THE RUISLIP CHURCH HOUSE (ALMSHOUSES), MIDDLESEX: RESULTS FROM A WATCHING-BRIEF

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SUMMARY

This paper gives the results of a survey of a timber-framed building latterly known as 'The Almshouses', Eastcote Road, Ruislip, during its conversion in 1979/80, and its known owners and inhabitants during its 400 years existence. It was originally built as a dwelling house c.1570, converted into ten cottages for the poor in 1616–17, altered in 1939 when accommodation was provided for the sexton, and again in 1956, when modern amenities were installed to avert a demolition order. After years of dereliction the building was restored in 1979/80 and has since been inhabited as four flats and a maisonette. The form of the original structure and the effect of the 1616–17 conversion are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Backing onto St Martin's church at the northern end of Ruislip High Street, are a number of timber-framed buildings, giving a close-like atmosphere to the churchyard (Fig 1). More 16th-century buildings on the opposite side of the High Street and another at the entrance to Manor Farm surround the junction of High Street, Bury Street and Eastcote Road, forming the village centre. Fronting onto Eastcote Road is a five-bayed, two-storey structure with brick nogging (Fig 2); it is now usually referred to as the Almshouses but was in fact never properly almshouses, and in the past has been variously referred to as the Parish House, the Church House/Houses, and St Martin's Churchyard Cottages.

The earliest documentary reference to the building appears in a Ruislip Court Book of 1589 when Mr Sanders surrendered 'Harker's House' to Mr John Hawtrey (d 1593).[1] The house was still known as 'Harker's House' in 1616–17 when it was converted into a 'parish house' to accommodate poor people, apparently at Mr Ralph Hawtrey's expense (1570–1638), as shown by accounts among the Hawtrey Papers.[2]

Although the Church House was inhabited by poor people and elderly widows until the 1950s and subsequently by curates, it had

Fig 1. Ruislip churchyard close. The Church House can be seen in the distance between the trees

Fig 2. The Church House before the 1979/80 conversion: north elevation facing Eastcote Road

fallen into a shockingly decayed state and a complete renovation and conversion into flats/maisonette was carried out in 1979–80. During this work the Ruislip, Northwood and Eastcote Local History Society was permitted to record the structure under watching-brief conditions. This paper gives the findings of the survey, and the associated known history of the building.

OWNERS AND INHABITANTS OF THE CHURCH HOUSE

The name, 'Harker's House', suggests that Harker may have been the original owner of the substantial house by the churchyard. Little is known about the Harkers, but they had Ruislip connections: John Hawtrey received several properties from Mr Sanders in 1589 as well as Harker's House, including a meadow called Hawkin's Long, said to be in the tenure of Henry Harker.[3] When Richard Harker of Hayes appeared in the Middlesex Sessions Records in 1617, indicted for receiving stolen cattle, Richard Harker the elder, butcher of Ruislip, was one of the prosecutors and Ralph Hawtrey requested that bail be refused.[4]

Ralph Hawtrey (1570–1638) was a member of the most prominent family in Ruislip. He succeeded his uncle, John Hawtrey, in 1593, presumably becoming the owner of Harker's House, along with the rest of the family estate centred on Eastcote House. As Justice of the Peace he became involved in providing a shelter for the impotent poor. The Elizabethan Poor Law enacted in 1601 placed the burden of caring for the poor upon each parish and empowered overseers of the poor, whose accounts were overseen by local justices, to provide a place of asylum for the sick and elderly. Accounts dated 1616 and 1617 are extant among the Hawtrey Papers.[5] The 1616 account, apparently written by Mr Hawtrey, is headed 'Layde out by mee one the Parish house in Repayringe of it'. A second sheet of paper says 'A note of the worke done in repayringe of the Church howse: 1617' and continues 'Leade out for making the partiscan for Harkers House 34s

11d'. This suggests that Harker's House and the Parish or Church House were one and the same building. There is no record of the house being handed over to the parish officially, but it is recorded under 1 June that, 'Mr Hawtrey hath layde out on the Parish House £XII XIIIs', suggesting that the building had become parish property during its transition into ten back-to-back cottages for the poor. It also seems likely that Hawtrey paid for the repairs and alterations out of his own pocket, at least initially. The lack of title became a problem in the late 1970s, when renovation work was being contemplated and there were delays before the Church managed to establish ownership.

The 1616 account does not give the dates that the work was done, but lists prices paid for materials: for boards, supplied by John Peckat and Richard Waller; for iron work; for 200 and a half of laths; for lath nails; for half a load and three foot of timber. An unnamed carpenter was paid 8s 5d and an unspecified number of bricklayers received 4s 4d. Carriage of timber, boards and laths cost two shillings and of loam one shilling.

