

NOS. 3-7 WEST STREET,
HARROW-ON-THE-HILL,
LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

A NOTE ON THE ARCHITECTURAL
INTEREST OF THE BUILDING

by

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Historical Analysis & Research Team

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Nature of Request

A request was received from Roger Bowdler of the Urban Strategies and Listing Section of English Heritage for advice on the historical significance of Nos. 3-7 West Street, Harrow-on-the-Hill, London Borough of Harrow. Earlier investigations inside one of the houses within the present brick-fronted terrace had revealed what appeared to be the remains of a timber-framed structure, and information was now sought as to its date, original form and present extent. The houses are currently owned by Harrow School, and are let as private residential accommodation. None of the houses in the group is presently listed.

Origin of Request:	Roger Bowdler, Urban Strategies and Listing Branch
Date of Request:	May 2002
Date of Report:	May 2002
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Introduction

The following report has been compiled at the request of Urban Strategies and Listing Branch of English Heritage to assist in determining the historical significance of Nos.3-7 West Street, Harrow-on-the-Hill, London Borough of Harrow. The description of the building's development is a largely speculative account based upon a relatively brief investigation of the building's fabric. The whole of the building was looked at, apart from a cellar said to exist below No.3 at the eastern end of the terrace. All of the available roof spaces were entered and the roof structure was examined at close quarters.

A set of drawings was produced to illustrate the form of the building and its historical development. The drawings are based on sketches produced from memory and should not be relied upon for metric accuracy. The reconstruction drawings showing the past appearance of the building are of necessity highly conjectural and their content, again, is purely speculative.

Architectural Description

The present arrangement of three brick-fronted terraced cottages dates from the middle of the eighteenth century. The terrace is aligned E-W and stands on the north side of West Street. The terrace is constructed on steeply sloping ground which follows the line of West Street as it rises eastwards towards the historic village centre (*fig 1*).

The terraced row preserves within it the remains of a timber-framed building probably dating from the late medieval period (*fig 2*). The timber frame is divided by a series of cross frames into four bays, the cross frames presently forming the present-day party and partition walls of the terraced row. The building originally included an extra bay at its western end, in the gap now existing between Nos.7 and 9 (the present brick gable of No.7 replaces an internal timber cross frame). At this point, the brickwork of the front parapet wall passes behind the brickwork of the brick gable, rather than being properly bonded to it, suggesting that the western end bay was demolished during a more recent phase of alteration some time after the building's alteration to a terrace.

A brief visual inspection of the timber frame revealed that the majority of its timbers were probably of elm, rather than oak. The use of elm as a building material, whilst relatively common in the medieval period, unfortunately rules out any possibility (given the current state of development of the discipline at least) of dating the building scientifically by tree-ring dating. It should be emphasized, however, that this was not an expert assessment, and there remains the possibility that some, at least, of the timbers may be of oak, and that these in turn might, on closer inspection, be considered worthwhile for analysis by dendrochronology.

The carpentry of the timber frame suggests a construction date during, or close to, the period 1475-1525. The clasped purlin roof with diminished principal rafters was a common roof type in the London region during this period, with comparable examples having been recorded at Addington House, Croydon (dendro dated c.1490); Sutton House, Hackney (dendro dated 1534); No.17, Upper Sutton Lane, Heston (probably late C15th); No.17, Gentleman's Row, Enfield (probably late C15th); Manor Court, Harefield (probably late C15th); Pimp Hall Barn, Chingford (probably late C16th); Great Tomkyns (solar wing), Upminster (probably late C15th); Upminster Hall, Upminster (probably early C16th); No.17, Dene Road, Northwood (probably late C15th); Brockley Hill Farmhouse, Stanmore (probably C16th). All the afore-mentioned examples are presently listed grade II with the exception of Sutton House; No.17 Gentleman's Row; and Great Tomkyns, which are listed graded II*.

