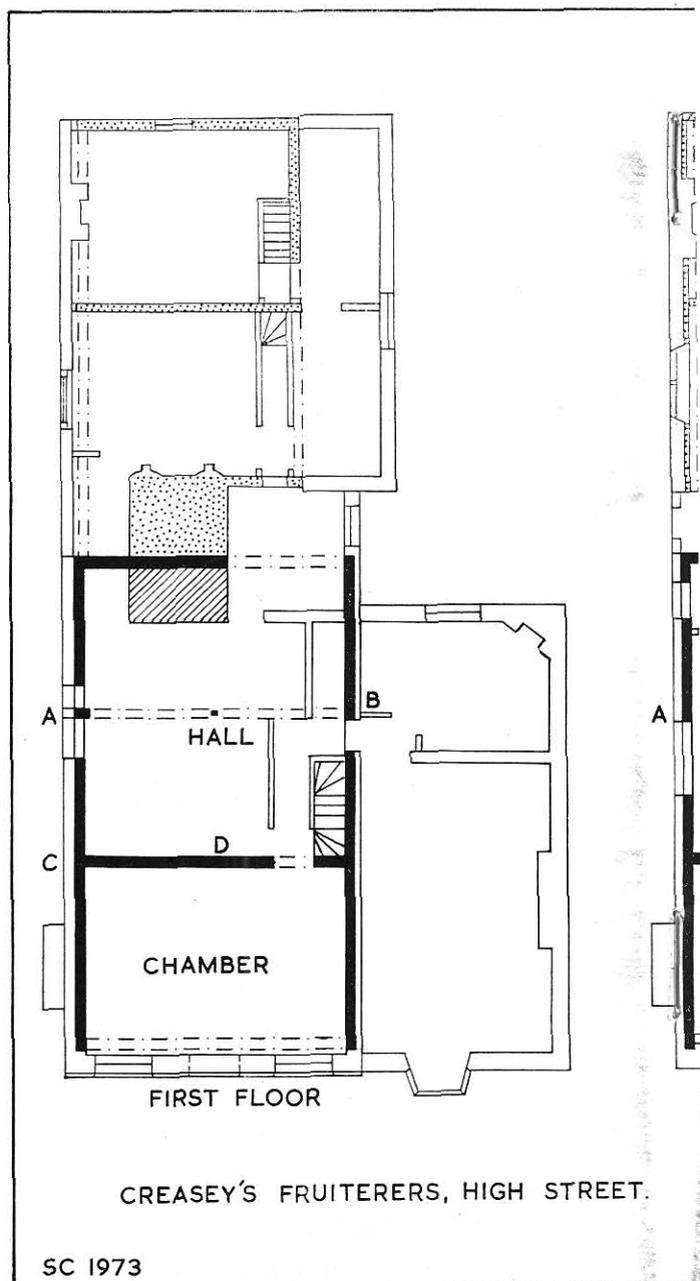
Today in 1975 eight such buildings remain on the Middlesex side, five of which form a most attractive village group and are situated on the east side of the High Street in the London Borough of Barnet. Included among these are two timber-framed houses both of which are disguised by later 18th and 19th century brick facades, their steep-pitched roofs betraying their origin. Both are late medieval hall houses and as such are rare survivals for the old County of Middlesex. The two buildings in question are Leonardo Antiques and Creasey's Fruiterers, the former situated at the northern end of the group just inside the Middlesex boundary and the latter in the centre of the group.

