

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

OF

34 UPPER HIGH STREET,

THAME, OXFORDSHIRE

SP 708 057

On behalf of

Carmichael UK

AUGUST 2005

REPORT FOR Mr R. Carmichael
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1 Introduction

1.1 Planning Background

The Government, through the Department of Culture Media and Sport is responsible for protecting the historic environment. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides specific protection for buildings and areas of special architectural or historic interest. The Department monitors the effectiveness of the controls.

The Secretary of State has a duty under the Act to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. There are three grades of listing:

- Grade II are of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them
- Grade II* are particularly important buildings of more than special interest
- Grade I buildings are those of exceptional interest

The Building at 34 Upper High Street, Thame has been listed as Grade II*.

An assessment of the building to inform planning decisions about the treatment of internal partitions has been commissioned and was occasioned by the modernisation and reorganisation of the interior, which has been used as offices since c.1979. The results of the assessment are given below.

2 Aims of the Investigation

To assess and record the areas of the building proposed for alterations.

3 Strategy

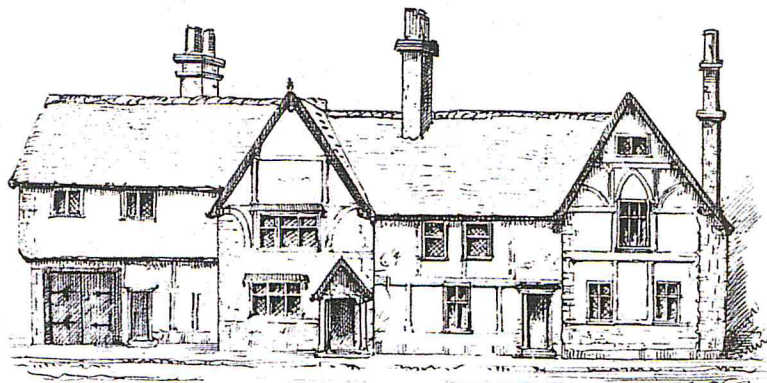
- 3.1 A study of all available historic maps and plans, together with a documentary search was undertaken at the Public Records Office in Oxford.
- 3.2 An analysis and photographic record of the features of the building proposed for alteration was undertaken to determine their significance to the building as a whole and to its development over time. Floor plans showing the locations of the photographs have been produced and will be included in the archive.
- 3.3 The archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Buildings Record.



Fig 1

Location map; house in red
(from Rodwell 1975, 153)

19th century drawing of 34 &
35 Upper High Street (NMR;
from Lee 1883)



*Old House, near the White-hound Pond, Thame.
from a Sketch by the Author.*

Photograph 1942
(NMR Oxford M38)



4 Background

The building stands on the south west side of the wide main street at the eastern limit of the built-up frontage (Fig 1) and is part of a property whose structural history was investigated in the 1970s by Malcolm Airs and John Rhodes and published in *Oxoniensia* (Vol 45, 1980, 235-59). This study took place after the rediscovery in 1968 of wall and ceiling paintings in one of the upper rooms of No 34. It proved to be one of the principal chambers in a mid 16th century house (ibid figs 1-6) consisting of a two-bay cross-wing and a four-bay hall, storied throughout and with an integral brick chimney stack; the hall range is part of a separate property (No 35). On the ground floor of the cross-wing there is a through-passage leading to a staircase next the stack and two unheated service rooms. These retain their paired original doorways but the intervening partition, originally studwork, was a modern replacement (now removed).

The first floor chamber of 1½ bays has an arch-braced roof open to collar level (ibid fig 9), a brick fireplace and a small closet at the rear. The paintings, which were removed to the Oxford City and County Museum in 1972, survived above an inserted attic floor. They were in Renaissance style, executed largely in black and white, and dated to the third quarter of the 16th century, probably contemporary with the rest of the building. A short length of frieze remains; this was discovered in 1977 when the room was restored and the inserted ceiling removed.

The south-eastern part of No 34 is a separate building comprising a two-bay range parallel to the street with a high continuous jetty. On the ground floor there is a one-bay room and an open cart-way; on the first floor a single full-length room with exposed timbers; this has a higher floor level than the adjoining rooms. At the rear is a long modern wing added in 1979 (ibid, 243) when the building was converted into offices. The front wall of both units was underbuilt in brick at this time, replacing an older shop front (Fig 1). The previous analysis of the building dated this range to the late 17th century without giving evidence for such a conclusion. Presumably it was unrestored or inaccessible at the time as the style of the exposed frame in the upper room suggests that it is in fact the earlier structure. Neither was it inspected when the listing was revised (see Appendix).

