

WHISPERING COTTAGE,
12 WESTBOURNE STREET, WRIBBENHALL,
BEWDLEY
HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

WCM47457



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1 **Summary**

An historic building assessment was undertaken in January 2013 by Mike Napthan Archaeology at 12 Westbourne Street, Wribbenhall, Bewdley. The building has been previously dated through tree ring dating to the winter of 1576-7 (Tyers 2007), but the present study has attempted to assess the significance and broad phasing of the building prior to proposed repair works. The building proves in fact to comprise two components of three related structures, one of which has been so heavily rebuilt that it is now essentially a modern building retaining only two original roof trusses. That building served as a bakehouse during the 19th C, being recorded as such in auction particulars of 1806 and ceasing use between 1901 and 1911. It forms the kitchen area of the current property, and has been rebuilt almost in its entirety during the late 20th Century.

The remaining portion of the study area is a two bay timber framed structure, the earliest elements of which appear from the tree ring dating to be of 1576-7. The building has been extensively altered, and as this was purely an assessment without detailed survey it is not possible to determine the phasing of all elements with certainty. The building appears to possibly originally have been open to the roof, as there is sooting on the trusses of Bay 1. There is no evidence of any original communication between the two bays, which clearly indicates the former presence of another bay or two of building to the north-east. Subsequently doorways have been inserted linking the two bays of the surviving portion. The south western bay is cellared, with a stone built cellar which could conceivably be late 16th Century in origin, but has several later modifications. The first floor structure of Bay 1 is significantly different to that of Bay 2, and appears to represent the use of the northern part of the building for more prestigious domestic purposes, whilst the floor structure of Bay 2 is of much less substantial construction more in keeping with a lesser or utilitarian function. It appears just possible that the floors were inserted after original construction, though the evidence is rather contradictory. The roof structure also appears to have been extensively modified, and there are some indications that the earlier roof had windbraces, now lost. The present purlins and common rafters appear to be secondary, but are not later than the early 18th Century. The external framing similarly shows signs of numerous alterations with evidence of relocated doorways etc.

Overall the building is of considerable interest as one of the oldest known structures in Wribbenhall, however other than the structural frame it retains no original fixtures or fittings, and the intended repair works are likely to impact only on the original structural timber

frame and later infill panels and modern fenestration and finishes .

2 Introduction

- 2.1 A rapid historic building survey was undertaken by Mike Napthan Archaeology to inform an assessment of 12 Westbourne Street, Wribbenhall, Bewdley , Worcestershire (NGR SO 7902 7541; Fig 1). The present project is based on a brief by Mike Glyde of WAAS (December 5th 2012). The project has been required as part of pre planning consultation (ref CWR9421) and has been commissioned by Roger Knight & Co on behalf of Mr and Mrs G Nicklin (the Clients). The project design has been prepared in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and English Heritage's Understanding historic buildings – a guide to good recording practice (2006). The property is Listed Grade II and located within a conservation area. The building is recorded on the Worcestershire HER as WSM12741, and the present assessment as WSM 47457. The property is Listed, the listing description being as follows: "*Southern part of No 12 11/264 [formerly listed as Cottage, south of No 12 (joined to and from 24.3.70 numbered with No 12)] Group Value II House. C17 with mid-C19 and some late C20 alterations. Timber-frame with painted brick infill and tile roof. Two framed bays aligned north-west/south-east: gable end to street. One storey with 2-light casement in gable lighting attic; ground floor: 3-light casement; entrance to other gable end. Framing: three square panels high with straight tension braces; gable has two struts to collar with V-struts in gable. Listing NGR: SO7902375411. In 2007 the building was dated by dendrochronology to 1576AD. The northern part of No12 is separately listed as: House, now shop and flat. Late C18 with some mid- and late C20 alterations. Brick with tile roof, central stack. Three storeys, dentilled brick cornice, two windows: 16-pane C20 sashes under segmental heads; second floor: 12-pane C20 sashes; ground floor: two multi-pane shop windows under C20 concrete lintels with signboard above; entrance to left-hand corner has a flat canopy, wooden doorcase and a C20 glazed door".*
- 2.2 The property is currently vacant, and proposals are being drawn up to bring it back into residential use.

3 Aims

- 3.1 The aims of the building assessment were to gather, record and analyse information relating to the standing structure. The project aimed to identify the full extent of the historic building fabric and determine the principal stages of development of the present buildings. Architectural features of intrinsic interest and those which relate to the construction and subsequent uses of the building were individually noted and recorded. The purpose of this is to inform the formulation of a strategy for the conservation, alteration, demolition, repair or management of a building.

4 Methodology

- 4.1 The principal features of the building were photographically recorded. A walk through survey was undertaken and features of note recorded on 1:50 plans provided by the Agent (Fig 10). The building was empty at the time of survey, the present owners currently living in the northern part of No.12. The building within the study area is principally of timber framing with later brick infill under a common tiled roof
- 4.2 The photographic archive for the building assessment is presented on a DVDROM enclosed with hard copies of the report.

- 4.3 A documentary search was undertaken at the Worcestershire Record Office for trades directory listings, and the information subsequently augmented from Census information. Searches at WRO traced several items relating to the present property and its immediate neighbour to the west. A list of former owners and occupants, together with significant alterations was compiled and is presented below.

5 Historical and Cartographic background

- 5.1 The present site was historically considered to be within the Foreign of Kidderminster. Kidderminster was in the Domesday Survey described as a central 'manor' with sixteen outlying farms or 'berewicks.' Wribbenhall was one of these berewicks. The monks of Worcester had a small estate at Wribbenhall, which they asserted had been given to their monastery by King Offa. It was assigned to the cellarer towards providing firewood for the use of the monks. Its subsequent history is uncertain; possibly it was included in the land at Kidderminster and Eymore with which the dean and chapter was endowed in 1542. In the time of Edward the Confessor the whole vill of Kidderminster was possibly held by the king. In 1086 it was held by William I, but most of it lay waste and the king had added the woodland to his forest (of Feckenham). It had probably suffered from depredations by the Danes, who certainly ravaged Ribbesford, one of the other berewicks. Three small estates in the manor were separately held. The land of one 'radknight' was held by the reeve of the manor; the land of another 'radknight' was held by a certain William, and Aiulf held a virgate of land. Moreover, two houses, one at Droitwich, the other at Worcester, belonged to the manor (VCH)
- 5.2 Bewdley had a complex history, and historically fell between the counties of Worcestershire and Shropshire – only in the 17th Century did Bewdley come within the jurisdiction of Worcestershire, prior to that it had served as a sanctuary because it was in neither jurisdiction. Wribbenhall is in many ways even more of an historical oddity and fell within the sanctuary but was incorporated into the borough of Bewdley only in 1838 and constituted as a separate civil parish in 1901. On the outskirts of Wribbenhall is the small hamlet of Catchem's End, which is said to have been the limit of the sanctuary of Bewdley
- 5.3 The “goodly fair” bridge of five arches at Bewdley admired by Leland in the 16th Century and Habington in the early 17th C. brought much business through the town until it was swept away by a flood of 1795. It had, indeed, long passed its best days before its destruction. In 1644 the whole of the second arch from the town had been broken down by the Royalists, and a timber one was afterwards substituted, while two of the other arches were patched with timber in places. It was not replaced by Telford's bridge till the summer of 1798, which was so dry that the great engineer was *'enabled ... to raise Bewdley bridge as if by enchantment,'* finishing it entirely in one season. It is a fine sandstone structure with three segmental arches and a balustraded parapet (VCH). Wribbenhall, like Bewdley, owes its growth to the existence of the bridging point but it is likely that a settlement developed here as a summer fording point and winter ferry prior to the construction of a bridge.
- 5.4 The cartographic record for Wribbenhall is rather sparse – whilst a good early map exists for the manor of Bewdley, this does not extend to the eastern bank of the Severn. A Foley estate map is reputed to exist (or perhaps existed) – Pat Hughes pers comm., but its present location is unknown. Due to the age of the present building in the study area the available historic mapping tells us very little more than is readily apparent on the site – the building footprint has not changed significantly since the early 19th Century (Figs 1-4).

6 Site Development

- 6.1 The development of the current property (12 Westbourne St) has been previously studied by

Stephen Price and Nick Moleneux. At the same time a number of dendrological samples were taken (Tyers 2007), and these produced a likely construction date of 1576-7. Externally the framing looks rather later than this date, but close inspection reveals that the structure has been extensively rebuilt.