Creasey's Fruiterers (figs. 1-3)

This late Georgian two-storeyed brick building encases a timber-framed hall house dating from c.1500 with west gable end facing Watling Street. The fron-

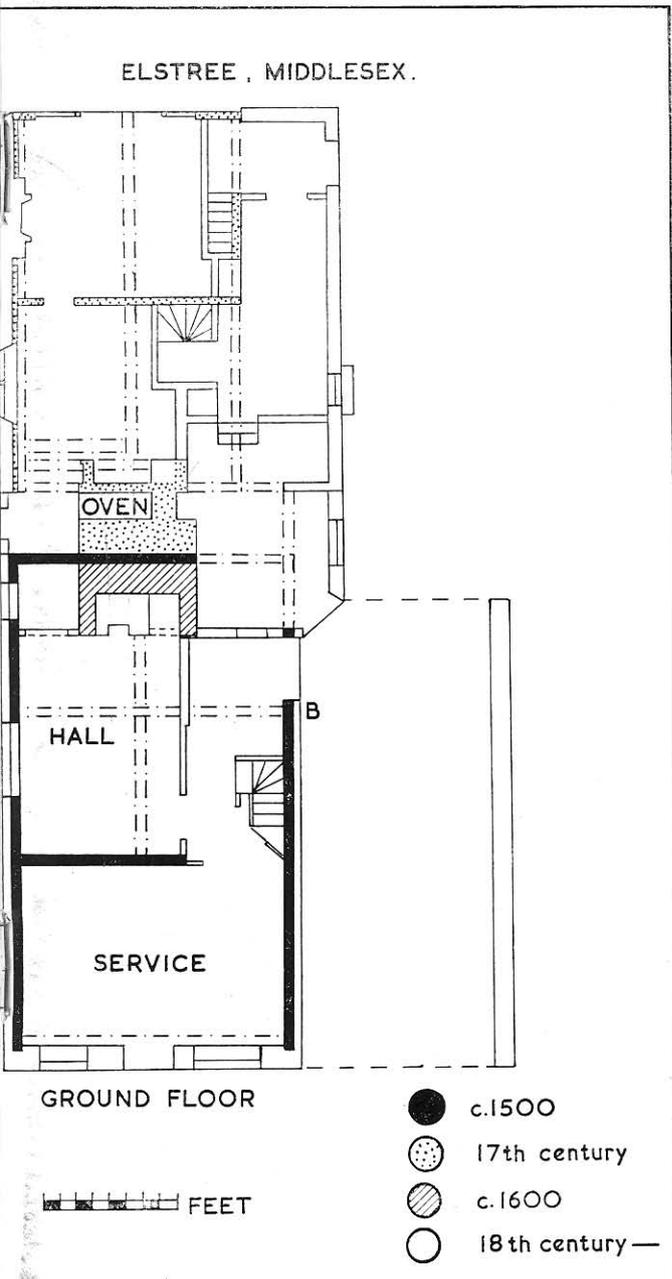
1. *Ordnance Survey Map*. 6 inches to mile, first edition (1873).
2. Nos. 1-5, Elstree Hill South, Wilson's Cottages. A large timber-framed building divided into cottages in the 18th century. Inadequately recorded.

Fig 2. Creasey's: ground and first floor plan.



Elstree

Fig. 1. Creasey's Fruiterers from the northwest, showing the late Georgian frontage and hall house with extension at rear.



tage comprises a 19th century shop and waggon-way on the ground floor; bedrooms on the first floor and a single attic room. Two sash windows and a third blocked, survive on the first floor, together with an oriel window which lights the front bedroom above the waggon-way. The Georgian brick frontage³ complete with parapet is rendered in stucco with green colour-wash and the roof is of Welsh slates.