Unfortunately no scarf joints were to be seen in the purlins (again, often a useful feature for dating a building stylistically) the timbers probably having been splay-halved together instead with their ends concealed within the partition walls.

The plan of the original building, although much altered, can nevertheless still be made out to a large degree. At the western end of the building was the hall, a large room open from ground floor level to the roof. The hall would have been heated by an open hearth situated in the centre of the floor towards the 'upper' or dais end of the hall (*fig 4*). Only the eastern half of the former hall now survives, its former western half (assuming it was a conventional two-bay hall) comprising the now demolished west end bay (see above).

It is likely that the present west gable marks the line of the former central open truss of the hall. The tie beam of this truss (and possibly its wall posts also) still exists encased in the

brickwork of the present gable, and can be seen from inside the roof space.

Given the amount of sooting upon the timbers of the eastern end wall of the hall it seems likely the wall faced the 'upper' end of the hall, where the hearth and dais (a raised platform for a table and bench where the owner and his family would have taken their meals) would normally be situated. This being the case, it would follow that the missing western bay would have housed the 'lower' end of the hall with its 'cross passage' and pair of opposing front and rear entrance doorways. Since the house was built on a slope, it seems likely that there would have been a set of steps leading up into the hall from outside (*fig. 4*).

The open hall was divided from the rest of the building by a timber cross frame (presently a partition wall dividing No.7 into roughly two equal halves). The cross frame formed a 'closed' partition (i.e. the spaces between its timbers were filled with lath and plaster all the way up to the apex of the roof). Where they are currently accessible (i.e. within the roof space) the timbers were seen to be heavily smoke-blackened on the western (hall) side but completely clean on its eastern (i.e. originally unheated) side.

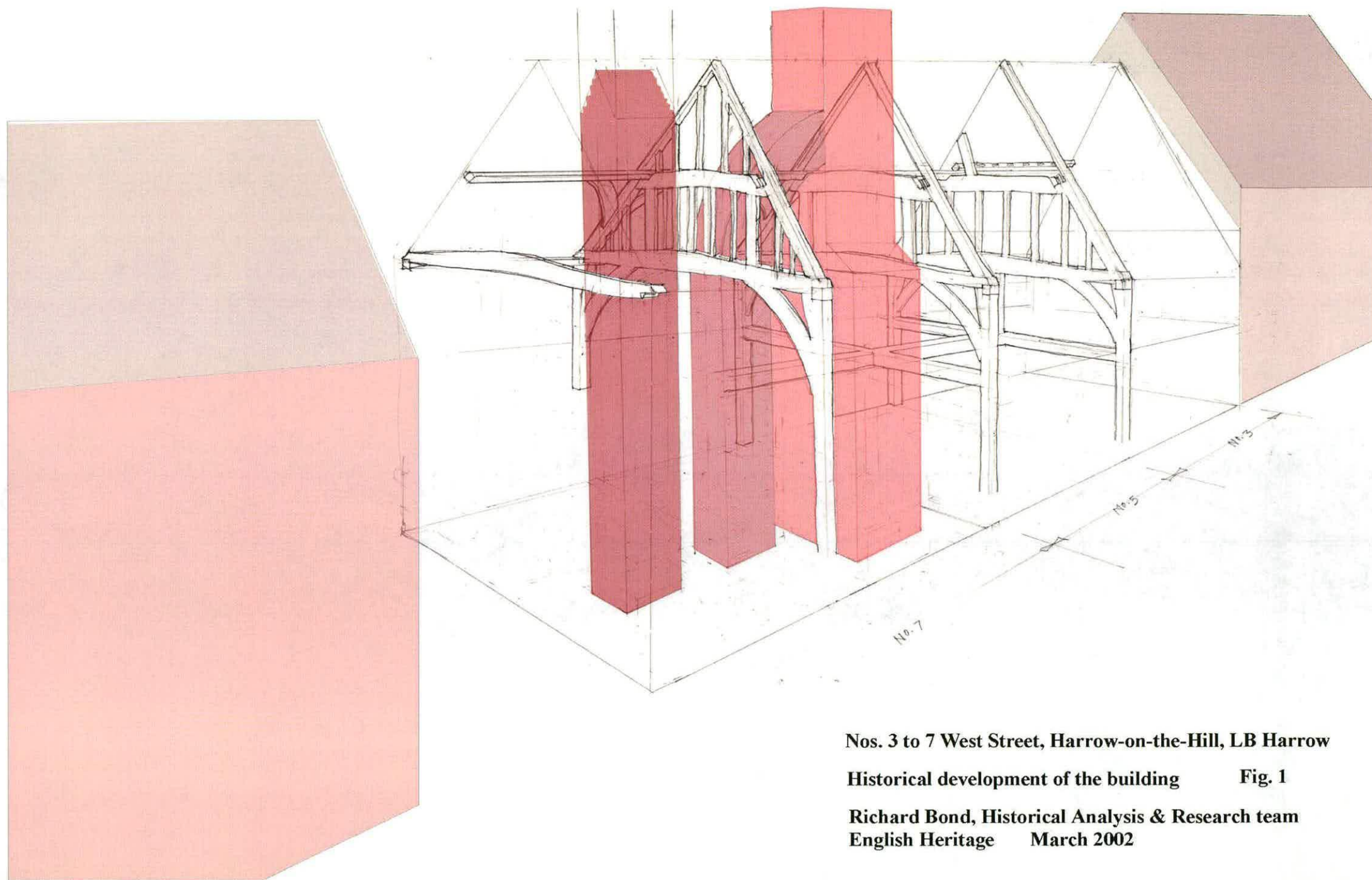
To the east of the hall in the original building was a large storeyed room of two bays. Spanning the centre of this room was a cross frame partition wall, which today forms the party wall between Nos.5 and 7. This cross frame was originally left open, but has since been infilled with brick.