5 Description (Figures 2-5)

During the current modernisation of the office accommodation a concrete block partition wall and other modern finishes were removed from the front rooms on the ground floor to expose the junction between two separate timber-framed units. These were butted against each other with a variable gap of c.0.05m at the base, widening to c.0.3m at first floor level due to movement in the frames. The modern wall had replaced any older partitions at ground floor level, but both units retain separate partitions on the first floor and there is a

c.1m height difference between floor levels. These are illustrated in plan (Fig 2), elevation (Fig 3) and photographs (Figs 4 &5)

5.1 Frame A

To the north-west, is part of the larger 16th century house described in *Oxoniensia* and forms the end wall of the cross-wing. It consists of a post at the mid point of the wing which rises through two storeys and is morticed for girding beams at first floor level; extant at the front, missing at the rear. The foot of the post is tenoned into a cill beam in good condition, set just above the lower modern floor level and cut off flush with the post. The underside of the girding beam is morticed for eight studs at 0.4m centres and has a deep secondary rebate adjoining the (modern) front wall; the front corner post is not visible. This partition had no mid rail but mortices indicate that the rear bay did, as did the partition which divided the cross wing into two rooms; these have been replaced by modern walls. The face of this frame abutting frame B is clean and unweathered, with no obvious sign of carpenter's marks; pegs were driven in from the rear and are uncut, indicating that it was built against a pre-existing structure.

Lodged on the top of the girding beam and projecting unevenly beyond it (by up to 70mm) is a floor of wide oak boards with overlapped rebated edges. Set on top of this and visible for a height of c.0.8m is a studwork partition of elm which is plastered from the reverse onto laths. This is evidently not the original finish as the bottom rail has a wattle groove; one panel is a modern replacement. Behind this partition is the chamber with the mid 16th century wall paintings described in *Oxoniensia*. Visible in the gap between the two frames at first floor level is a curved brace running from the front corner post to the wall plate; this is unweathered.

5.2 Frame B

To the south-east forms the end of the jettied two-bay range which has a greater ground floor ceiling height. At this level it comprises two wall posts tenoned into a girding beam. Both have jowled (thickened) heads facing in the same direction (away from the street). Only the inner and rear faces of the front post are visible; the other two sides are built into modern walls and the foot is cut off at the higher modern floor level. The inner face is morticed for upper and lower rails.

The other post is free-standing; it is set on a wooden pad in poor condition which is probably the remains of the cill beam. The top, which is appreciably wider, is out of true and leans away from the street. The joint with the girding beam is secured by a peg with a projecting point driven in from the direction of frame A, but the head of this post is also tenoned for a wall plate which passed beneath the beam (normal assembly). The present plate, running south-east, is a replacement and suggests that the post has been reversed. There are

two big mortices in the south-east (illustrated) face of the post and the corner facing the street has a shallow rebate for a door with a stopped chamfered moulding. This has been roughly recut and two hinge pins inserted. The north-east face has an upper rail mortice, matching that in the opposite post, but no corresponding lower mortice. There are no mortices in the two other faces.

The girding beam oversails both posts; it is jettied at the front and has been cut off and underbuilt by a modern wall at the rear. There are no mortices in its underside. The upper part of this partition is exposed in the room above; the corner posts are jowled and tenoned into a cambered tie beam and the wall is framed into three panels. There was originally a door at the south-west end, redundant since frame A was built because of the 1m discrepancy in floor levels. The reverse of this partition can be partly seen in the gap between the frames; it has a smoothly-finished pinkish daub surface with woven wattles visible where the face is damaged. One of the studs is visible; it has a clean unweathered surface and like the adjoining plaster, no surface finishes. The reverse of the blocked door was out of view.

The timber framing in this upper room has been fully exposed; it is divided into two bays by a jointed arch-braced truss springing from a wall post with a semi-octagonal rib moulding. The roof, exposed to collar level is windbraced. At a later date an attic floor was inserted and substantial tie beams were lodged on the wall heads. A brick chimney stack was built into the south-west wall in the 19th century.

