WEST WYCOMBE VILLAGE: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF THE CHURCH LOFT AND VILLAGE BUILDINGS

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The Church Loft is thought to be the oldest surviving building in West Wycombe village with dendrochronology dating suggesting 1465 for its construction. Situated in a prominent location on the north side of the High Street it has a fascinating history reflecting changing patterns of social, domestic and commercial activity in the village over a period of more than 500 years. This article describes the results of archive research and recording of the building undertaken by members of the Buildings Recording Group of Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society. It complements a wider archaeological and historical study of the village undertaken by Oxford Archaeology for the National Trust while a number of the village buildings were undergoing refurbishment between 2012 and 2014. Dendrochronology dating has provided a useful and accurate signpost for the construction and development of these buildings, suggesting that a major phase of building took place during the period between about 1530 and 1561 when a number of high status timber-framed buildings were erected along the High Street, possibly as part of a planned town instigated by the Bishop of Winchester as Lord of the Manor. The buildings were extended in the 17th century and re-fronted in the 18th century, when brick replaced the wattle and daub infill of many of the timber frames.

INTRODUCTION

West Wycombe village stands as something of a landmark for the National Trust. It was the first village to be acquired by the Trust when it was purchased from the Royal Society of Arts (hereafter RSA) in 1934. Through their 'Cottage Fund' the RSA were seeking to ensure the survival of vernacular architecture, and in particular the English country cottage. The village buildings had fallen into a dilapidated condition and the RSA acquired the buildings in 1929 from the West Wycombe estate. Restoration and adaption took place under the direction of the architect William Weir. The National Trust's ownership extends to about 50 properties, covering most of, though not the entire village, and including 23 listed buildings. All of these buildings are tenanted.

This article arises from the Trust's recent project to upgrade the buildings. This has involved stripping and re-covering the roofs and updating kitchens and bathrooms and internal facilities. As historic buildings they have previously been poor in terms of their energy efficiency and the roofing works have included the installation of fibreboard insulation material. As part of this programme of refurbishment the National Trust commissioned Oxford Archaeology to record and re-assess the phasing and evolution of the buildings, adding to knowledge derived from earlier studies undertaken in the early 1990s. As part of the current project dendrochronology dating was also commissioned from the Oxfordshire Dendrochronology Laboratory of a select group of buildings. The article therefore summarises current understanding of the evolution of the village based on recent research, and also encompassing evidence from the earlier 1990s surveys. It also includes a detailed description and assessment of the building known as the 'Church Loft', situated on the north side of the High Street. This is in the ownership of the Diocese, and as the oldest dated building in the village it represents a significant omission from the Trust's survey. The author has therefore worked closely with members of the Buildings Recording Group of Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society to produce a drawn and descriptive record of the building, supported by documentary

research. The results of this research are included in the article.

Dendrochronology dating of the Church Loft was made possible through a grant generously provided by BAS. Individual members involved in the survey of the Church Loft are too numerous to mention but their time and assistance is acknowledged. The author also wishes to thank the Dashwood estate for consent to reproduce Figures 2 and 3.

Historical Context

Until recent archaeological discoveries of Roman evidence, little was known about the origins of West Wycombe village. Its situation within a natural valley provided not only a means of communication from the Icknield Way to the Thames Valley but also a source of water for early settlers. The Iron Age hillfort on the hill above the village points to an organised community capable of constructing and utilising a large earthwork. The interpretation of hillforts as solely defensive structures is being increasingly debated, and it may be that a wider study of Chilterns hillforts will determine whether the earthworks at West Wycombe were built for defence, storage, ritual, or a combination of these activities. A recent study of the West Wycombe landscape by English Heritage has identified elements of an extensive Iron Age or Romano-British field system surrounding the hillfort (McComish, Tuck & Went 2001). Metal detectorists have recovered 30 late Iron Age coins from a field to the west of the hillfort and other coins and metalwork from adjoining fields, leading Farley (1995) to suggest that the hillfort may have been an important centre for trade or ritual activity in the area.

The recent unearthing of four Roman burials on Church Lane indicates a settled community existed as far back as the late 3rd century AD, the burials perhaps forming part of a small cemetery on the side of a track leading up to the hill (Carlyle 2012). An earlier (1978) excavation of 13 graves on the edge of West Wycombe Park furnished radiocarbon dates of AD 370 ±120 years, suggesting either a relocation of the earlier cemetery on Church Lane, or perhaps a separate community (Farley & Wright, 1979 and 1981). The habitations of these communities have yet to be determined: there is a strong probability that the current village is a continuation of this settlement, but it has yet to be confirmed by the pottery and other artefact evidence one would expect to find. Several hundred metal-detected coins and fragments of pottery were recovered from silt-filled pits and ditches when the lake beds at West Wycombe Park were dredged in 1991 (Marshall 2008). The large number of coins – unfortunately not dateable – recovered from what were evidently water-filled features suggests their deposition may have arisen as votive offerings.