- 6.2 The earliest record of the property that can presently be traced in the absence of any deeds is a reference to an auction sale in 1806. The property then belonged to Samuel Swan who put Nos 4-9 Whispering Street (as this portion of Westbourne Street was then known) up for auction in 1806, as two lots Lot 1 comprised the present No 12 Westbourne Street while Lot 2 was Nos. 5-9 Whispering Street. The earlier numbering of the present property may be deduced by comparing the numbering given in the Census for fixed points (eg the Red Lion and Coach & Horses PH) with the number of buildings shown between these points on the 1880s OS mapping. The 1806 sale particulars give the following details:
“Lot 1 Two messuages or tenements , one of them recently built, sashed front, containing two rooms in front on the ground floor, arched cellar, four bedrooms, large room backward, lately used as a bakehouse, with store-room over the same. Back yard, etc. The other, the tenement next adjoining, with proper conveniencies, and joint use of a well of water and pump. Situate and being near to the Red Lion Inn, in Wribbenhall, Lately occupied by Mr George Lowe, and Mr James Briant ...Nb the above lots are freehold, subject to a yearly chief rate of six-pence”. The mention of a bakehouse is particularly interesting in view of the later history of the building. The properties did not sell, and were retained by Swann. The eastern (brick built) part of the building was described in 1841 (Rate book) as “House & yard” with a rateable value of £5 .4.0, owned by Samuel Swann and occupied by John Ince. In 1844 a survey of property ownership undertaken during the surveying for the route of the railway listed the occupier as John Hence [sic], owned by Samuel Swann. 1845 Rate book: “House & yard”, owned by Samuel Swann and occupied by John Ince. 1846-7 “House & yard”, owned by Samuel Swann and occupied by John Brown. 1849 Occupied by William Ree. In 1850 the property was “ void”. (Flack, 2003)
- 6.3 The south-western (timber framed) part of the building was described in 1841 (Rate book) as “House & yard” with a rateable value of £2 .16.0, owned by Samuel Swann and occupied by John Pickernell, who remained until April 1845. William Southam occupied the property October 1845-July 1850. By April 1851 he had moved next door and the house was void. (Flack, 2003). The 1871 Census reveals the occupant to be John Glover, a baker. Glover was the son of William Glover (b.1812), a native of Kidderminster, who in the 1841 Census had been a baker trading in Lode Street. William Glover and his wife Sarah had four children including John. Also living with William was his uncle, a retired baker and confectioner – making John Glover a third generation baker at least. By 1861 the family business, still in Lode Street was employing John as an assistant, and his sister Sarah as a confectioner. In 1862 John Glover married Elizabeth Link, and by 1871 they were living in the present No 12 Westbourne Street (then No. 4 Whispering Street).
- 6.4 The 1871 Census lists the occupants of the house as John Glover, Head, aged 37, baker born Bewdley, Elizabeth his wife was 33, also born Bewdley, their daughters Amy A. And Catherine Susannah were 7 and 7months respectively. The 1873 Littlebury’s Directory lists John Glover as “confectioner” of Wribbenhall, but he is “baker” in the 1879 directory,.They were still there in 1881 when John was listed as aged 47, a baker and confectioner. The 1881 Census additionally lists Mary Glover aged 17 (an unemployed dressmaker), John C. Glover, then aged 8, and Mary O. Glover, aged 5. 1891 Census again lists John Glover as confectioner and baker, 51. Elizabeth Glover was 52, Catherine (listed as Kate) aged 20 was a “shop woman, confectioner”. John C. Glover 18 was a pupil teacher. The two younger daughters were listed as Mary E Glover 15 and Ellen E Glover 9. By 1901 the Glover family consisted of John Glover aged 61, Confectioner (the premises at 4 Whispering Street being noted as “Confectioner’s Shop”), Elizabeth his wife was 62. Kate aged 30 is not listed as having an occupation, but presumably assisted in the shop. Emily (presumably the Mary E of 1891) aged 25 and Ellen 19 were working as dressmakers. The 1905 Bennets Directory was the last to list

John Glover (as confectioner) and the previous year the business had been listed under his wife's name. Elizabeth Glover last appears in Cope & Co.s Directory of 1911, after which the business disappears from the record. The latest available census information is that of 1911, John was dead and his widow aged 72 was head of the household without occupation – she is listed as having had 7 children, 5 of them still living. Daughter Katherine aged 40 also had no occupation. Mary Emily 35 and Ellen Elizabeth 25 were both working as dressmakers on their own accounts. The use of the rear part of the premises as a bakehouse appears to have ceased in the early years of the 20th Century. The front portion of the eastern half of the property however remained in retail use until relatively recently, latterly as a butcher's shop. Unfortunately early 20th C Directories do not specify the address in Wribbenhall, but it seems probable that the butchers occupied the present premises from circa 1916 when GH Palmer, butcher appears in Wribbenhall. Between 1933 and 1936 GH Palmer was succeeded by Ernest James Palmer present until the last available directory, Kelly's of 1940. Further Directories held at Bewdley Museum Local History Collection were unavailable on the day of our enquiry, but may clarify later occupants.

7 Building Description

- 7.1 For the purpose of discussion the building now known as 12 Westbourne Street may be conveniently divided into three portions, Building 1 being the timberframed structure occupying the NE portion of the footprint, Building 2 representing the former bakehouse area to the SE and Building 3 representing the late 18th C brick built structure that formerly contained the shop in the NE part of the site. The study area consists only of Buildings 1 and 2, though the recent division of the property has left the vaulted cellar beneath Building 3 as part of the property of our Clients. This brick built cellar is not affected by the proposed works and will not be further discussed. For photographs illustrating significant features see Figs 5-9.
- 7.2 There is a small cellar beneath the whole of Bay 2. The construction is primarily of stone rubble with some brick. The earlier portions of brickwork appear to be 17th C in date, but there are numerous later additions including the cheeks of the cellar light on the south elevation which appear to be mid 19th C. The cellar light is currently blocked and this has caused considerable damp problems due to lack of ventilation. The cellar floor is of 19th C brick. The lower cellar steps are of stone, with the upper flight of timber (probably mid 20th C). There is an early 19th C brick plinth beneath the stairs which presumably supported an earlier timber flight. The cellar is beneath the main staircase enclosure and the suspended portion of ground floor. These are supported by a combination of modern steel props and 20th C brick piers supporting a pair of RSJs which in turn support an assortment of old timber joists. The potentially most interesting feature of the cellar is a pair of bricked up recesses in the northern wall. These appear to be original features and are bridged by a very decayed timber lintel. The base of the opening is also timber, possibly a shelf. The recess is blocked with mid 20th C brickwork.
- 7.3 The timber framing is discussed below following the Truss numbering given by Stephen Price during his study of the building in 2008, the descriptions are however entirely our own interpretation and the more detailed survey by Price should be referred to for comparison: . Externally the framing looks rather later than this date, but close inspection reveals that the structure has been extensively rebuilt. The report by Stephen Price describes the property in detail: the report is summarised here:
“Felling date: Winter 1576. An L-plan timber-framed house of two storeys. It is set back from the road and the main east range (Truss 4 – Truss 5) is embedded within an early nineteenth-century brick extension. The cross-wing (Truss 1 – Truss 3) is more complete and was sampled. Dendrochronology produced the felling date of 1576, suggesting construction during 1577, and thus one of the earliest post-medieval buildings in the settlement. It was also surprisingly early for a building which might have been dated on the basis of the then current thinking a good half century later. The cross wing is of interrupted tie-beam form, with side walls three

panels high and large tension braces. It was divided into two unequal spaces. The front part [Bay 1] measures 13' 6" feet long and has two main ceiling beams with lamb's tongue stops. There is a lateral stack on the east side with a partially rebuilt inglenook retaining a high mantel beam with lamb's tongue stops. The shorter bay to the rear is just over 8 feet long. Unlike the main room there is no main ceiling beam just plain joists which rest on a wooden ledge. The partition appears to have been closed and now has a two panel high section of panelling against the south side. In the middle of the west side wall the position of a doorway is apparent where the regularity of framed panels has been interrupted by the higher rail of a door lintel. The room at the back is partly occupied by the staircase, its trimmer, moulded handrail and plain newel post may not be part of the primary build but these elements could well be late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, although the whole stair has been overhauled in recent times. At first floor level Truss 2 shows the tie-beam has been cut to create a doorway near the east end. Originally the truss comprised a pair of struts to the collar, the pegholes for which are still visible near the later doorway. Truss 1 has V-struts above the collar. It is possible that they have been turned round during twentieth-century repairs because they are painted black internally and do not fit comfortably into the mortices. There are two tiers of purlins with evidence for short plain windbraces at both levels. Pegholes in the wallplate of the west wall indicate the position of a dormer lighting the first floor front room. Truss 3 facing the street has been altered to accommodate a large opening at first floor level. Integral with the cross wing is the main range (Truss 4 – Truss 5), although largely embedded within much later alterations and not visible at all externally. Truss 4 sits on the wallplate of the wing. It comprises a pair of principal rafters, collar and ridge. Two struts cut the wallplate of the wing to create a doorway (now blocked) into the main range at the top of the landing. There is a notch at the apex of the principals for the ridge to sit in. There are no windbraces in this section. Only part of Truss 5 is exposed. It comprises approximately half of the tie-beam and one of the principal rafters, set slightly in from the end of the tie. A single peg in the tie may indicate the position of a strut but plaster prevents us from seeing the pegs for a collar into which it may have once been fixed". (Stephen Price 2008, with minor clarifications)