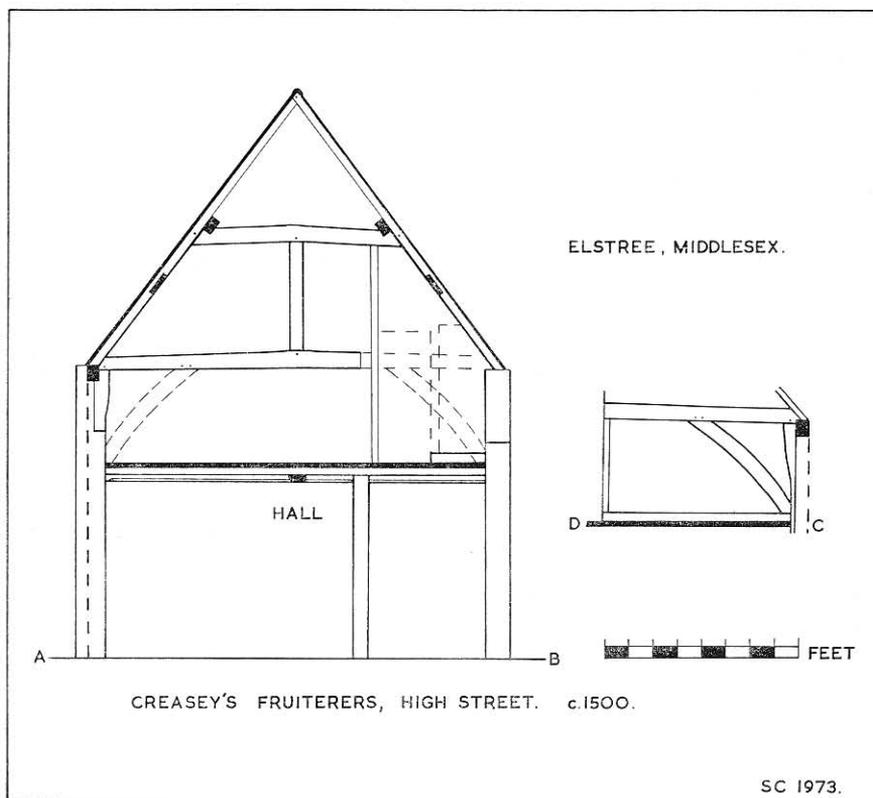
Immediately behind the frontage is the three-bay hall house, comprising a two-bay open hall 17½ft. x 15½ft. internally, which is spanned by a plain cambered tie-beam⁴ above which is a plain square-sectioned lower king-strut (fig. 3)⁵. Springing from the jowled wall-posts to the soffit of the tie-beam were plain arch braces. Above the king-strut is a cambered collar which clasps the side-purlins. Springing from the principal rafters to the purlins are arch wind-braces. The soot encrusted rafters of the open hall are halved and pegged at the apex. Heating would have been provided by an open fire, probably in the centre of the hall, the smoke from which presumably escaped through a louvre at the east gable end. Between the hall and third bay is a lower king-strut truss with upright studs, comprising an original partition with tie-beam supported by arch braces, one of which survives. Presumably the first floor of

3. Bricks in Flemish bond 9 x 4 x 2½ins.

4. For a glossary of the less familiar terms used in this article, the reader is referred to A. L. Osborne, *The Country Life Pocket Guide to English Domestic Architecture* (1967), in particular pages 258-66. Further reading might include R. W. Brunskill, *Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture* (1970) 52-57, 78-79, 98-99 and 107.

5. R. A. Cordingley, 'British historical roof-types and their members; a classification,' *Trans. Ancient Monuments Soc.*, n.s., 9 (1961) 91, type Ve, 3a.

Fig. 3. Creasey's: section through the open hall showing the lower ring-strut roof truss A-B and the inserted first floor; also a section of the hall partition D-C.



the third bay consisted of a chamber or solar and the ground floor the service room. The absence of sooting on the rafters above the presumed chamber confirms that the hall was merely of two bays.

By or about 1600 a first floor was inserted in the hall, the joists and floorboards of which are supported by stop-chamfered ceiling beams. At the same time a massive red brick chimney shaft⁶ was constructed at the east gable end together with an open fireplace with a stop-chamfered wooden lintel, on the ground floor.