The 1617 accounts are itemised more professionally and show that work was being carried out between 29 March and 25 April and was apparently complete by 1 June. They run (modernised spelling) as follows:

Imprimis to John Roye the 29th day of March for 7 days work	7s 8d
Item to Marshall for 4 days work at 10d and 2 days at 8d the day	4s 8d
Item to Hodsdonn April the 5th and his men as followeth	
Item to himself 2 days at 18d the day	3s 0d
Item to his son 3 days at 10d the day	2s 6d
Item to his man 4 days at 16d the day	5s 4d
Item his labourer 5 days at 10d the day	4s 2d
	£1 7s 4d
Item paid more to Ducke of Batcher Heathe for one thousand of bricks and carriage	15s 0d
Item to him more for 20 bushels of lime at sixpence halfpenny	9s 0d
Item to the sawyers for sawing 154 foot	3s 8d
Item more to Hodsdonn for himself 2 days and his son 4 days	6s 4d
Item to his man and his labourer 4 days a pair	8s 8d
Item to Tho: Bryte for 12 days work at 16d	£1 9s 4d
Item to him for his apprentice 2 days	1s 8d
Item for 2 loads and a half of timber at 12 shillings	£1 10s 0d
Item for 100 of boards	10s 0d
Item for sawing of 154 foot	3s 6d
	£5 17s 2d
Item more to Ducke for one load of bricks and thousand of tile and 20 bushels of lime and the carriage of them	£1 10s 0d
Item to Bates for carriage of 6 loads of loam and two of sand	9s 0d
Item more to John Page for tile pins	3d
Item to him for hair a bushel	6d
Item to him for 2 days work at the Church House	2s 8d
Item to Marshall for 2 days work there	1s 8d
	£2 4s 1d

April 25th 1617	
Item paid more to Steven Wheeler for 9 hundred at 9d the	
hundred of hair, laths and 3 hundred of same at 15d	6s 9d
Item paid to Bates for carrying of 10 loads of earth to raise the	
ground at the Church House	3s 9d
Item more to Castleton for lath nails	4s 0d
Item more due to Thomas Lewes for iron work	6s 2d
	14s 6d
1617 1 June	
Mr Hawtrey hath laid out on the parish house	£12 13s
Remaineth in my hands	7s 7d

This document is interesting, despite the odd discrepancy in the figures, because it names the sources of some of the materials and gives the wages of the craftsmen and labourers involved. Most of the names are local and appear in other documents. The materials used are consistent with alterations that took place. The payment to Bates for earth to raise the ground suggests that the land had to be levelled. Evidence of this was noted during the 1979–80 alterations.

The earliest poor law accounts for Ruislip are in a book entitled 'Ralph Hawtrey Esq. His Book of Accts. Being a true Accompt of all them that hath served Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of Ruislip from the year 1659'[6] (Ralph Hawtrey 1626–1725). The book continues to 1744 and abounds in references to payments in money and kind to people lodged at the Church House, as described below.

The entry 'Given to John Ford in the Church house from November 24th 1671 to May 3rd 1672 he being sick and very poor £1 3s' mentions a commonly given reason for residence. In June 1665 Widow Fearne was given money (13s in all) several times during her sickness. Ten years later she was provided with 50 bavins (bundles of kindling), showing that the small cottages were not just temporary refuges. Members of the Bowden family remained in the Church House from *c.*1850 until the early years of the 20th century (Bowlt 2008, 17). Others sought shelter for specific reasons, such as an imminent confinement. Jane Lawrance was brought to bed there three times at the turn of the 17th/18th centuries. The parish clerk noted the babies' baptisms and placed a discreet 'father unknown' beside the first entry, but a more outspoken 'second bastard child' and 'third bastard child' on later occasions.[7]

The ten cottages do not appear to have been furnished. James Norland was moved into the Church House 'with their goods and lumber and wood' in 1708 and when three women went there in 1726, the overseers paid a carpenter for 'taking down their beds and setting them up'.[8]

Dame Mary Franklin, daughter of Ralph Hawtrey, left £100 in her will in 1732 to buy land, the income from which was to be used to buy clothing for such of the poor of Ruislip as were in the Church Houses and belonged to the Church of England. This bequest led earlier historians to believe that Dame Mary had had the building erected as Almshouses, but this has long since been known to be incorrect.

The Ruislip Workhouse opened in 1789, but the Church House continued in use. Possibly the Church House was offered to the feeble in health and other deserving cases. 19th-century census returns show a selection of elderly residents, mainly over 60, often described as 'former nurse', 'formerly laundress', 'formerly dressmaker' and 'former farm worker', but there was also a sprinkling of families. Joseph Bowden, who was only 48, lived there in 1861 with his wife, a stepson and six children ranging in age from one to twenty-one years. He and his stepson were farm labourers. They must have been very overcrowded, but possibly had two of the cottages.