7.4 *Truss 1 – the southern gable end*

7.4.1 Truss 1 Forms the southern gable end, and the exterior presents a sorry picture of inappropriate "repair" works, which appear in the main to be very recent additions of painted softwood cladding timbers over the original frame. The use of cross-head screws to affix the "patches" indicates work undertaken in the last 20 years. Other parts of the framing are externally clad in a skin of brickwork. Internally, however the frame survives relatively intact, but clearly suffering from decay and distortion caused largely by the removal of the original overhang of the roof at the gable end, which allows rainwater to run down the exterior face. The weight of the inserted brick infill has no doubt also contributed to the distortion of the framing. No ground plate appears to survive. The NW corner post has been internally cut away to house possibly a propping timber (the foot of the post having decayed), the rebate is however neatly finished and there may have been some other purpose. The SW corner post is very largely obscured (only just visible from the interior beneath the stairs) but is present behind a skin of brickwork added externally (possibly mid 19th C.) Internally there is a skin of 17th C brickwork which may conceal the lower part of the southern intermediate post. Only three of the original four intermediate posts at ground floor level appear to survive. The insertion of the doorway necessitated the removal of one intermediate post and the slight relocation of the other. Only three mid rail sections (of the original five) are visible, though the fourth may still be encased in brickwork. The diagonal brace of the NW corner post has been cut partially away to accommodate the doorway. Above the girth beam (which largely survives, albeit concealed by a modern plank externally and the floor internally) the framing is better preserved, though one mid rail appears to have been lost beneath the small bedroom window. The tie beam appears to be largely complete albeit externally concealed by planking. The intermediate post between the two windows is possibly truncated, but it is concealed by the external brickwork skin so this is uncertain. Above the tie beam the two raking queen struts

have been reversed – internally the weathered faces are clearly visible, the brick infill of the apex above collar level is recent (c. 1970s) and the struts were presumably reversed at this time. The principal rafters, as with the previous two trusses, are morticed for double purlins, and there are redundant mortices suggestive of windbraces at collar level. It may be significant that this truss shows no sign of internal sooting – probably indicating that Bay 2 was unheated.

7.5 *Truss 2*

7.5.1 Truss 2, which divides Bay 1 from Bay 2, appears to have been very substantially modified. The two principal storey posts survive and both have matching long narrow plugged mortices on the inner faces at shoulder height. These do not correspond to the present intermediate framing, and quite possibly housed diagonal braces. The ground floor partition framing includes at least one re-used timber as an intermediate post, and the “tie beam” appears to also be a secondary timber, or possibly the original tie beam dropped from the conventional position where it would have tied the two girth beams. The present lateral restraint at girth beam level is apparently only a single large peg at each storey post. The ground plate survives in part, but has been cut away beneath the inserted doorway between Bays 1 and 2. Surviving mortices in the adjacent posts and the “tie beam” indicate that there was not originally any opening in the partition at ground floor level. The present 1st floor structure is lodged on the partition framing. At 1st floor level there is a corresponding inserted doorway, cut through the tie beam, the intermediate posts either side of the doorway show redundant mortices and peg holes, and appear to be re-used. The door head timber is also a later insertion. The principal rafters are both morticed at collar level for either a third purlin (which seems improbable) or for a curved wind-brace. The upper parts of the principal rafters are smoke blackened. The brick infill of the apex panel is plastered and formerly whitewashed on both faces, indicating that the rooms below were formerly open to the underside of the roof. There are no signs of either sooting, whitewash or lath nails on the common rafter soffits or purlins in either bay indicating a possibility that the roof has been rebuilt in its entirety though the dendrological dates obtained in 2008 indicate that at least one of the purlins is contemporary with the original structure.

7.6 *Truss 3*

7.6.1 The front bay framing has lost both the ground plate and the lower ends of all of the posts. The NE corner post is possibly still present, but enclosed within later brickwork. The ground floor framing originally consisted of the two corner storey posts, with four intermediate posts and a mid rail. There is one remaining diagonal brace, but no visible evidence of its probable pair. The intermediate posts have been re-arranged to accommodate a large window opening and a probable former doorway abutting the NW corner post, which has been internally partially cut away to accommodate a door head. Above the girth beam the framing is better preserved, though the mid rail has been raised in the panel beneath the inserted 1st floor window. The presence of inexplicable pegs (and presumably corresponding redundant mortices) on the tie beam and the NW corner post hints strongly at either re-use of earlier timbers or extensive reconstruction in the past. The first floor window opening has been cut through the central section of the tie beam, weakening the structure. The mid rail beneath this window is a reused timber nailed in position from the interior. From the interior of the attic it is clear that one of the queen struts is re-used or re-set as the interior faces show signs of weathering not present on the other timbers of this truss. The interior face of the principal rafters, collar and other strut show signs of sooting on the interior – the sooting does not extend to the adjacent portions of the purlins, indicating that the purlins are later replacements. The principal rafters are trenched for two purlins on each pitch. There are redundant mortices at collar level, possibly indicative of wind-braces, but the mortices are mostly obscured by carpeting (used as insulation). The purlins have been cut back to the face of the frame, and the modern roof has no overhang – only the projecting portion of the wall plate shows that the roof originally had a significant overhang. The loss of the overhang at the gables is undoubtedly contributing to the decay of the framing as an overhang at the gable is essential to protect both framing and panels from water penetration. Some portions of the framing have unsightly modern planks screwed over the original timber – the use of cross head screws and painted softwood indicates that

these repairs are very recent. The panel infills are brick, much of it probably late 17th C, with areas of later repair.

7.6 *Framing of western elevation*

7.6.1 The framing of the western elevation is divided into two bays. The northernmost bay (Bay 1) consists of four principal posts, two of which form jambs for a window opening. The development of this opening is complex – the presence of peg holes indicative of one or possibly two former mid rails (one dropped from the general line of the mid rail) suggests a former window opening. The removal of the mid rail suggests the later insertion of a doorway. This doorway has been more recently blocked and a probably re-used mid 19th C window frame inserted, probably in the 20th C. The framing above the window is secondary. The intermediate framing north of the window has also been rearranged or replaced as the studs do not correspond with the double pegged mortices in the rails. There is a redundant double pegged mortice in the NW corner post for which there is no corresponding rail. A straight raking brace survives, but the ground-plate is lost, as are the bases of the posts. The framing of the southern bay has also been lost up to girth beam level, only the NE corner post surviving. The brick infill of this area appears to be late 19th or 20th C, and surrounds a modern softwood window. The girth beam above the window has two double pegged mortices to the upper face which are redundant in the current location. The present studs are single pegged and there are corresponding single pegged mortices in the soffit of this beam, The ground beam has been lost.

7.7 *Framing of the eastern wall*

7.7.1 Very little of this wall framing is now visible, being obscured by modern finishes and the chimney breast in Bay 1, and partially obscured in Bay 2 by the stairs. Without detailed survey it is unclear how much of this framing relates to Building 1 and how much to Building 2 (the former bakehouse). There may be a degree of commonalty, but it is likely that the lower elements of the framing were originally constructed as Building 1 up to eaves level, and Truss 4 was then added over the wall plate as part of the timber framing of Building 2. The framing visible beneath the stairs has a strong resemblance to corresponding elements of Building 1, consisting of a straight raking brace from the SW corner post with mortices and double pegs to receive the mid rail. The ground plate is encased in brick, but probably present. Above the stairs the original wall plate has been cut and secondary intermediate posts inserted apparently to support Truss 4 and form the jambs of a doorway (now blocked). Both the jambs appear to be reused as there are redundant double pegged mortices.

7.8 *Truss 4*

7.8.1 In the roof spaces of Building 1 and Building 2 Truss 4 is exposed, - to the east (within Building 2) the apex infill of the truss between the near vertical queen struts is plastered and painted with grey colourwash on a brick backing, within the roofspace of Building 1 this brickwork is bare and roughly finished and of late 18th-early 19th C appearance. One of the queen struts appears to be a re-used window head. The principal rafters are trenched for purlins, which extend out from Building 2 to meet the rafters of Building 1, but are not jointed to them. A secondary, double pitched roof, much rebuilt and incorporating both reused and modern rafters covers the junction of the two roofs, suggesting that the two buildings were not completely integrated originally.