At sometime in the 17th century a two-storeyed, two bay timber-framed wing was added on the east side of the hall. The partition trusses are of collar-and-tie-beam type and the wall posts are not jowled. Two chambers survive on the first floor, whilst the ground floor comprises a parlour and kitchen, the two spanned by rough-chamfered ceiling beams. A contemporary brick chimney shaft and stack⁷ survive, together with an open fireplace and bread oven in the kitchen. The gable end is clad with weatherboarding some of which may be contemporary, and the north wall was rebuilt in brick⁸ in the 18th century. During that period a brick extension was added at the south side.

6. Red bricks 9 x 4½ x 2ins.

7. Red bricks 8¾ x 4½ x 2½ins.

In the late 18th or early 19th century much of the roof and timber-framing of the service and chamber was destroyed to facilitate the construction of the larger, brick frontage with sash windows. A little panelling of Jacobean type, though clearly a Georgian insertion, survives in the ground floor passage and none of the doors or windows appear to be earlier than the 18th century. A cellar below the medieval hall is of 18th century date.

Leonardo Antiques (figs. 4-7)

This building comprises merely an open hall of three bays, the southernmost of which, bay 3, is incomplete. What remains of the hall is 16ft. wide by at least 30ft. 6ins. long, externally, though to judge from the position of a 19th century extension at the rear, bay 3 like bay 1 was probably 11ft. long, suggesting a total length of 36ft. The hall is spanned by slightly cambered tie-beams, above which are plain rectangular-sectioned lower king-struts which support the cambered collars (fig. 6)⁹. These collars clasp the side-purlins which are supported by arch wind braces. A notable feature of the principal rafters is that they narrow in width above the purlins¹⁰. Also noteworthy is the absence of wind-braces, and

8. Bricks in Flemish bond 9 x 4 x 2½ x 2½ins.

9. Cordingley, *op. cit.* 91, type Ve, 3a.

sockets for the same, at the principal rafters of the open truss between bays 1 and 2.

The bridled scarf joints of the purlins are slightly splayed (fig. 7) and medieval carpenters' numerals (Roman numeral's) are inscribed on the rafters. The principal wall-posts which are not jowled, merely extend from the middle to upper wall-plates and the absence of mortise sockets confirms that the tie-beams were not braced. Both the principal and common rafters, the collars and wind-braces are soot-encrusted thus indicating that this building was originally an open hall, possibly part of a much larger building.

By or about 1600, a first floor was inserted in the open hall, its joists being supported by stop-chamfered ceiling beams, which are visible in the antique shop. This floor was inserted below the level of the middle wall-plates thus facilitating a headroom of 7ft. 2ins. below the tie-beams. It appears that the first floor and possibly also the ground floor, remained undivided until the 18th century, when a central partition was inserted and the building was encased in Flemish bond brickwork¹¹ and sash windows inserted. In addition a brick extension was constructed at the rear on the Barnet Lane side, its light roof trusses being of queen-strut type. In the late 19th century about half of bay 3 was demolished to facilitate the construction of High Street House, next door. At about the same time the greater part of the brick frontage was rebuilt in Flemish bond red brickwork¹² and the ground floor shops have since been inserted.

Discussion

Parallels for these plain though interesting build-



Fig. 4. Leonardo's Antiques from the west showing late-brick facade to hall house.

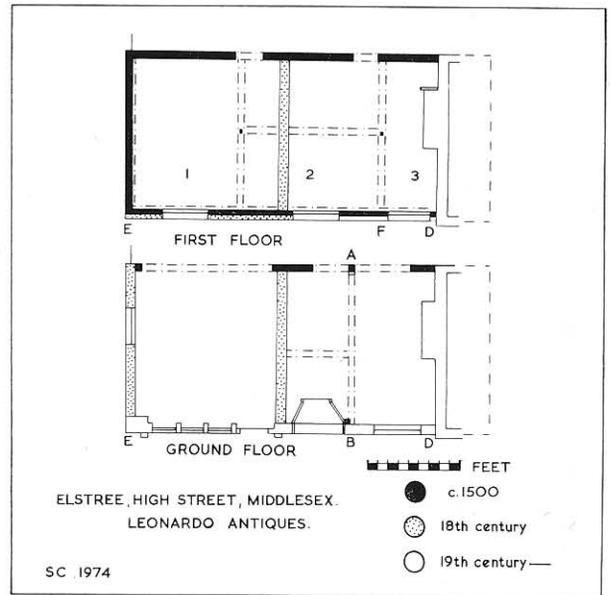


Fig. 5. Leonardo's: ground and first floor plans of the three bay hall.