On the ground floor the framing is largely reduced to the four corner posts; the front wall underbuilding the jetty is modern, replacing a shop front (Fig 1), and the rear wall is open to a modern office extension. The south-east wall is hidden internally apart from a high-set window frame with seven close-set diagonal mullions, but the adjoining post is visible externally in the covered way. Modern plasterboard adjacent to frame B was removed from the ceiling to expose the underside of the joists forming the jetty (Fig 5). These averaged 0.15m square and were set at 0.35m centres; they have been limewashed and a hatchway cut through the end joist adjoining frame B, probably in the 19th century. They are lodged on a tie beam which is morticed on its underside for a central post and a series of studs at 0.3m centres. It appears to be reused as it has been truncated through one of these mortices where it is jointed to the north-west corner post of frame B.

5.3 Structural Sequence

1 It is clear that the range incorporating frame B was built before frame A because it has a finished outer face at first floor level. This does not appear to have been external as it is unweathered and the presence of an integral door indicates that the building originally extended further to the north-west. The three timbers on the ground floor lack any mortices for an original partition, suggesting that the room at this level was at least two bays long. The jowled head of the rear post appears to have been reversed and should originally have

faced inwards to match the other. It appears to have been rotated about the axis of the pegged joint to the girthing beam; if reversed (Fig 5) the tenoned joint for the wall plate would be in the correct position and the mortices in the south-east face would relate to the missing part of the building. The style of the carpentry, particularly the roof truss, suggests a 15th century date for this building.

2 The mid 16th century house to the north west is the later building, butted against a pre-existing structure and replacing at least one bay; none of these surfaces are weathered or finished. It originally had its own studwork end wall (frame A), indicated on the ground floor by mortices in the girthing beam but replaced on the upper floor by a partition set on oversailing floorboards. This probably took place in the late 17th or early 18th century when a lower ceiling was inserted into the painted chamber. This preserved the only section of painting to survive on this wall; a narrow band of scrolled frieze discovered during the 1977 restoration (Airs & Rhodes 1980, 249; Section E). The wall below was replastered at a subsequent date, probably in the 19th century.

3 At an unknown date in the 16th or 17th century the south-west post of frame B was rotated through 180° to its present position and secured to the girthing beam through an original peg-hole. The wall plate joint was reused for a secondary tie beam which was cut to fit through a stud mortice. This alteration was probably carried out as a structural repair. A partition was constructed between the posts of frame B in this modified position, indicated by the relatively slight rail mortices in their inner faces; where the mortice is missing the lower rail was probably lodged on the sloping post.