7.9 *Truss 5*

7.9.1 This truss is only partially exposed in the eastern party wall of Building 2, and extends outside the study area into the stairwell of the eastern portion of No.12 (now a separate flat). It is of traditional framed construction, and possibly of 17th C date, though detailed examination was not possible.

7.10 *Roof structure*

7.10.1 The roof timbers of Building 1 are all of pegged oak construction, but there are indications as mentioned above that the purlins and common rafters may be secondary. The most convincing

evidence for the putative rebuilding of the roof is the presence of what appear to be possible windbrace mortices in the trusses, which do not appear to have corresponding trenches in the purlins (though a more detailed inspection or stripping of the roof covering might reveal these) The use of square section oak and pegged lap joints at the ridge is suggestive of a date prior to the mid 18th C for this putative renewal of the roof. The roof has been stripped, felted and rebattened probably circa 1970-80s. The present roof lacks any overhang at the gables, and this has contributed to damp penetration through the framing and walls. The extent of the overhang that the roof originally had at the gables may be judged by the width of the gap where the brick portion of No 12 wraps around Building 1, together with the projection of the wall plate at the NW corner.

- 7.10.2 The roof structure of Building 2 is almost entirely modern with the exception of Trusses 4 and 5 which now serve only a secondary role being incorporated into the side walls of the later roof pitch. The modern roof construction is of unusually slender softwood rafters, some of which have been lapped and nailed to extend the length, a significant weakness in construction. The two purlins are also of modern softwood, and appear to have deflected slightly, being of barely adequate size for the considerable span between side walls. There are two linked gablets to the southern elevation – these are of entirely modern (1970s-80s) construction. The upper edge of the modern roof appears to be at least partially lodged on a timber wall plate (of ?19th C date) spiked to the face of the earlier rear elevation of the late 18th-early 19th C Building 3.

7.11 *Fenestration*

- 7.11.1 All of the windows and external doors in the study area are (with one exception) of modern softwood, and probably of 1980s date. The exception is a possibly mid 19th C re-used window at ground floor level facing the side passage. All of the internal doors appear to be modern. None of the present windows or doors is of any historic interest or architectural value. There are some indications that the present roof window in the northern bedroom replaced an earlier dormer, as the purlin has been notched as if to receive the sill of a window.

7.12 *Stairs*

- 7.12.1 The lower flight of stairs has been replaced in recent times up to the half landing . The upper portion of the stair appears to be of late 18th-mid 19th C date, however the newels, well string and handrail are of earlier date, possibly mid 18th C, though there are no close parallels to the handrail design known to the author (Fig xx). The soffit of the handrail is deeply trenched for the balusters – the present balusters are however fairly recent replacements.

7.13 *Floors*

- 7.13.1 The ground floors throughout the study area are of 20th C date, with the exception of the cellar floor which appears to be 19th C in date. The floor of Bay 1 of Building 1 is of concrete, and appears to have been previously lowered by 190mm – it was formerly level with the present concrete floor of Building 2. Part of the floor of Bay 2, over the cellar has been raised and is now supported on steel girders off mid-late 20th C brick pillars. Whilst some of the floor joists are of older re-used timbers the softwood boarding and general structure of this suspended floor is of 1960s-70s character.

7.13.2 *Building 1 First Floor*

There is no certain surviving evidence for any original first floor structure within Building 1, and it would appear that at some point Bay 1 may have been open from floor to roof, as this would explain the sooting of the trusses. The present first floor structure of Bay 1 is carried on two bridging beams running front to back, and the floor joists are housed in mortices in the inner faces of the girth beams (or possibly timbers planted on the face of the girth beams, as some possible peg fixings are visible internally that do not correspond with the double pegging of the intermediate posts visible on the exterior). The eastern bridging beams has decorative “lamb's tongue” stopped chamfers to both faces, whilst the western beam only has a decorative stopped chamfer to the east. The western girth beam is simply chamfered, whilst the eastern girth beam appears to possibly have a decorative stopped chamfer although this is currently concealed by a group of electrical cables. The form of the stopped chamfers and use of

rectangular ceiling joists laid flat suggests a 16th -17th C date for the floor structure. The tree ring dates obtained by Ian Tyers indicate that the bridging beams were broadly contemporary with construction but one beam was not closely dateable (but post 1533) and the other had a possible end of date range of 1594 so it is just possible that the first floor structure was added a little after the building was first constructed. The ceiling joists appear to have been re-arranged and partially replaced in the past. Only a very few exhibit nail holes and these are not consistent with a lath and plaster under ceiling. The joist soffits are not chamfered suggesting that either the joists were not exposed or that the room served some utilitarian function. There is no sign of whitewash or sooting on the joists. The evidence is therefore rather contradictory. Within Bay 2 the ceiling timbers are more widely spaced, run north to south and exhibit nail holes consistent with a former lath and plaster ceiling. They appear to be smaller scantling than the Bay 1 joists and at their northern end are lodged on an applied timber pegged (and later nailed) to the tie beam of Truss 2. At first floor level the floor is of fine quality wide oak planking throughout Bays 1 and 2, a typical width being 340mm. This planking appears to have been at least in part re-laid. At the northern end of the northern bedroom there is a break of joint in the floor boarding across the width of the room parallel to the gable end. The significance of this is uncertain. The first floor structure is presently very weak – the most significant weakness being the spreading of the framing north-south which has removed almost all bearing from the beneath the two bridging beams of Bay 1. In no case does the bearing appear to be more than 15mm and in the worst case the bearing is around 5mm. The presence of packing pieces of some antiquity beneath the joints suggests that this is a long standing problem, but there would be a danger of imminent collapse should the framing be further disturbed in any way. The length of exposed tenons suggests that the structure has spread by about 160mm front to back.

7.13.3 Building 2 First Floor

Whilst not directly observable the floor structure of Building 2 would appear to be entirely modern, supported as it is on mid-late 20th C blockwork walls. The floor boarding is entirely modern softwood, of two phases, the second phase relating to the re-arrangement (in the 1980s?) of the former rear entrance to the flat occupying most of Building 3.

7.14 Ceilings

7.14.1 The ground floor ceilings of Building 1 are of painted and skimmed fibreboard applied to the floorboard soffits, and of no historical significance. This type of ceiling provides very little if any protection against the spread of fire. At 1st floor level the ceilings appear to be primarily lath and plaster to the flat portions of Bay 1 and plasterboard to the sloping rafter soffits. The flat portions of the ceilings of Bay 1 are supported by oak “hangers” nailed to the upper purlins – this form of construction suggests a late 18th to mid 19th C construction for the present ceilings, though the presence of deep layers of carpeting in the roofspace prevented observation of the ceiling joists. The ceilings of Building 2 appear to be plasterboard throughout at both levels.

7.15 Panelling

7.15.1 There are two (non matching) sections of panelling on the Bay 2 side of the ground floor partition in Building 2. The larger section appears to be late 17th-early 18th C (Fig xx), and the smaller section probably 18th C. It is likely that the panelling was re-set when the partition wall was modified to form a part open screen between the two rooms. This appears to have occurred in the 1970s or 1980s as the backing to the panelling is probably blockwork beneath the modern plaster. It is likely that the panelling was reused from somewhere else in the property or imported.

7.16 Chimney

7.16.1 The brickwork of the chimney is (in its exposed portions at least) of late 18th C date, with additional modern brickwork added apparently to support and strengthen the rather thin (9”) jambs of the fireplace. It is not possible to tell if the present chimney directly replaced a chimney contemporary with the 16th C framing, but this would appear to be an unlikely arrangement and the present chimney appears to have been constructed more or less

contemporaneously with the rebuilding of the eastern portion of No.12 (Building 3). It is possible that the timber lintel is reused, but the internal “throating” of the lintel is more late 17th-early 18th C in character than 16th C. The bricks of the chimney are 232x62x115mm which suggests a late 18th C date. There is evidence of a blocked fireplace and removed hearth at 1st floor level.

8 Archaeological constraints

- 8.1 Very little below ground archaeological fieldwork has occurred in this area of Wribbenhall, and these projects have represented rather small interventions. The present author undertook the only recorded archaeological evaluation in Wribbenhall at Pewterer’s Alley in 1996, but very little was found other than a few sherds of 12th-13th C pottery (Napthan and Ratkai, 1996: WSM29658) An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in 2005 as WSM34482; Milward and Jacobs 2005 at Pewterer’s Alley, Bewdley, Worcestershire. The excavation of seven geotechnical test pits by hand was observed and the archaeological deposits recorded. A photographic record of the general nature of the south-east alley wall was also produced. No significant deposits relating to the medieval and post-medieval development of Bewdley were recorded. Some pre-wall undisturbed deposits were present in some of the test pits and a few 18th century artefacts were recovered. Remains of an earlier wall (or possibly a sandstone foundation to the brick wall) were observed in Test Pit 2 and had apparently been used as the footing for the later brick wall. The near absence of archaeologically recorded deposits in Wribbenhall almost certainly reflects the paucity of archaeological fieldwork – whilst the standing buildings have received much archaeological attention, very few below ground observations have been made, and the presence of medieval buildings in the settlement very strongly suggests the likely presence of significant buried remains. The archaeological resource on the present site is untested, but it is highly probable that late medieval and post medieval deposits may survive around the building footprint.