Following the General Outdoor Relief Prohibitory Order of August 1841, some guardians, reluctant to evict widows who resided there, and who needed the now forbidden outdoor relief to survive, specially requested the Poor Law Commissioners to allow them to continue providing it, on the grounds that if evicted and sent to the Uxbridge Union House, the women would lose their few belongings and never be able to live independent lives again.[9] Grudging permission was granted.

A notable resident in the 1920s was Mrs Tobutt. One of her grand-daughters described the interior of her cottage, at the north-east corner of the building, as simply furnished with a table, dresser and some chairs. In a cupboard beside the fireplace she kept firewood and a bucket of water that she filled at an outside tap. All the cooking was done on the open fire and she had an oil lamp for lighting. Despite these basic facilities she sometimes cooked dinner for her grandchildren who passed her door on their way to the National School, further along Eastcote Road.

As the cottages fell vacant in the period between the two Wars, they were left empty and new uses for the building were discussed. By 1938 the four cottages at the western end were empty and the Parochial Church Council proposed to turn them into a verger's cottage for Mr Casemore, who was also sexton, and his wife.[10] F H Mansford, an architect who lived in King's End, Ruislip, drew up plans for a pleasant house, with a kitchen, living-room and dining-room downstairs and a bathroom, WC and two bedrooms upstairs. Electric light and modern plumbing was installed, but only in the verger's cottage, not the rest of the building. The Casemores lived there until their deaths in 1969 and 1972 respectively.

There were still three ladies living in three of the other cottages after the Second World War, in accommodation that failed to reach the standard required by the 1936 Housing Act. Nothing was done until an order of demolition for the whole building, including the Casemores' cottage, was issued in 1948, when electric light was installed and running water was piped into one communal room as an interim measure.[11] Plans, including making the top storey into a Council Chamber for the Ruislip-Northwood UDC, were still being discussed for the building when it finally became vacant. Girl Guides were given use of the cottage at the north-eastern corner in 1938 and after the last old inhabitant, Mrs Lavender, died aged nearly 90 in 1954, her cottage at the south-eastern corner was made available for the Rovers.[12] A curate decided to live in the four central cottages next to the Casemores and, with some gaps, four more curates followed until 1975. The only physical changes during these years seem to have been the insertion of a more modern fireplace in one of the rooms and a bathroom.

As early as 1973 the condition of the building was causing public concern as brick nogging was being shaken from the framework by heavy traffic passing along Eastcote Road and hardboard and wooden supports were placed against the brickwork to preserve it from further damage. The Harding Housing Association were interested in the building and were preparing a draft for a 75-year-lease on five flatlets and it was hoped that the Church authorities would vet tenders for work to be put out early in 1974.[13] Delays ensued while legal problems were sorted out and the ownership of the building was transferred to the Diocesan Council in March 1979.[14] An architectural report had been drawn up by Norman Haines Partnership and work on the final conversion to four flats and a maisonette, began in May 1979, but was suspended in July as the GLC was involved in the lease and had not signed it because of legal problems. The Harding Housing Association had been unable to obtain the required grant and could not pay for the work already done.[15] The Ruislip Village Conservation Area Panel played an active part in persuading various authorities to resolve the difficulties. Finally work restarted in January 1980 at a cost of £84,000 and was completed later that year. Mr Bodovsky was the contractor. The Harding Housing Association merged with Battersea Churches and Housing Trust in July 2003 and following another merger in March 2005 Servite Houses became the leaseholder. The Church retained the right to nominate tenants of the maisonette at the eastern end.

The restored Church House remains an attractive historic feature in the churchyard

at the centre of old Ruislip and continues to fulfil the purpose envisaged by Ralph Hawtrey and the overseers of the poor in the 17th century.

DATING

Three samples of cross-sections of different jetty joists were sent to the University of Sheffield for dendro-dating in 1982. One sample had 69 rings (of which 15 were sapwood), another had 95 rings (5 sapwood), and the third had 111 rings (10 sapwood). Jennifer Hillam (pers comm) could find no match between the three samples, nor did they match any dated reference chronologies. The samples were re-examined again some years later by Ian Tyers (Sheffield; pers comm) with the same result. It is likely that the timber used in construction was grown locally as Ruislip has always had (and still retains) extensive ancient woodlands less than a mile away (Bowlt & Bowlt 1982). Future samples from elsewhere in the building may identify the origins and date of the timbers used but at the moment, following Smith 1992, typology has been used in dating in default of a better method.