The eastern end wall of this room was formed by a closed cross frame partition wall presently serving as the party wall between Nos.3 and 5. The roof truss of this cross frame appears to have lost its original infill framing, and the roof beyond it to the east has been reconstructed, the original clasped purlins having been removed, and replaced with tenoned purlins. Whether the building originally extended further to the east (i.e. on the site of the present No.1) is not known.

Given the size of the building and its proximity to the historic centre of the medieval town, it is likely to have been of some quality and importance. Whereas most medieval shops occupied plots running backwards from the street, with their hall situated at right angles behind the main street front range, this building extended parallel to the street, with its hall and unheated chambers arranged in series under one continuous roof. Further examples of the use of the 'terraced' plan in late medieval buildings can be seen in various other English towns, including York, Ipswich, Lavenham and Tewksbury. However in the majority of cases the building comprised a number of shops or domestic units, each in separate ownership. In the Harrow example, by contrast, it would appear that the building was in a single ownership, and may have housed a number of different domestic, social and commercial functions all under one roof.

Acknowledgements

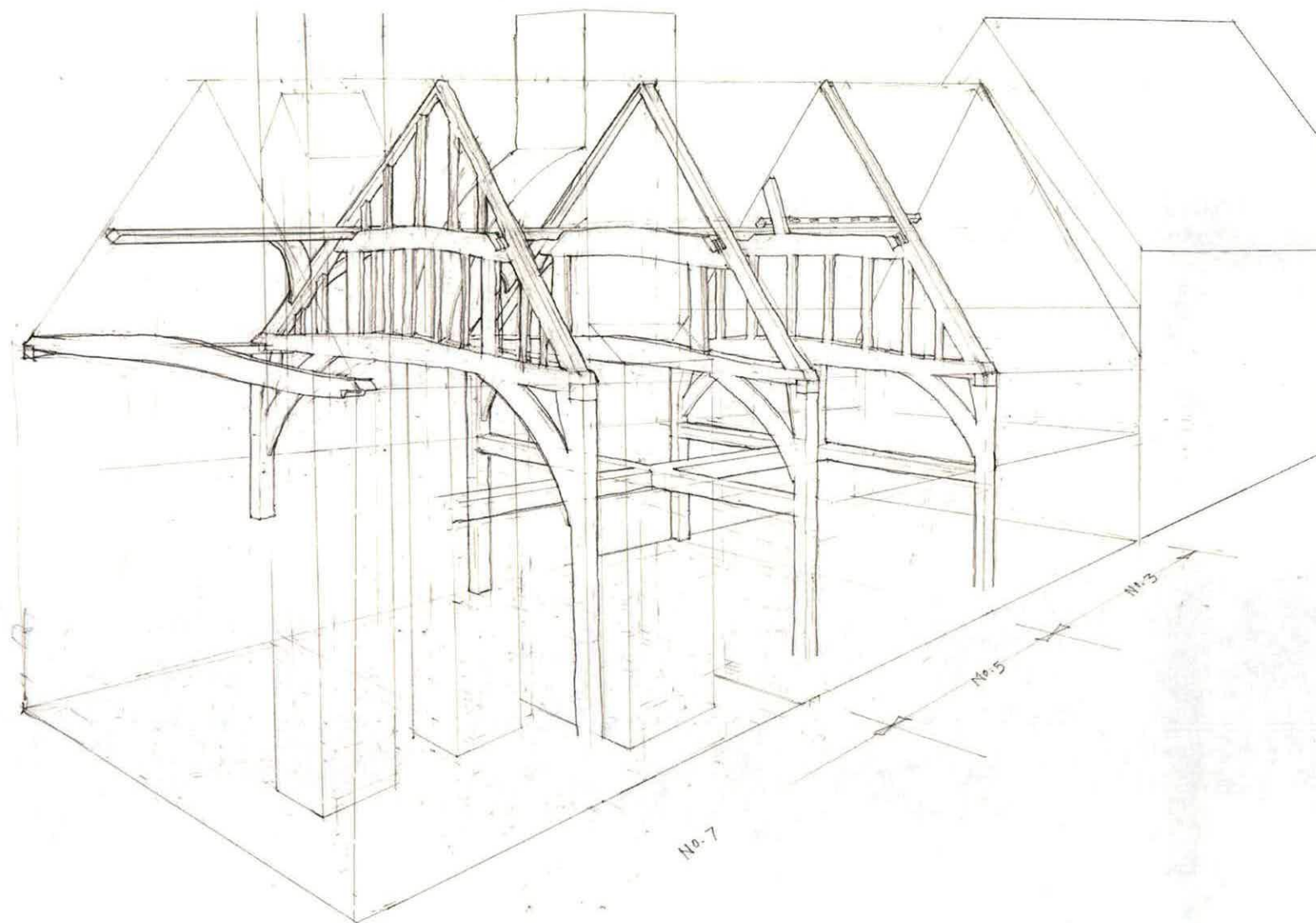
I am grateful to Dr. Roger Bowdler of the Urban Strategies and Listing Section of English Heritage for requesting this advice and for providing information and useful discussion on the later development of the building. I would also like to thank the Estates Bursar of Harrow School, Mr. Trevor Gray, for arranging access into the building and for accompanying Dr Bowdler and myself during our visit.