As further evidence of Roman influence the ridge to the south of West Wycombe Park has been suggested by several authors to define the course of a Roman road connecting London and the South Oxfordshire region (Morris, Hargreaves & Parker 1970). The evidence is debateable but if the road did exist the question arises as to when and why it went out use, evidently to be replaced by the course of the present village road. It is believed to have formed part of a 'Strata de Dusteburg' – Desborough Street – recorded in the 13th century. Its earliest depiction is on the 14th century 'Gough' map in the Bodleian Library, believed to be the earliest pictorial representation of Britain, which shows a road from London to Oxford and Woodstock passing through West Wycombe as against on the hill.

Little is known concerning early medieval occupation in the West Wycombe area, although a small number of Anglo-Saxon artefacts have been found in the locality, mainly from the intensively metal detected area west of West Wycombe Hill. The place name of West Wycombe is first recorded in 944–6 (Ekwall 1940), with the *wyc* element implying a dwelling or dwelling-place and later evolving to give the name of the river Wye. There are a cluster of Anglo-Saxon place names in the locality including 'Havering' (Averingdown Farm) from *Haefer*(ing) = a Hill of Haefer, 'Chawley' or *Chaluelegh* = calve's clearing, and Fillington Farm *Filas* = valley (Mawer & Stenton 1925).

At the time of the Norman Conquest the manor of West Wycombe passed to the Bishop of Winchester, forming one of 32 manors in his ownership but never one of his residences (Knox 2001). It was the largest corn producer in 1208 (Ashford 1960). Oats were another important crop and were transported to Southwark, another of the Bishop's manors. By the 15th century the prosperity of the Wycombe area was dependent on corn and cloth going to London. The Bishops

held the manor until 1551, when it was surrendered to the Crown as part of an exchange of lands. It was subsequently granted to Sir Henry Seymour, and in the following year Sir Robert Dormer was established as his tenant (British History Online). The manor and parish were coterminous, *i.e.* covering the same area, remaining as such until 1901. The population was centred on the village, but with a few small outlying settlements such as *Chalvely* and *Fylendon*, perpetuated today by Chorley Farm and Fillendon Wood. The site of the early manor house maintained by the Bishop's tenants is unknown, but probably lay at the heart of the village, perhaps on the site of the 'Old House Yard' shown on a map of 1767 (Fig. 3, described subsequently). It must have been of some status as it housed Princes Elizabeth whilst travelling under guard to Oxford in May 1554 (Knox, 2001, p.46). No. 24 on the south side of the High Street (Fig. 1) may be a candidate as its timber framing incorporates elaborately moulded timbers which appear to be the remaining wing of a large demolished hall house. However, its construction date of 1532, established by the dendrochronology sampling, seems a little too late. The morphology of the village, laid out as a series of narrow plots running at right angles to either side of the High Street, suggests it may have been a planned township to provide income for the Bishop with rents paid on the individual plots. If this were the case, it may well be that the competition for trade with close rival High Wycombe was too great, and the original plantation failed. The building construction dates given by the dendrochronology sampling commence as early as 1465 and then appear to straddle the 1551 date, extending from 1531 to 1561. They suggest the planned settlement may have commenced under the direction of the Bishop of Winchester, and was continued under the influence of Sir Robert Dormer.