9 Interpretation and conclusions

- 9.1 The previous rapid study of the building undertaken by Stephen Price, (with input from Nick Molyneux) concluded that the present timber framed structure (“Building 1”) was the cross-wing of an L shaped house, the main body of the house being in the location of our “Building 2”. This remains a very strong possibility but a difficulty arises in the interpretation when it appears to be the case that there was no communication between the two bays of the cross wing at either ground or first floor. This layout appears rather awkward, but on present evidence cannot be discounted. It is possible that the later “bakehouse” was a re-building of the original main body of the house retained behind the late 18th Century brick built “Building 3”, but it also seems feasible that Trusses 4 and 5 were actually moved back during the 18th C to be reused as the basis of the Bakehouse roof. Without substantial exposure work no firm conclusions can be drawn, but the present junction of the roofs of “Building 1” and “Building 2” is clearly a rather adhoc and a secondary arrangement, the date of which is obscured by the re-use of earlier timbers.
- 9.2 The building clearly has had a long and complex development, which is not presently fully understood. The intended building works are intended in order to preserve the structure from further decline, and it is very clear that the present structural movement and settlement needs to be urgently addressed to avoid potential partial collapse. Exposure of the original framing of the southern gable end (Truss 1) will remove the very inappropriate and damaging “planking” repairs that have trapped moisture within the frame and no doubt accelerated decay. The full extent of survival of this framing is not presently apparent due to large sections being concealed by the planking and earlier brick infill. Decay in this portion of the building has been accelerated by the removal of the roof overhang at the gables, and also by the closure of the original cellar ventilation which has greatly increased dampness in Bay 2.

Both of these issues should be addressed in the proposed programme of works. It would appear that some elements of the external framing will need total replacement, but the majority may be retained with appropriate repair. Several areas of the brick infill appear to be modern and these could justifiably be replaced by infill of higher thermal value, which would also reduce the loading on the frame. None of the brick infill is original (though some may be 18th Century), and wider replacement of the infill panels with thermally efficient (but flexible and breathable) infill may be considered appropriate where substantial dismantling for frame repairs is required. Much of the interior has been affected by previous episodes of renovation, and there appears to be little or no survival of historic finishes (plasterwork, painted or wallpaper decorative schemes) within the building. It would appear quite probable that the present late 17th-early 18th C panelling in Bay 2 (ground floor) is a secondary introduction to the building (possibly added in the 1970s or 80s when the partition wall was remodelled as it is apparently backed by modern blockwork) There are also no surviving fixtures or fittings relating to the previous use of the building. In this context the only real significant features are the structural frame, upper part of the staircase and the oak floorboarding. There appears to be little potential for surviving below ground archaeological deposits within Building 1 as the floor level has been lowered substantially (190mm) and the depth of the concrete slab is likely to be at least another 100mm. Within Building 2 the slab levels are possibly close to the original floor level, so there is some potential for survival of significant archaeological deposits in this area. Externally ground levels in front of the property appear to have been raised in the past to create a parking area, but otherwise archaeologically significant horizons externally may be present to within 0.3m of current surface levels. The documentary evidence points to the presence of a well on the property.

- 9.3 The programme of repair works should ensure the long term survival of the property, but care should be taken to ensure the maximum possible retention of historic timbers where this may be achieved by “piecing in repairs” rather than wholesale removal. The property will benefit from the removal of the unsuitable plank-cladding repairs and general increased use of breathable traditional materials such as lime mortars and lime plasters rather than Portland cement and browning plasters that are currently trapping moisture within the fabric.

10 Bibliography

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11 Acknowledgements

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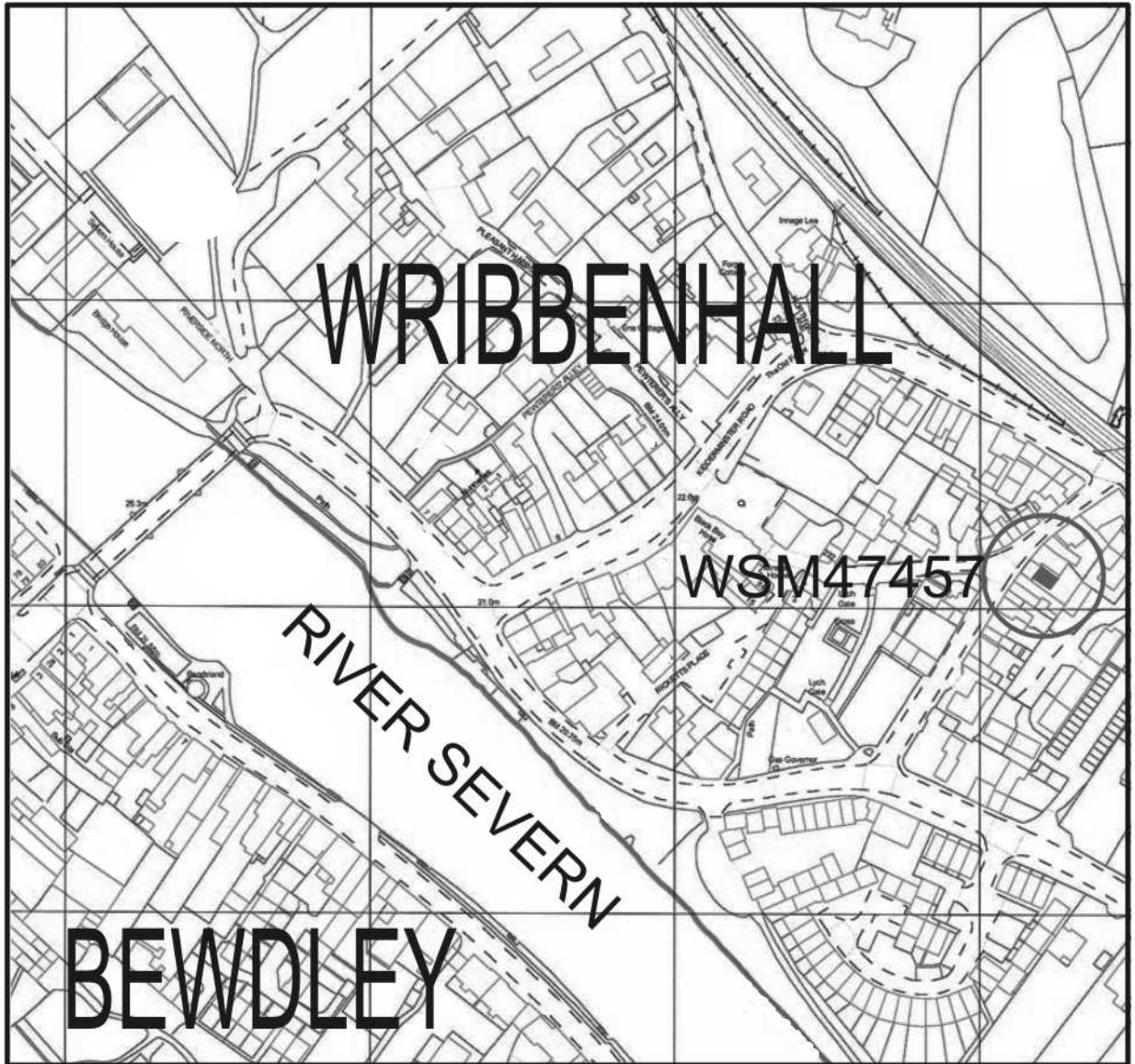


Figure 1: Site location Whispering Cottage, Westbourne Street, Wribbenhall, Bewdley, Worcs.



Figure 2: The earliest available detailed general mapping to show Wribbenhall (survey by J Dearhurst 1838)



Landowner	Occupier	Plot		Acres	Rods	Perches
Wodehouse, Lydia	Wodehouse, Lydia	1	Houses & Gardens			9
Wodehouse, Lydia	Lowe, John	2	Garden			32
Wodehouse, Lydia	Lowe, Mary	3	Garden			7
Wodehouse, Lydia	Fox, John	4	Land	Arable	1	21
Wodehouse, Lydia	Hayling, William & Lowe, John	5	House & Yard			25
Wodehouse, Lydia	Wodehouse, Lydia	6	Severn House & Plantation		1	6

(Tithe Awards Transcription from Peter Walker 2011)

Figure 3: Tithe Award Plan for Kidderminster Foreign, West of the Stour 1851. Nb: the present property was apparently non-titheable, so no ownership is indicated.