Nos. 3 to 7 West Street, Harrow-on-the-Hill, LB Harrow

Historical development of the building Fig. 1

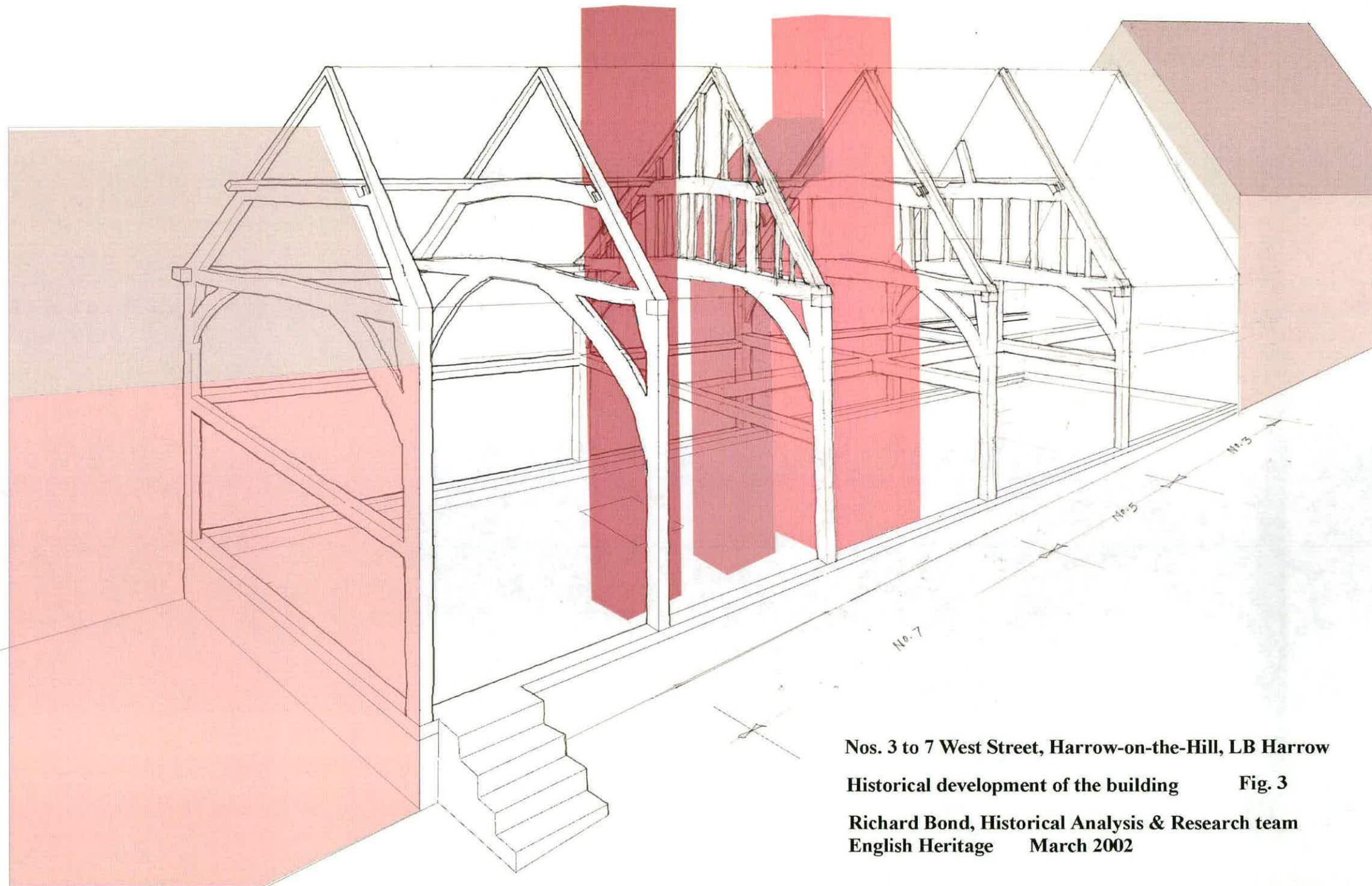
**Richard Bond, Historical Analysis & Research team
English Heritage March 2002**



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Historical development of the building Fig. 2

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Historical development of the building Fig. 3