ings are to be found in West Hertfordshire where a number of medieval hall houses, some with lower king-strut trusses have survived¹³. In particular Nos. 62-63 Park Street, St. Albans, also situated on Watling Street; Tenements Farm, Abbots Langley; No. 3 High Street, Flamstead; The Holly Bush, Redbourn and Nos. 4-6, High Street and Tyler's Farm, both in Bushey¹⁴. The ill-fated Town Farm at Wheathampstead (demolished in 1971) also had trusses of this type¹⁵. Yet another most interesting example was Harms Hall Cottage, at nearby Letchmore Heath, which despite protests was demolished in 1967, a few months before the village was designated a Conservation Area. This four-bay hall house with lower king-strut trusses had two fine four-centred arch screens-doorheads between the hall and service¹⁶.

The magnificent aisled barn at Harmondsworth, Middlesex, also has lower king-strut trusses though with butt-purlins¹⁷ and appears to date from the 15th century.

Late 15th-early 16th century date is generally indicated for these late hall houses which are a feature of the Wessex region, and it will be interesting

10. *Ibid.*

11. Reddish-orange bricks in Flemish bond $8\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ ins.

12. Red bricks in Flemish bond $9 \times 4\frac{3}{8} \times 2\frac{5}{8}$ ins.

13. G. Bailey and B. Hutton, *Crown post roofs in Hertfordshire* (1966) 4, 12 and 19.