ORIGINAL STRUCTURE

There is no documentary evidence for an earlier building than the present one on the site. Notably there is no reference to the building in a Terrier compiled in 1565.[16] However a shallow pit under the north wall revealed some rough brickwork to a depth of about 51cm. Whether this related to an earlier building was unclear. From structural evidence, the present building appears to have been erected in the mid-16th century.

Main layout

Internally the original building, presumably a private house of *c.*1570, was of two stories with a continuous jetty along the south side facing the churchyard. It had a three-cell plan, with three-bay central rooms up and down, and single-bay rooms at either end (Fig 3). At this stage all rooms were through rooms, except the ground floor western bay (parlour), there being no longitudinal internal walling. Originally the building had only the westernmost brick chimney. The other two chimneys appear to have been inserted later, judging from the way the joists have been cut to allow their construction. The western end of the house was thus the upper end, with an eastern service area.

The three-bay central block, with the lower part presumably functioning as the hall, had a single-bay section at its western end, the position of the solar in medieval houses, but in this building probably functioning

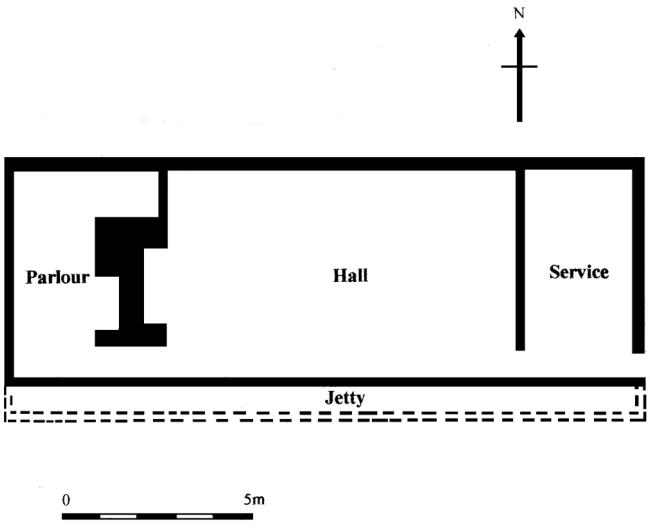


Fig 3. Ground plan of the original building

as the kitchen or parlour. The single-bay section at the eastern end was the service room (identified by the low status heck door — stable door type — in the gable end).

Fig 4. South-east corner showing jowl

The six cross-frames, forming the five bays, are still extant, but the lower parts of the 28cm square main posts have mostly decayed and have been replaced by brickwork (see Fig 2). The external facings of remaining timbers are much weathered and many peg holes have been obliterated. The tops of the main posts have long jowls (Fig 4). The external walls had arch-bracing on the upper storey. It is still in place, from main post to wall plate at two positions on the north side and one position on the south side (see Figs 2 and 5). At the east gable end there are arch-braces beween the corner main posts and the tie-beam. The west gable end is similarly braced except that the southern one arises from a stud rather than from the main post. All the bracing is now covered externally with tiles. No evidence remains of bracing to the external walls of the ground floor, except that during recent renogging (1979–80) at the west end a mortice was revealed on the girding beam for a missing brace to the lower part of the north-west main post.

The original internal walls between AB/CD and GH/JK (see Fig 6) were also arch-braced. Those between GH/JK run from the main post on the northern side and from the original door jambs on the southern side to the mid-rail and the tie-beam on the ground

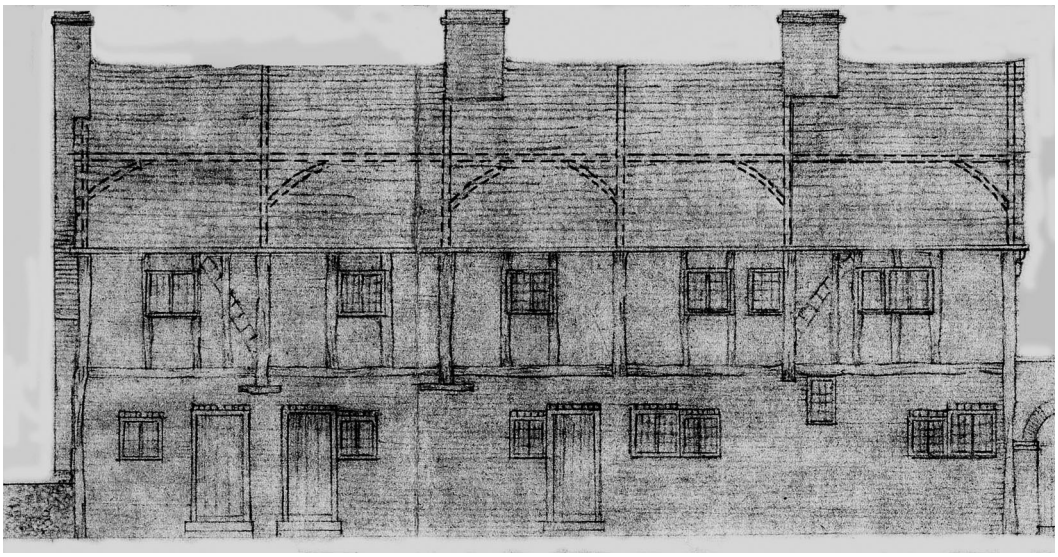


Fig 5. Architects drawing (1949) showing the north elevation with wind-bracing under the tiles added (shown dotted)