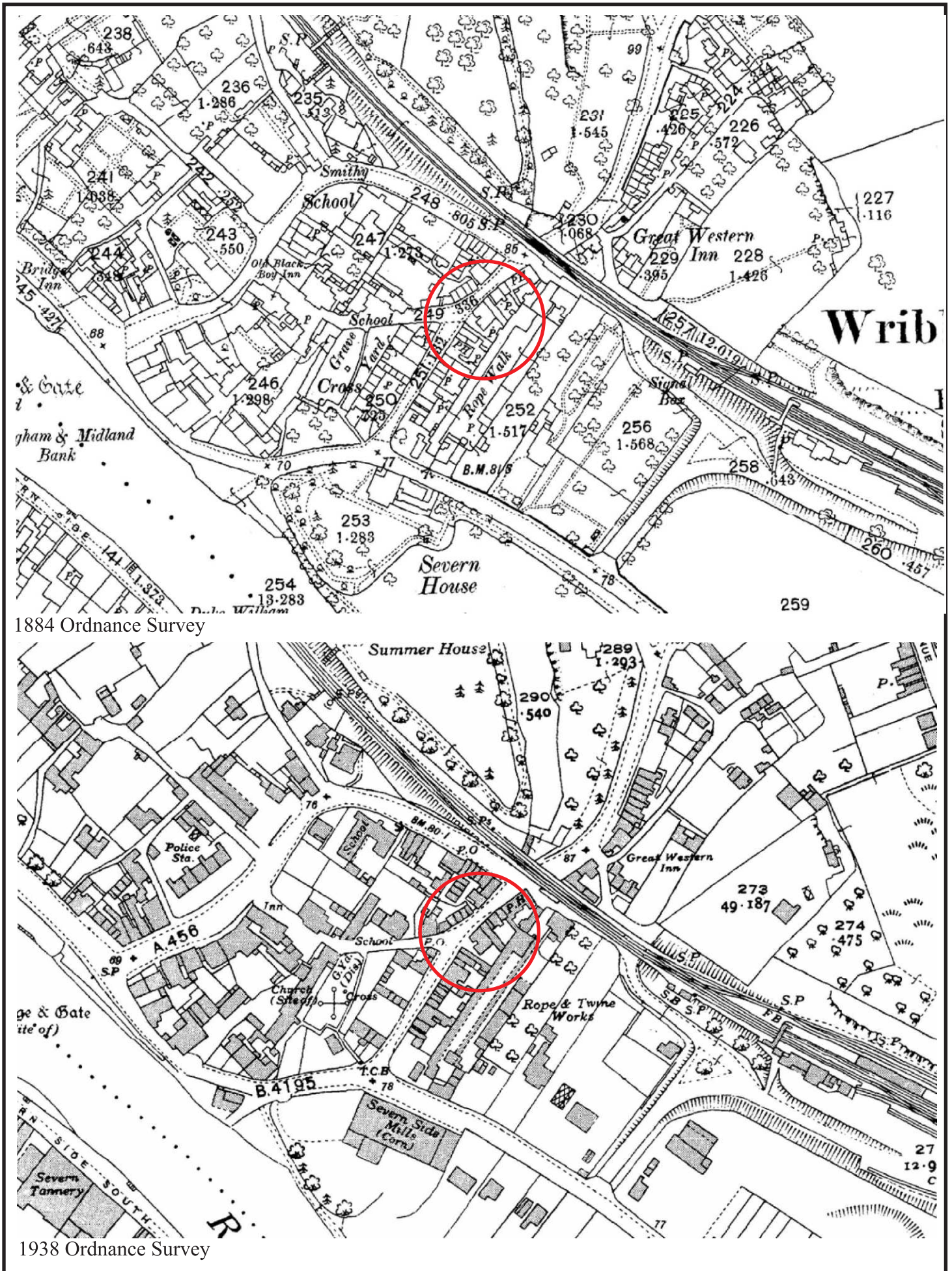


Figure 4: Historic mapping of Wribbenhall



Rear elevation



Street frontage

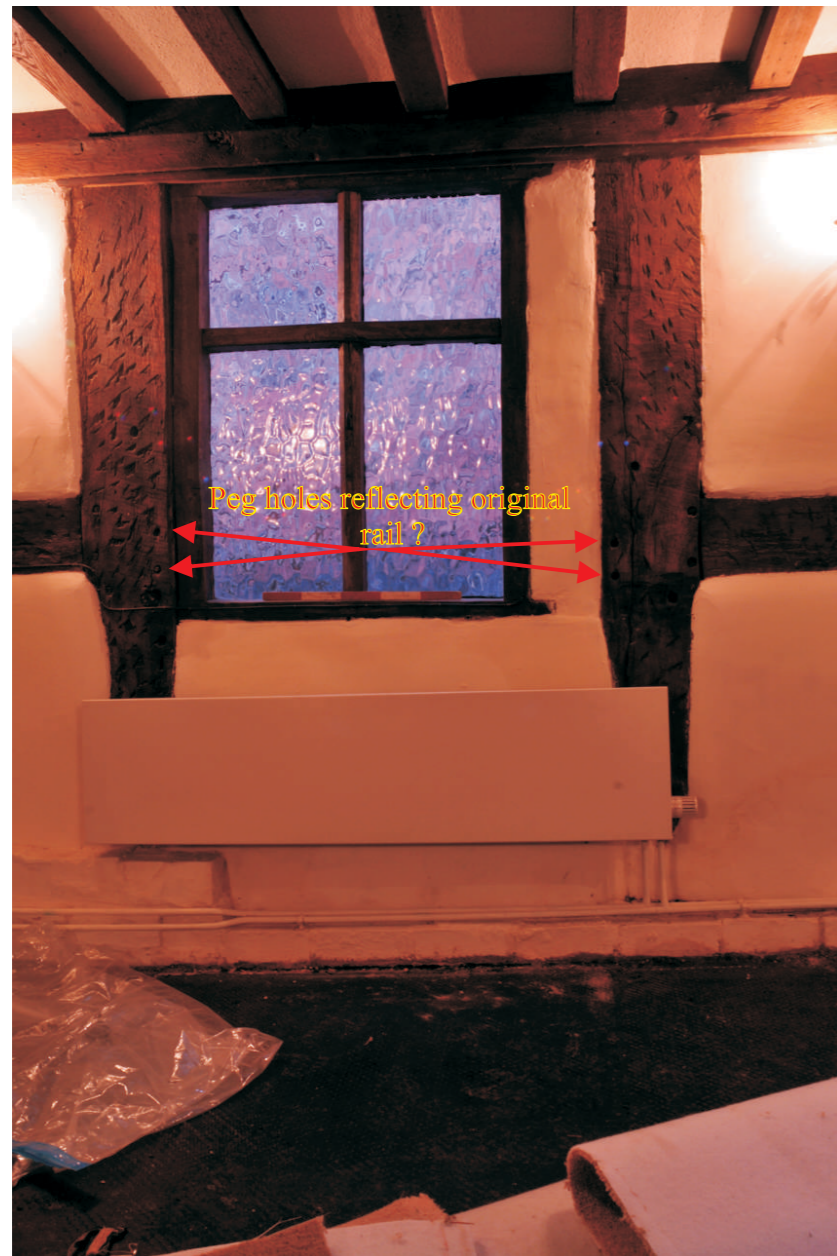


Western side elevation facing north



Facing south

Figure 5: Exterior of Whispering Cottage



Probable original window opening, subsequently converted to doorway and reused as reduced size window opening

Detail of interior of NW corner storey post note notching of post for probable former exterior door case, also note plain chamfer stop on timber morticed for 1st floor joists



Modified inserted late 18th C chimney and fireplace - note reduced floor level around hearth



Detail of eastern storey post of Truss 2 - note the two redundant mortices representing a mid rail (lower mortice) and probable tension brace (above) - these prove that there was originally no doorway opening between Bay 1 and 2 at ground floor - two pairs of peg holes at mid rail level disprove any original link to Building 2 at this point

Chamfer stop detail- note also that lap of bridging beam bearing has moved out by 75mm reducing the effective bearing



Figure 6: Ground floor Bay 1 of Whispering Cottage



Re-used panelling - oak section is probably mid-late 17th Century, pine section to RHS is probably 18th Century - detail of oak mouldings below



View facing towards cellar steps, note blocked recess below electrical socket



Detail of stair rail (balusters are recent insertion)

Interior of Truss 1 (southern gable end)

Figure 7: Ground floor and cellar in Bay 2 of Whispering Cottage

Front bedroom - view facing west - note notching of wall plate for former dormer window



Roof space facing north, note extensive sooting of truss which does not extend to purlins - interior of Truss 3 infill panels are plastered. Timber hangers for ceiling are nailed to purlins



Roof space facing south - note sooting of truss but clean purlins. Note also redundant mortice possibly for wind-brace beneath LH purlin. Brick infill of Truss 2 apex is plastered and colourwashed indicating that it was formerly exposed.