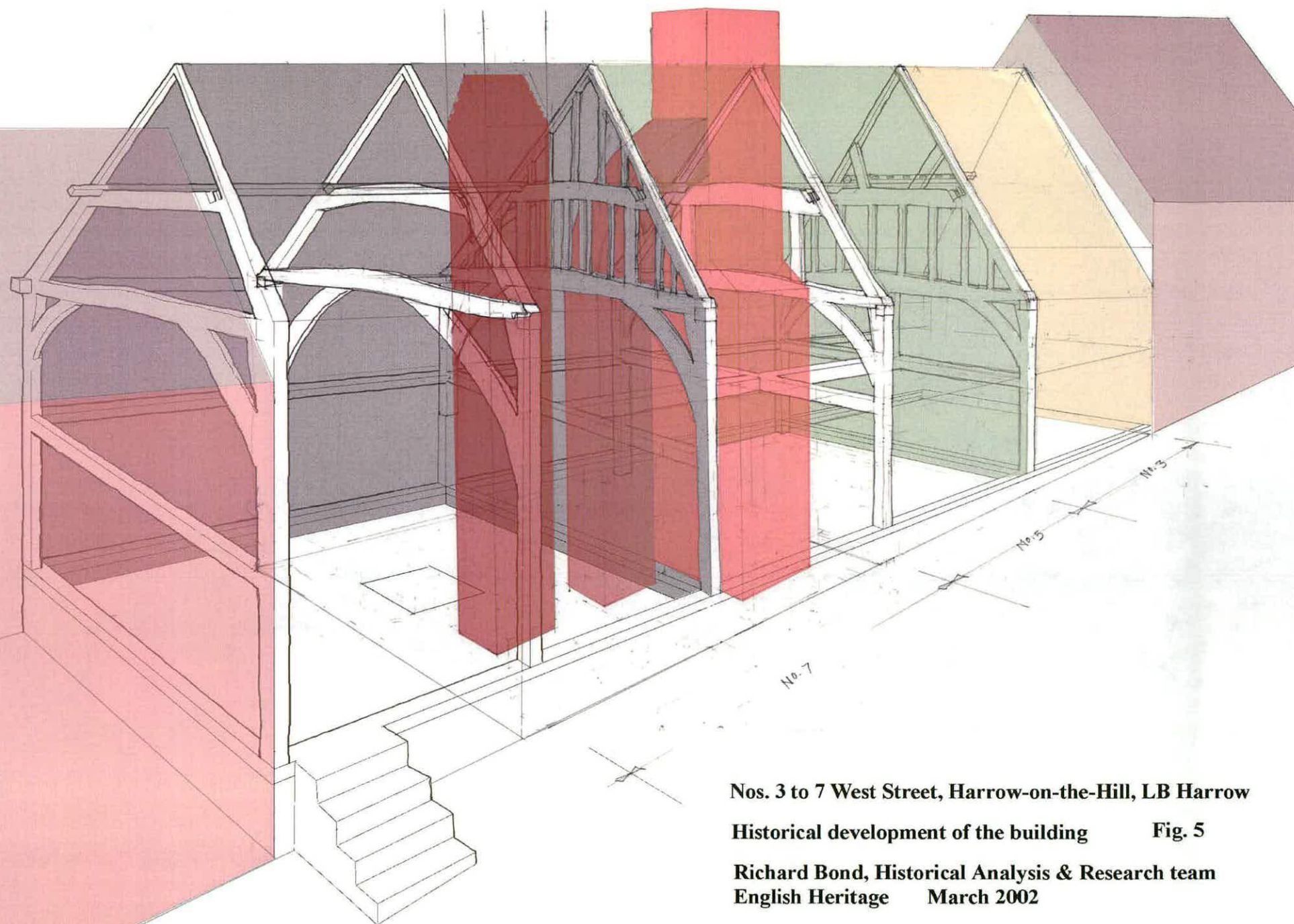
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Historical development of the building Fig. 4

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Nos. 3 to 7 West Street, Harrow-on-the-Hill, LB Harrow

Historical development of the building Fig. 5

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