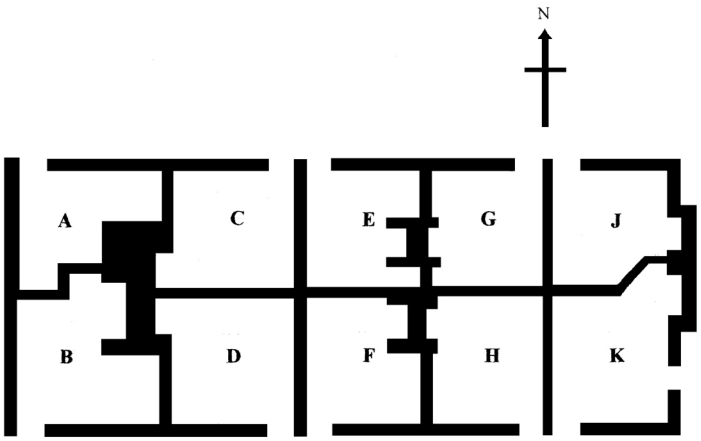


Fig 6. Ground plan after 1616/17conversion into ten cottages

Fig 7. View, looking south-west, of internal wall between hall and service room with floor removed, showing original doorways; these were blocked and the upper room pitched to the purlin during the 1616/17 conversion

and upper floor respectively (see Fig 7). Arch-bracing is present in the internal wall between AB/CD in the upper floor matching that between GH/JK.

The external ground floor walls are now of brick, but remaining peg holes along the girth rail along the north side, facing the road, indicate that it resembled the upper floor walling with studs, braces and nogging infill, but no jetty. The south side facing the churchyard was certainly originally jettied. However the ground floor wall is now of brick built under the bresummer of the jetty and replacing the original wall set back under the jetty. There is no moulding on any of the internal beams or joists. This seems somewhat curious for such a large well-built structure which gives all the appearances of being constructed as a single dwelling.

External doorways

The original position of the main doorways into the house has not been ascertained. In medieval tradition they would have been at the lower (eastern) end of the hall, but here the main doorway may have been adjacent to the original chimney at the west end — a precursor of the lobby-entrance house. The only remaining original external doorway into the building is on the south side of the east gable wall (Fig 8). The door head and remnants of the jambs are unmoulded but judging from the rabbeting in the lower part

Fig 8. Remains of external doorway of the original building, in the east gable end (20cm scale divisions)

of the remaining long door jamb, still visible inside the building, it seems likely that the original door was in two parts like a stable door (heck door). The rather unusual position in the gable end of a low status door strongly suggests that it functioned as an outlet from the service end of the original building.

Bricks and tiles

The brickwork of the building is a mixture of old and newer bricks. Much has been relaid at various times. Only that of the chimney at the east end, built 1616/17, is more or less original with two-inch bricks. The bonding throughout is irregular.

The infill between the timbers of the external walls is of brick. Careful searching when the bricks were removed during the most recent restoration work at the western end failed to reveal any grooves or holes necessary to hold staves around which wattles were woven. It is concluded that the Church House always had brick infill. This is not too surprising in an area well known for its production of bricks, certainly since the 16th century.[17] The bricks are of various ages with some probably as old as the original structure. Many have been reused during alterations and repairs and it is not known which, if any, are in their original positions. There is no reason to suppose that the roof has not always been tiled, although the tiling was repaired and replaced at least twice during the 20th century, and presumably at other times since the original roofing *c.*400 years ago.

Roof woodwork

The roof is of clasped purlin with queen struts type and rather simple scarf joints (Fig 9), as is general in most of the local timber-framed buildings. There was no smoke blackening of any of the rafters (they were in remarkably pristine condition and probably original), showing that it had always had a brick chimney, and not a smoke bay originally.

In the roof curved wind braces between principal rafters and purlins are positioned symmetrically about the central bay (Fig 5), which would have been visible in the original build since the upper chambers were open to the roof. The wind braces in sections A and H are now hidden behind the later pitched ceilings.