Truss 2



Interior of Truss 3

Figure 8: Upper floor and roof space in Bay 1 of Whispering Cottage



Truss 4 within the roofspace of Building 2



Lodging of modern Building 2 roof on earlier timber spiked to rear wall of Building 3



Truss 5 visible at 1st Floor of Building

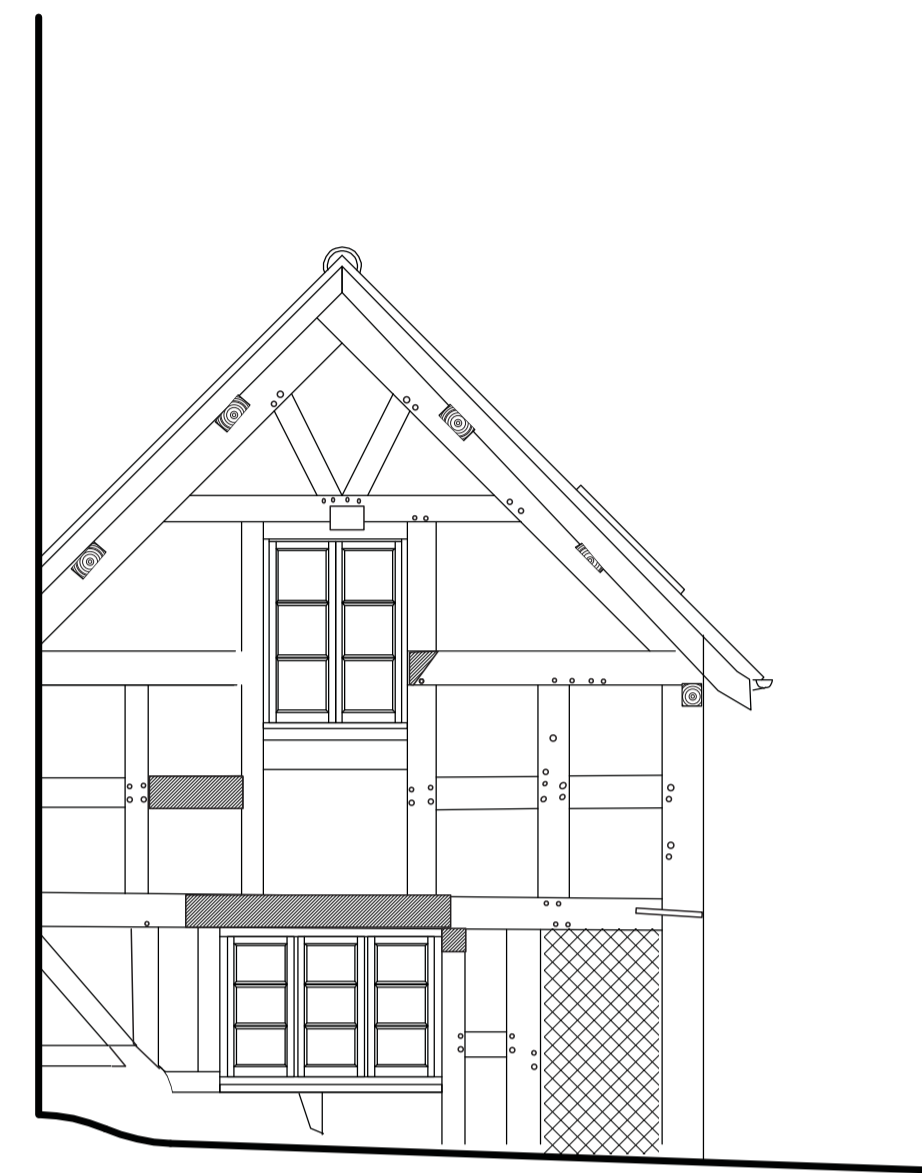


Framing of Building 1 visible from kitchen of Building 2

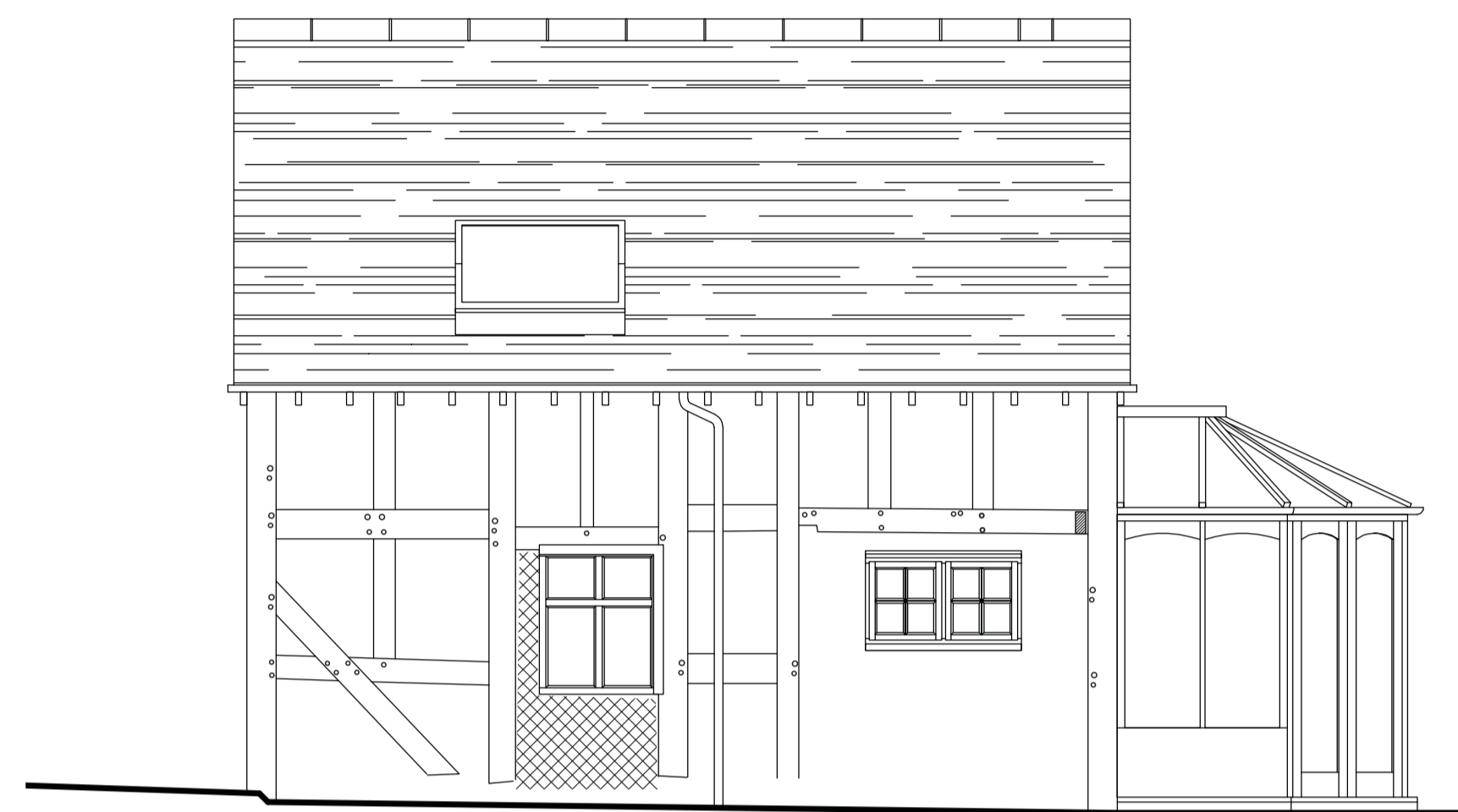
Inserted (and later blocked) former doorway linking Building 2 with Building 1 at 1st floor level (visible only from west side of Truss 4)