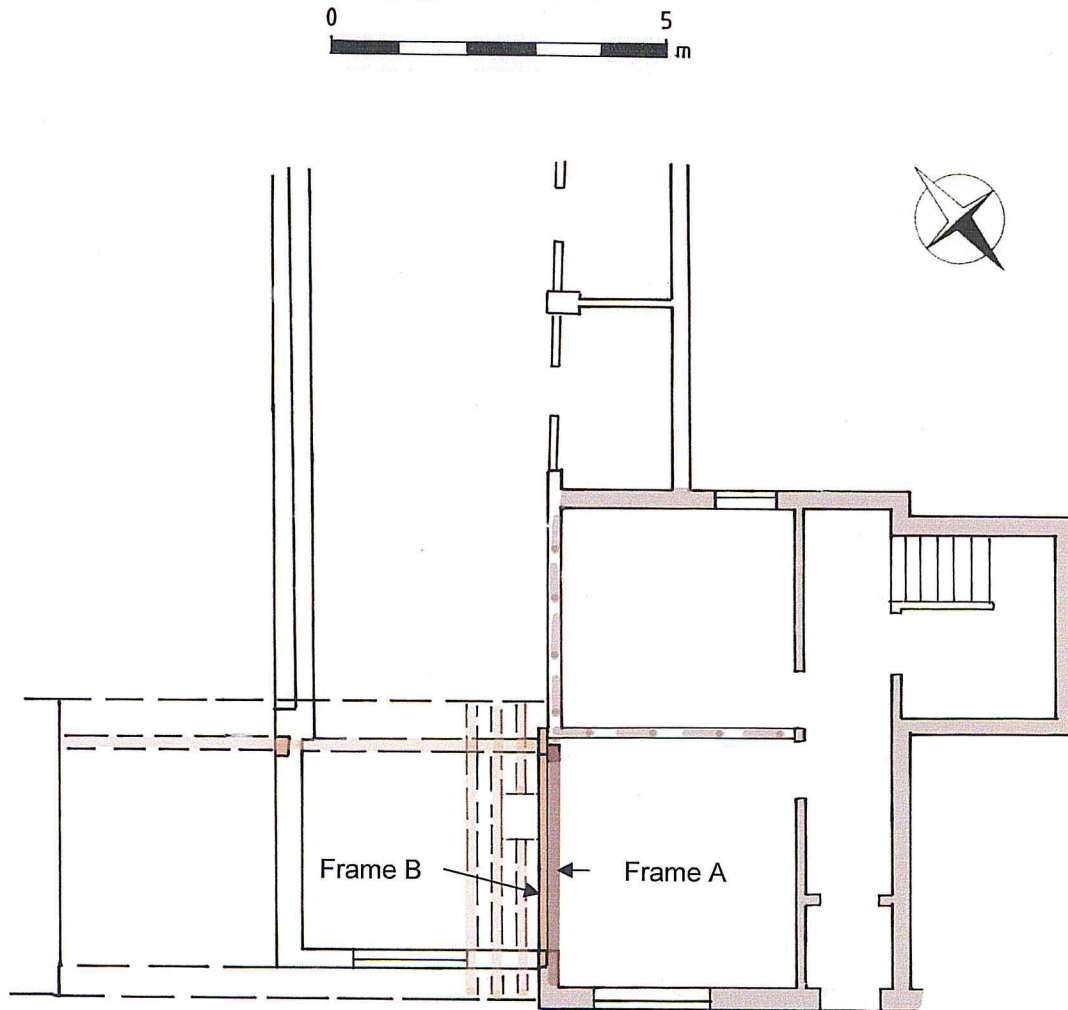
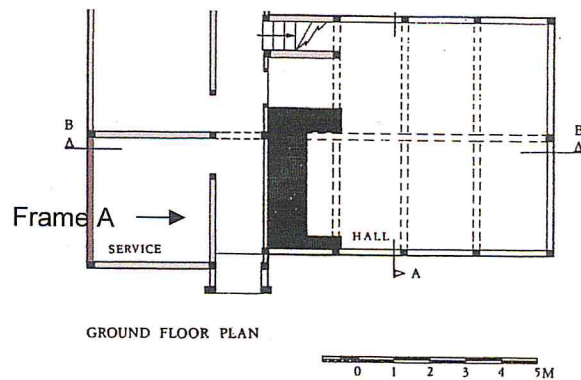
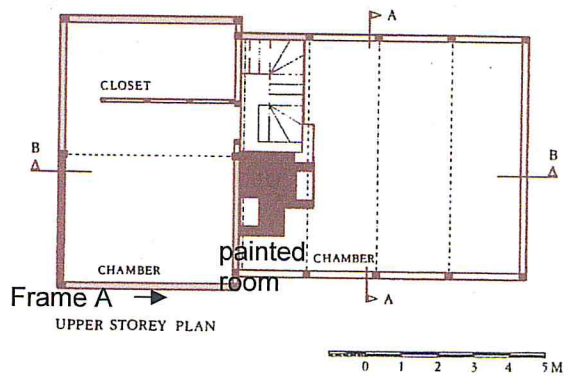


Fig 2

Ground floor plan showing position of frames and exposed first floor joists. 16th century cross wing outlined in brown. Modern walls in outline

Ground and first floor plans from *Oxoniensia*, figs 2 & 3. 16th century cross wing outlined in brown