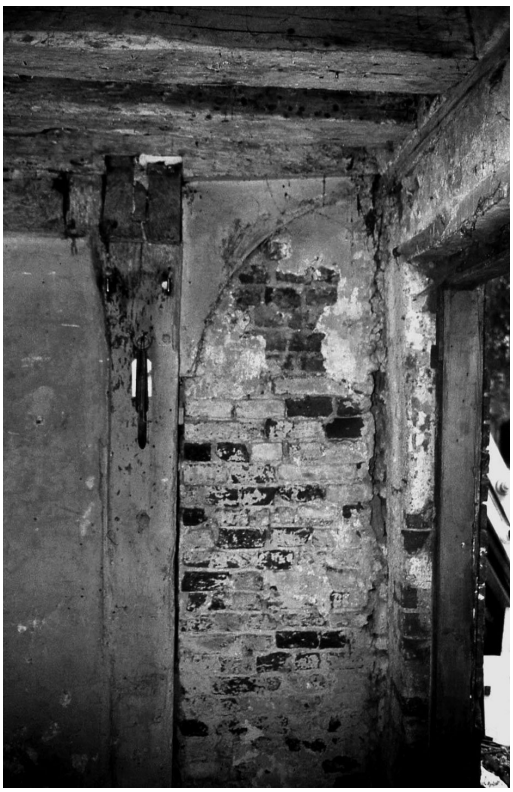
Chimneys

According to Bailey (1979, 9) chimneys were not in common use until the second half of the 16th century. The existing chimney with back-to-back fireplaces opening into the hall and parlour/kitchen at the west end appears contemporary with the initial build but does not have a short bay to contain it. The central bridging beam, holding the morticed ends of the ground floor ceiling joists, is itself morticed into a beam running in front of, and free of, the east side of the chimney. The original fireplaces appear to have always been only on the ground floor and although parts contain much old brickwork, documentary evidence records alteration in 1939.[18]

Jetty

The Church House was originally built with a continuous jetty on the side overlooking the churchyard, as were several of the other old buildings backing onto the churchyard (Bowlt 1990; Clarke 1994). Such jetties were widespread in the 16th century, but in the

Fig 9. Clasped purlin with queen strut in roof truss (second from east end, looking north-east)



adjoining county of Hertfordshire, at least, had fallen completely out of favour by the end of the 16th century (Smith 1992, 111). The 74cm overhang at Church House was filled in with brick walling at some later period, perhaps during the early 17th-century alterations. During conversion work in 1979–80 the positions of the main posts supporting the originally protruding joists were very obvious and can still be seen externally in the east gable end. One of the original jetty brackets was still *in situ* incorporated into an internal wall (Fig 10).

Upper rooms

The rooms on the upper floor would probably have been chambers for sleeping. These chambers were originally open to the roof as is apparent from the fact that the bridging beam supporting the current ceiling joists is not morticed into the tie-beams but simply rests on them. Also the roof trusses separating

Fig 10. Infill between H/K looking east, showing jetty bracket, jetty post with slight jowling, and cut end of jetty plate. 17th-century cottage door is on the right

the two end bays to form the large central chamber have remnants of infill between the queen strut and the principal rafter which clearly continued the partitioning of the hall chamber from the end bay chambers into the roof (Fig 9). The queen struts at the west end continue up to the rafter indicating that here the partitioning went up to the rafters.

Flooring

Wide oak floorboards were still present in a number of places upstairs but covered with later deal boards. The joists were rebated to hold the ends of the floorboards, leaving their surface flush with the top surface of the joist. There was no indication that the ground floor had been boarded. Indeed a small excavated hole indicated a possible earth floor at 2.65m below the ceiling height.

Stairway

Until the late 18th century access to the upper floor in a building such as this was usually confined to a ladder or steps (Brunskill 1978, 120). In the north-west corner of the lower central room or hall, adjacent to the fireplace, a morticed cross-piece between first floor joists probably supported the top of such a ladder or steps; this position continued in use for stairs until the recent alterations.

Internal doorways

In the original house there were intercommunicating doorways between the end bay rooms and the large central rooms. As mentioned above, those in the eastern partition wall, and the upper door in the western partition were still present but blocked, presumably during the 1616 conversion . On the ground floor between the hall and the service end there is a single doorway, clearly indicating that the lower service end was a single room. It has a rounded door head, and abutted the original external wall under the jetty. It aligns with the external door in the eastern gable end. Its counterpart into the western end bay appears to have been removed during conversion work in 1939. On the upper floor the doorways to both end bays on the south side abutted the external wall over the jetty and had simple squared lintels. There is also another blocked doorway in the dividing wall into the upper eastern end with the central stud as a jamb; that may have been inserted after the original build (but before the 1616 conversion) to divide the upper end bay room into two. Mortices in the tie-beam suggest that there may have been a similarly positioned door from the hall chamber into the parlour chamber. This is confirmed by the presence of corresponding mortices for studs in the upper and lower bridging beams, showing that the parlour chamber was divided into two rooms.