Figure 9: Building 2 - Whispering Cottage



street front elevation as existing

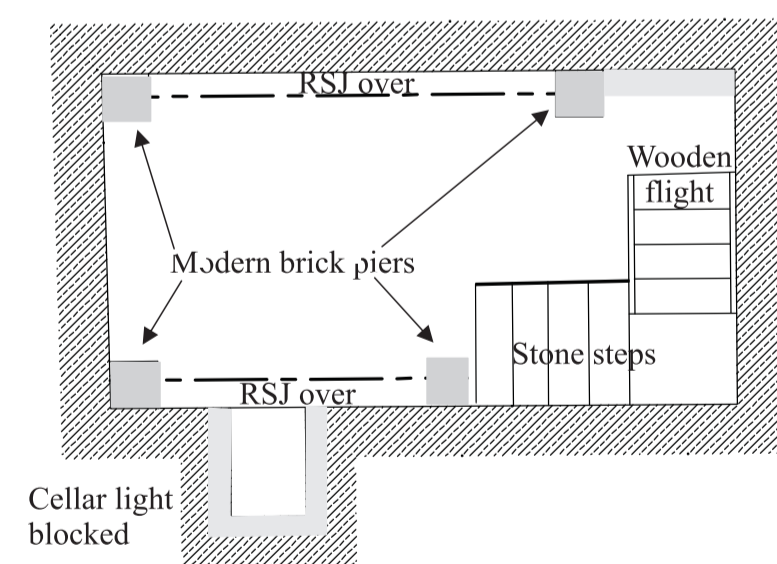


side elevation as existing

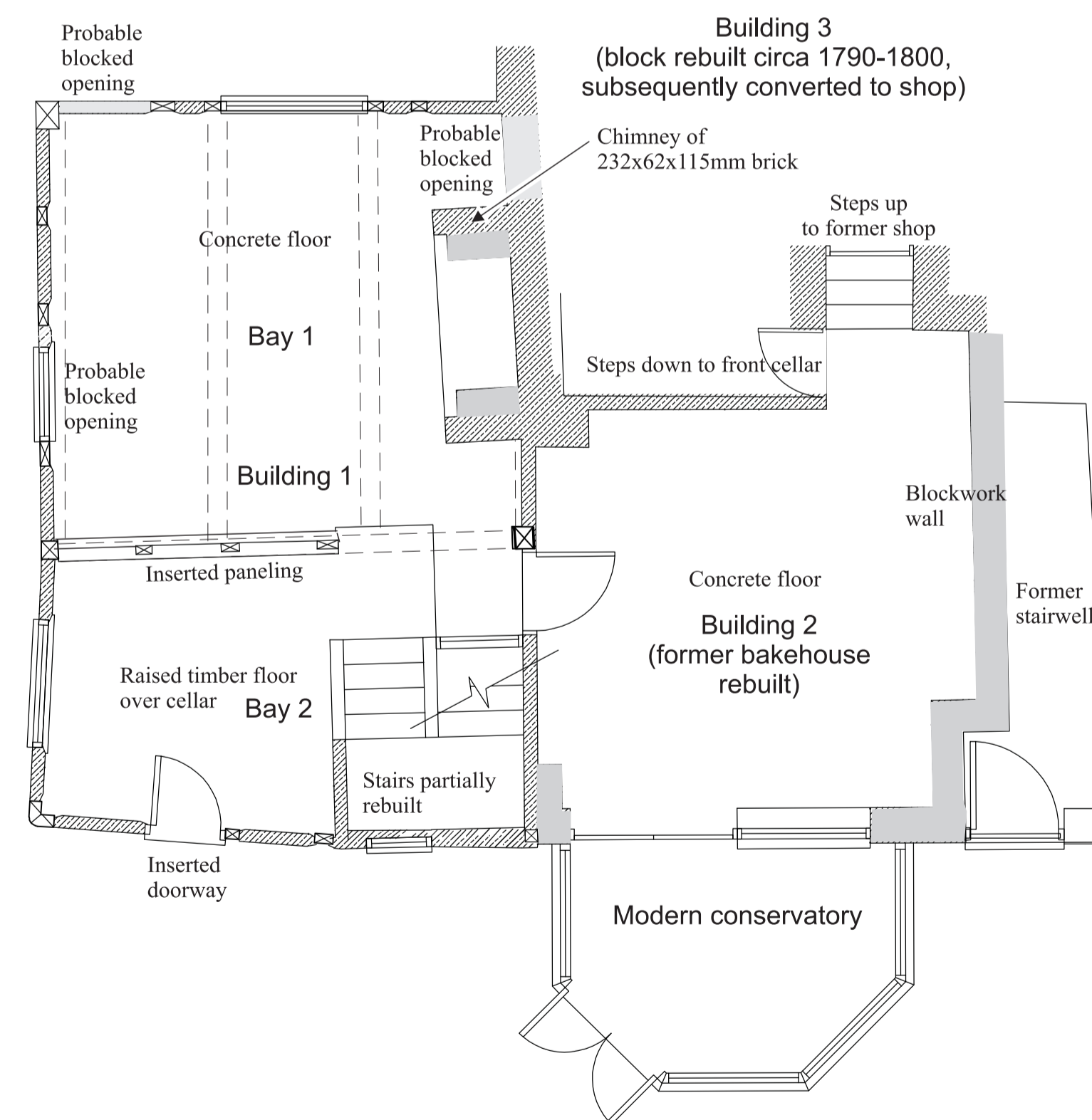


Nb: the original framing on this elevation is largely concealed by modern boarding

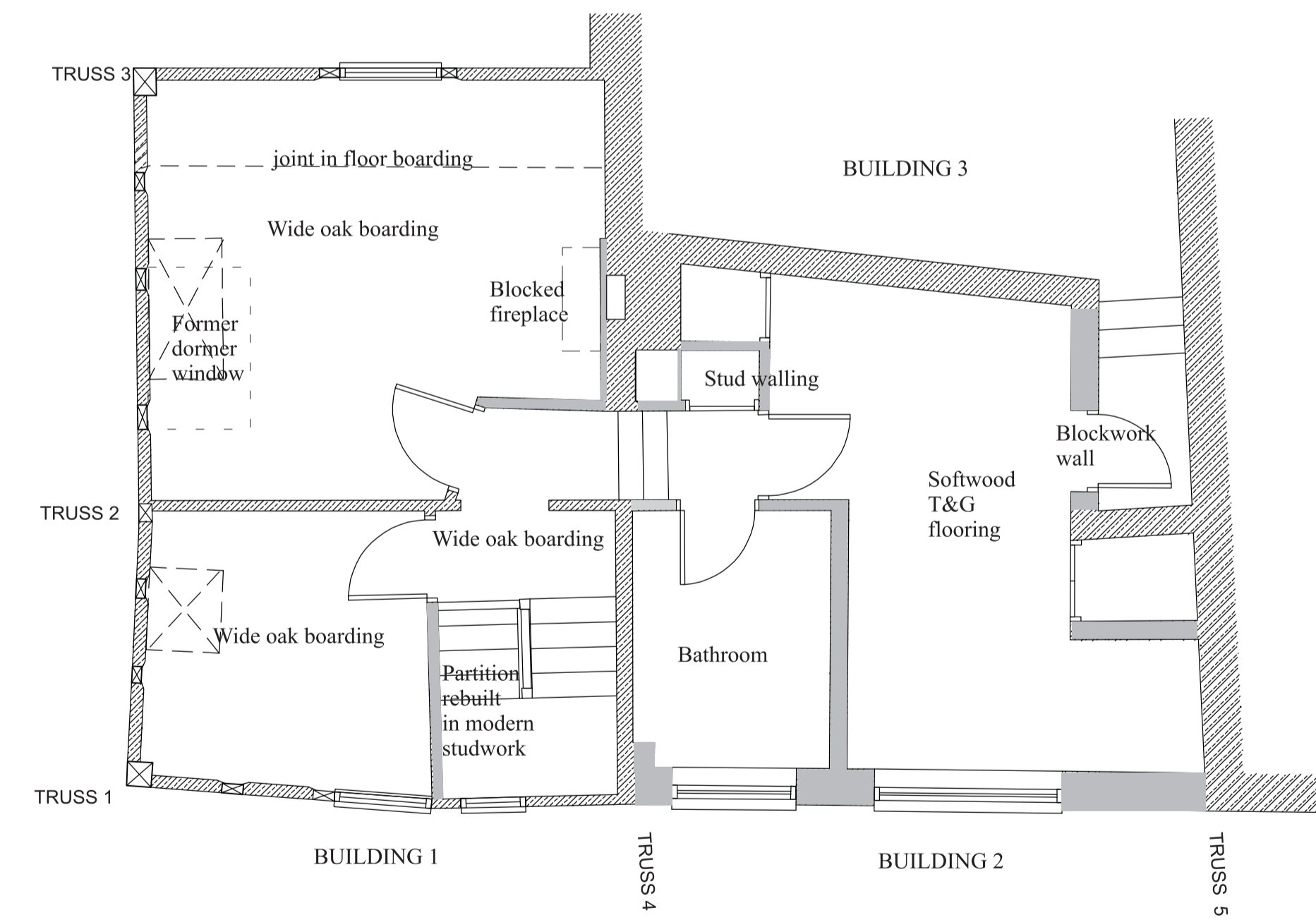
yard elevation as existing



cellar plan as existing



ground floor plan as existing



first floor plan as existing

Figure 10: Annotated architect's plans and elevations - crosshatching indicates blocked doorways, light grey tone indicates later additions, dark grey tone indicates modern fabric