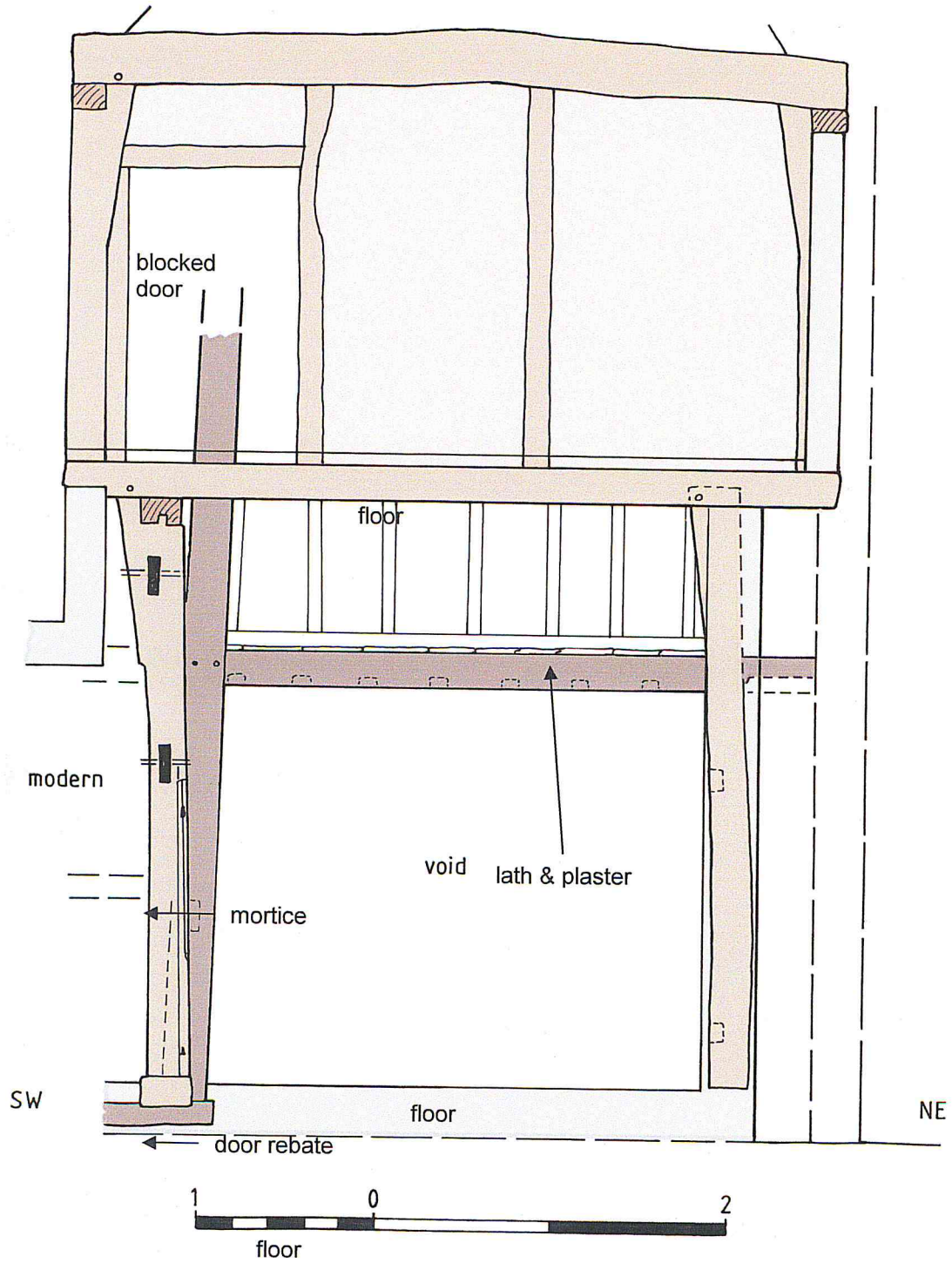


Fig 3

Frames A (dark brown) and B (light brown) from the south-east.
Wattle and daub – pink Modern walls and floors - grey