Windows

The only original windows are those that were on the upper floor facing north onto Eastcote Road, away from the churchyard. Surviving shutter grooves just under the eaves were noted in the upper room of C, and a lintel containing the sockets for diamond-shaped mullion bars, now with the sockets turned inwards and filled (Fig 11), was recorded in the upper room of G, showing that the mullioned windows were unglazed but could be closed by internal horizontally sliding shutters. A piece of reused timber with a shutter-slide was built into the south side of the inserted 1616 chimney; whether it came from an upper or ground floor window is unknown. Harris (1978, 25) states that after the late 16th or early 17th century shuttered window openings were designed to be glazed; however there was no evidence of that here.

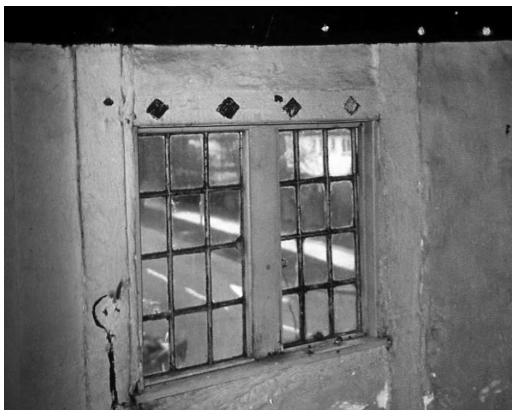


Fig 11. Original window lintel turned through 90 degrees and showing mullion sockets, in upper room of G looking north

DISCUSSION OF ORIGINAL BUILDING

The three-cell plan with a large room (hall) and smaller rooms at either end (solar and service) with upper rooms open to the rafters follows the medieval tradition. However, the continuous jetty with its consequent upper floor is generally accepted as being a 16th-century feature that had fallen completely out of favour by the end of the century (Smith 1992, 111). Upper floors were sometimes inserted into an existing medieval hall building to 'modernise' it, but this required the insertion of a chimney (or smoke bay) to replace the open hearth. Here the westernmost chimney was built with the house and yet the medieval plan was retained. The building also had sliding-shuttered windows (at least in the upper rooms), but glass did not come into more general use until the late 17th century in lesser houses.

The building was well constructed with nicely cambered tie-beams, and plentiful curved bracing in the roof and internal and external walls. Yet there were no internal decorative features, such as moulding, or even chamfering, on the beams, although these details have been noted on nearby buildings. The only slight concession was the rounded door head between the hall and the service rooms (probably present also with the other doors leading from the hall but now missing). The doorway in the gable-end wall from the service room to the outside, which was certainly part of the original structure, was clearly functional and plain, with a stable-type door. A door of any kind in a gable-end wall of a timber-framed building appears to have been unusual.

The question arises as to why such a large, well-built, but plain, building was constructed at such a central position in the village next to the church. F H Mansford, a local architect who worked at both St Martin's Church and the Church House in the 1920s and 1930s, surmised that it had been built as a moot-hall with an open under-storey. The survey revealed no evidence to support this theory. The building was clearly intended to be a house, but not a vicarage, because documentary evidence shows that the vicar of Ruislip lived on a site in Bury Street from at least the 14th century until 1982 (Bowlt 1989, 23). The lack of decorative features suggests that the owner did not intend to live in it himself. It was possibly a speculative building venture. The fact that the building was converted into ten cottages relatively shortly after its construction would fit in with this idea.

CONVERSION TO DWELLINGS FOR THE POOR

Once converted, the Church House largely retained its 17th-century layout until the 20th century. The building was divided into ten two-room dwellings (one up, one down). Five faced north onto Eastcote Road, and five faced onto the churchyard. This was achieved by dividing the house longitudinally on both floors with lath and plaster walling supported by oak studding, which was largely still in place at the time of the survey. These studs were not morticed into the beams but simply nailed into position, demonstrating that they were not part of the original structure. The laths were nailed onto the studs and then covered with plaster mixed with hair — items which were listed among the materials purchased in 1616/17.

New chimneys

To provide each dwelling with a fireplace two further chimneys were constructed. Rooms A, B, C and D were heated by fireplaces in the original chimney. One of the new chimneys in bays E/F and G/H provided four back-to-back fireplaces for dwellings E, F, G and H; this was clearly a late insertion since joists had to be cut to accommodate it. Fireplaces for the two remaining dwellings at the east end were supplied from a chimney built onto the east gable wall. A cavity, recorded during the survey, between the two ground floor fireplaces sharing the east gable end chimney was probably used as a cupboard to keep salt or firewood dry.