14. G. Bailey and G. Longman, *Bushey then and now: Old houses* (1971) 5-7 and 20-21.

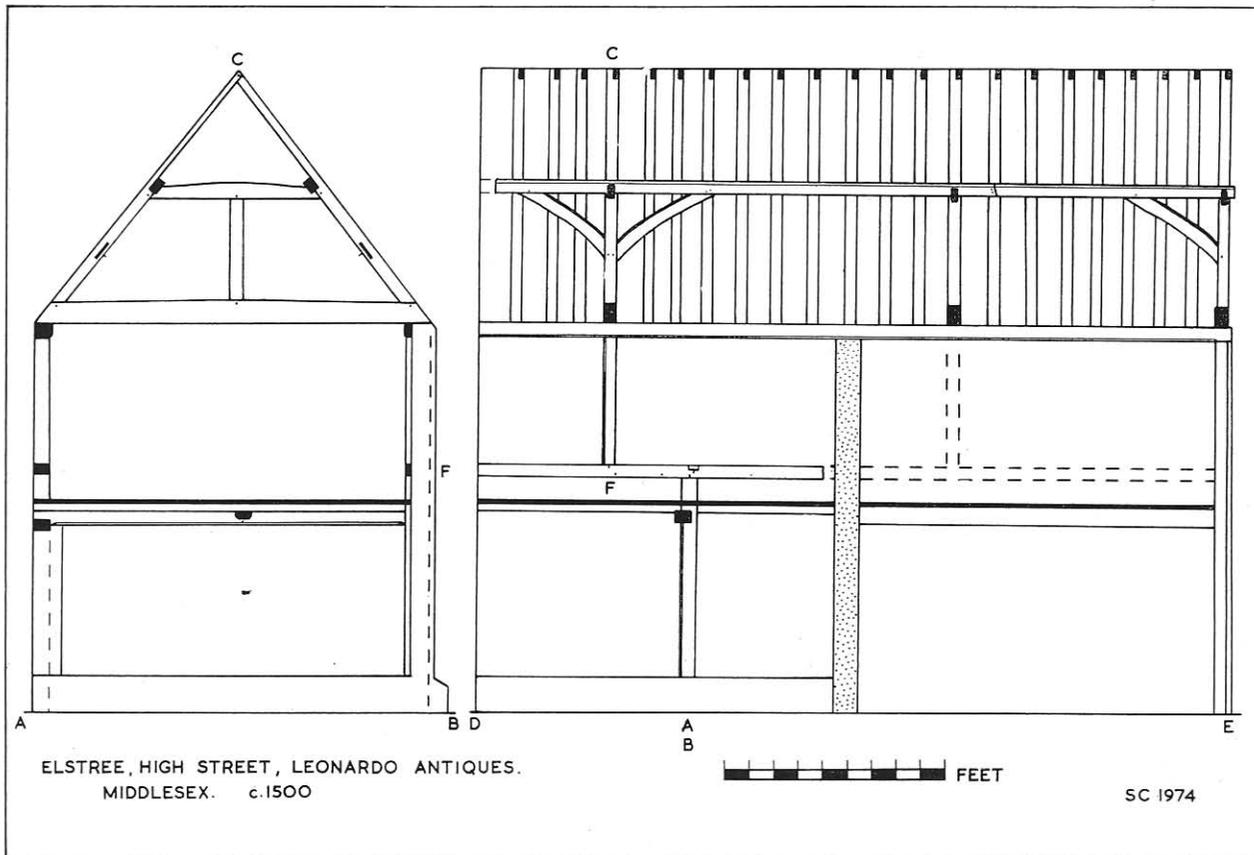


Fig. 6. Leonardo's cross and longitudinal sections of hall showing inserted first floor, lower ring-strut roof truss (left) and arch wind-braces (right).

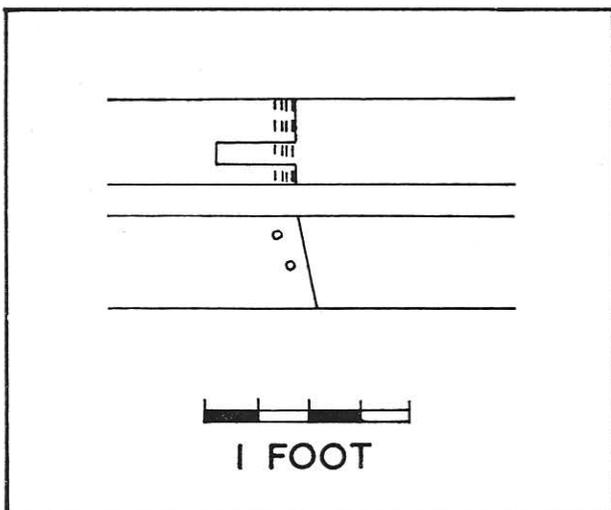


Fig. 7. Leonardo's: bridled scarfjoint of the side-purlin (see fig. 6 for position).

to see whether any further examples come to light in the Greater London region.

Acknowledgements

The writer is indebted to Mr. and Mrs. G. A. Creasey for permitting access to their property on numerous occasions and for their cordial hospitality. It is gratifying to report that this building has now been included in the Department of the Environment's Statutory List. Thanks are also due to Mrs. Waxman of Leonardo Antiques for permitting me to record the ground floor of this building and to Mr. E. J. T. Neal of Edgware who kindly arranged for me to make an inspection of the first floor and loft. Mr. G. Robinson kindly assisted with the surveying of Creasey's Fruiterers. Lastly, I am grateful to Mr. J. T. Smith, Senior Investigator of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, for his helpful advice on the subject of these buildings.

15. Information from Mr. Graham Bailey.
16. Personal observations.
17. Cordingley, *op. cit.*, 90, type Vd, 4a.