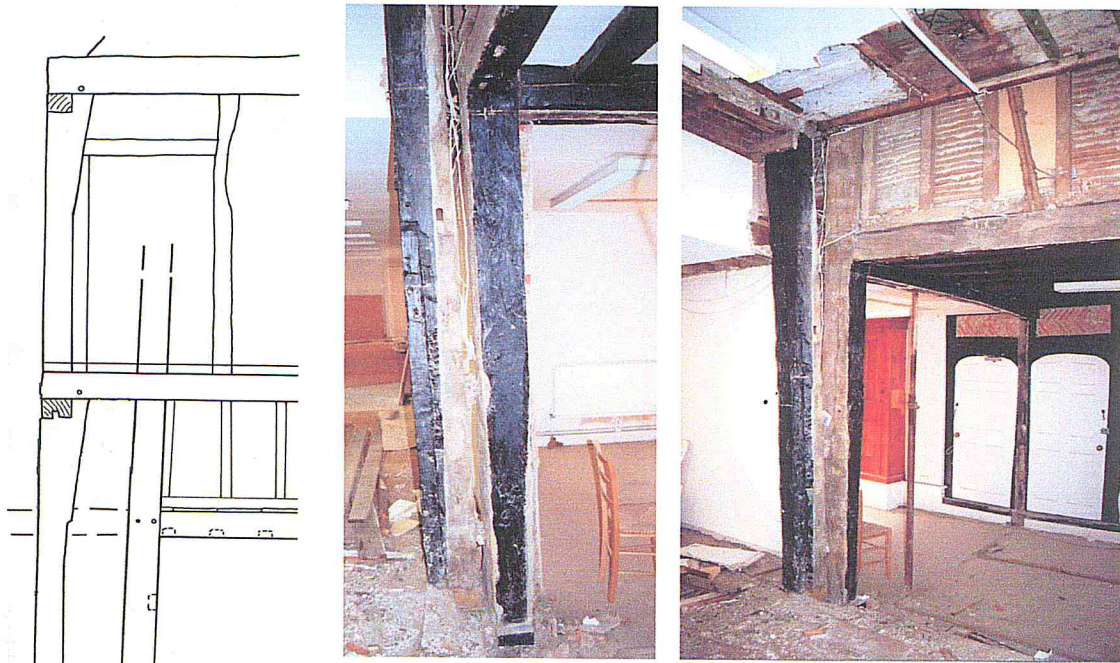


Fig 4 (clockwise)
Frame B showing the corner post reversed with the jowled head facing inwards
The junction of frame B (left) & frame A (right); frame B is rebated for a door
Frames B (foreground) & A looking west; 16th century doors in the background
Post of frame B looking north; lath and plaster infilling frame A at first floor level behind
Frames A (foreground) & B looking east





Fig 5 (clockwise)

Junction of frames looking north-east; A to left with stud mortices in soffit of beam. B to right with exposed ceiling joists cut by later hatch
Head of frame B with ceiling joists and tie beam looking south-west
Looking up into gap between frames; A to left with curved brace centre bottom. Frame B to right with finished wattle and daub face
First floor room looking towards frame B with arch-braced truss and later floor beam in foreground



6 Conclusions

This analysis of the recently exposed fabric has reversed the structural sequence proposed in *Oxoniensia*. Rather than being a late 17th century addition, the jettied range to the south-east is earlier than the mid 16th century house and probably dates to the 15th century.

7 Bibliography

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APPENDIX – LISTING**THAME UPPER HIGH STREET**

(South-west side) Nos.34 (Gallup Poll) and 35 (Garfield)

(Formerly listed as Nos..33, 34 and 35)

II*

House, now office and dwelling. Mid C16; cross-wing to right added early C17; wing to left added late C17 Roughcast, on brick with areas of timber framing; C20 brick to ground floor left; C19 close-studded timber framing with roughcast infill to first floor left of centre; old plain-tile roof; brick stacks. Originally 4-bay hall house with 2-bay cross-wing to left. 2-storey, 4-window range. 6-panel part-glazed door to right of centre with C20 segmental hood. 4-panel door to left of centre with probably mid C16 timber-framed gabled porch, having 4-centred archway with decorated spandrels and shaped bargeboards. Late C20 three-light wood mullion and transom window to left. 3-light wood mullion and transom window to centre. Two 2-light wood mullion and transom windows to right. 2-light wood mullion and transom windows to first floor, except 3-light wood mullion and transom window to left. Cross-gables to left and right. 3-light leaded casement to right cross-gable. Brick end stack to right, ridge stack to left of centre. Wing to left: C20 brick to ground floor; roughcast, probably on timber framing to first floor; old plain-tile roof; brick end stack to left. 2-storey, 2-window range. C20 three-light wood casement to right. Carriageway to left. Two C20 two-light wood casements to jettied first floor.

Interior; closed well staircase to left of centre. C19 straight-flight staircase to right of centre. Arch-braced collar-truss roofs with windbraces to mid C16 building. Double queen-post roof to early C17 cross-wing. Massive open fireplace to ground floor centre with wood Tudor-arched surround having quatrefoil carvings and elongated chamfered spandrels. Early C17 stone fireplace to ground floor of early C17 cross-wing to right, with C19 marble fireplace in front. Massive chamfered spine beams and joists to ground floor. Fragments of C17 wall painting to first floor left. Series of wall paintings from first floor chamber removed (1972) to the Woodstock Museum.