Ceilings

It seems likely that ceilings to the upper floor rooms were inserted at this time; this was carried out by laying a bridging beam on top of the tie-beams (*ie* not morticed in)

longitudinally along the building to support the ceiling joists running to the eaves. A curious feature is that two of the upper rooms (not adjacent) have a pitched ceiling peaking to the purlin (south-east corner example shown in Fig 7). This appears to date from the original conversion but the reason remains a mystery.

Stairway

Each of the ten cottages had a separate communication between upper and lower rooms. It is likely that there were no proper staircases and access to the upper rooms was presumably by a ladder or possibly a simple stair. The surviving dog-legged staircases were typically 19th-century.

Doorways

The gable-end chimney was offset from the central position to prevent it blocking an original doorway in the gable end, indicating that this original external doorway must have been retained in use after the conversion. The positions of the other doorways after conversion were presumably those existing until the 20th century (there was little option with such small dwellings), but no early woodwork remained. Indeed, as explained earlier, the exterior ground floor walls were not those of the original house. It is unclear whether the infilling of the jetty on the side facing the churchyard occurred at this time or later, but it did have the effect of making the rooms on the north and south side more equal in size.

Windows

The type and exact position of the windows in each of the ten dwellings following conversion is unclear. The studding visible externally on the upper floor shows considerable amounts of cutting, which could indicate window positions at different times. The ground floor walls have been much altered, and the existing windows are metal framed of prob-ably 19th-century date.

Earth floor

There is a recorded payment in 1616–17 for six loads of earth 'for raysing the ground at the church house'. Prior to the recent alterations, the ground floor levels in the rooms on the northern side were 43cm lower than the rooms on the southern side. It seems likely that when the building was divided in two by a longitudinal wall the ground level of the rooms on the south side were raised. Just why this was thought necessary is unclear. Since the ground floors probably had earth floors, it might have been to counteract damp, but the building was surprisingly dry at the time of examination.

LATER KNOWN BUILDING HISTORY

At an unknown date the ground floor front wall (facing Eastcote Road) of timber framing/nogging was replaced by brick walling with doors and windows for the five cottages on that side of the building. This may have been done because the lower sections of the main posts had rotted (see Figs 2 and 8); however, the post at the north-west corner is largely intact, and the north-east corner main post was repaired with the bressumer timber removed from the central chimney during the 1979/80 conversion work. Also at this time a brick engraved with the initials CFK was found loose amongst fallen brickwork. This could refer to Christopher Kingston Fountain who was a churchwarden in 1835, when this repair work might have been carried out. The brick was built into the front wall during the 1980 conversion.

The Church House remained as ten one-up-one-down cottages until 1938/40, when the four westernmost cottages were adapted for use as a dwelling for the sexton. The doorways of three of these cottages were blocked and a new entrance made in the west end. Some lath and plaster internal walling was removed. Three of the cottage staircases were removed and the other reconstructed. Parts of the original 16th-century fireplace were cut away and the sloping brickwork on the first floor removed.

In 1948 a demolition order was served on the vicar because the remaining six cottages did not meet the requirements of the 1936 Housing Act. Electric lighting and running cold water were installed as an interim measure in 1950. By 1956 the four centre cottages had been made into a single dwelling for a curate. The two remaining cottages at

the east end remained untouched until the conversion of the whole building to four flats and one maisonette in 1979–80.

The late 20th-century restoration and conversion of the building which prompted the recording work involved major alterations and reconstruction work, even to the extent of removing some original jetty joists and oak floorboards and replacement with soft wood. However, much still remains and externally the building still appears more or less untouched. Indeed there was an immediate improvement with the removal of the temporary shuttering which had been holding the loose brick nogging in place for some years. How many of the early features of the building have survived the 1979–80 conversion is not known.

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The author wishes to thank Mr Bodovsky, the builder in charge of the 1979–80 conversion work, for giving him welcome access to the building at that time.

NOTES

1 British Library: Add MS 9367.
2 London Metropolitan Archive: Acc 249/145.
3 *ibid*; LMA 249/145.
4 William Le Hardy (ed) *Middlesex Sessions Records* New Series, IV (1941), 148.
5 LMA: Acc 249/234-5.
6 LMA: Acc 249/1574.
7 LMA: DRO 19 A1/1.
8 LMA: Acc 249/1574.
9 Times Online, 14 December 1841.
10 LMA: DRO 19/D1/1.
11 DRO 19/D1/2.
12 DRO 19/D1/3.
13 Extracts from Minutes of Ruislip Village Conservation Area Panel. Author's possession.
14 *ibid.*
15 *ibid.*
16 King's College: RUI 182 (formerly R36).
17 *ibid*, folio 50. The rents of customary tenants in Eastcote included 1,000 bricks per year.
18 LMA: DRO 19/D1/1.

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