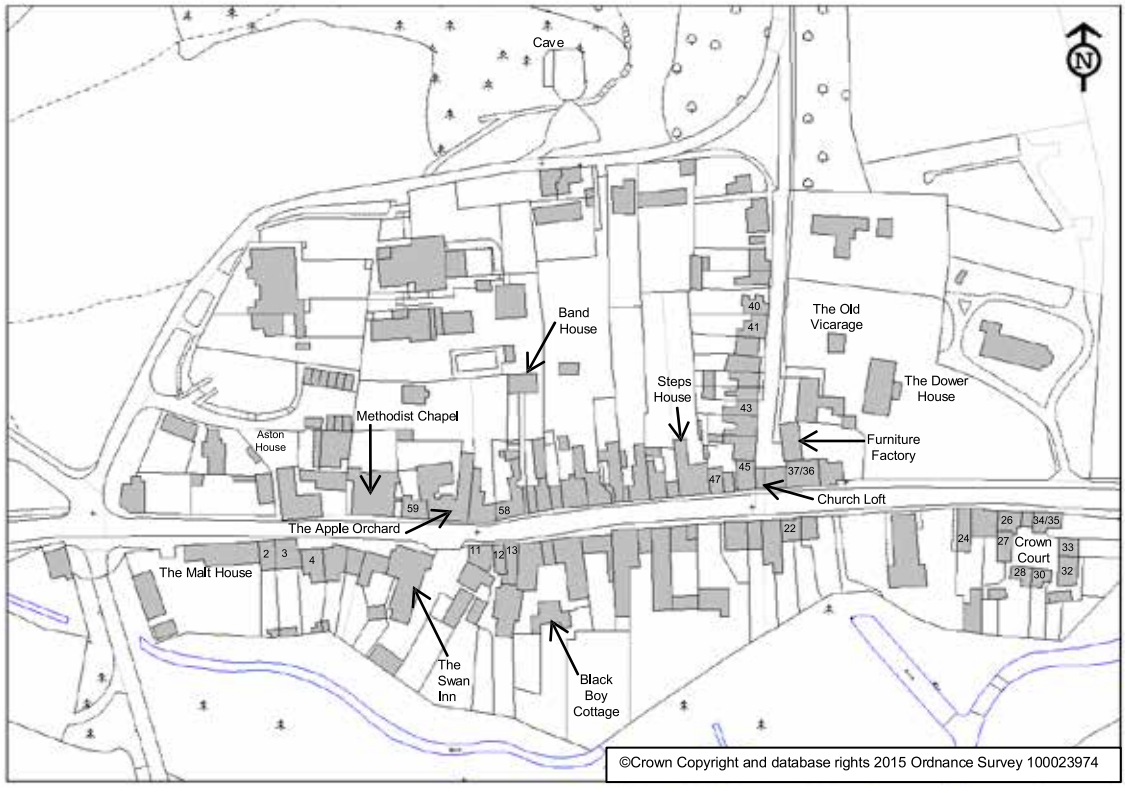

FIGURE 1 Plan showing the location of buildings described in the text

The Dormer family continued to hold West Wycombe until 1670, when it was sold to Thomas Lewis, Alderman of the City of London, who in turn settled it on his two brothers-in-law, Sir Samuel Dashwood and Francis Dashwood. In 1706 Francis Dashwood bought out Sir Samuel's share for £15,000: it may have been at about this time that the old manor house was demolished and rebuilt on its current site in the park. Langley (1797) describes the old Dormer house as being 'built of brick, of no great extent…similar in appearance to Toweridge' (the subsidiary manor house to the south, then a Tudor brick range). The limited documentary evidence is unfortunately ambiguous in differentiating the Dormer and Dashwood mansions. A plan of *c.*1698 held by the Dashwood estate (Fig. 2) shows a modest 5-bay Queen Anne-style house separate from the village in the centre of the park, but its representation on the plan is out of scale. Brick foundations have been found in the valley bottom suggesting either buildings or walled gardens, and the date for the current house is not known (Marshall 2008). The likelihood is that the mansion was moved to its present location by Sir Francis soon after 1706.

The *c.*1698 plan is perhaps most useful for its depiction of the village, which at this date does not appear segregated from the park. The settlement pattern consists of a mix of what appear to be planned village elements and more dispersed hamlets and isolated farms. The village is shown as a double-row settlement. The curving road from Toweridge Common interrupts the southern row close to its midpoint and some development appears to have spread along this route. Long tofts are shown to the rear of the south row, but these have been truncated in the area around the Dormer/Dashwood house. The northern row survived as a more regular line of houses, each with a standard sized toft. At least nine properties are shown here and the uniformity of layout as well as the common size of house and property strongly suggests a planned origin. This row is bounded at its east end by another road populated with houses,

FIGURE 2 Plan of the Manor of West Wycombe, c.1698 (courtesy The Dashwood Estate)

corresponding with Church Lane. It meets with the back lane leading up to West Wycombe Hill. Three small properties are shown on the western side of the lane leading to Toweridge Common. The English Heritage survey suggests that these may be squatter cottages as they do not have attached plots and each sits within the line of the lane.

A more detailed map of 1767 drawn by the cartographer John Richardson is known as the 'Town' map (Fig. 3). The 26 named properties were all likely to be held as 'copyhold' from Sir Francis Dashwood as Lord of the Manor. The map shows 59 properties in the 'Town' owned by Sir Francis, also a further 38 cottages or houses, two malthouses and a slaughterhouse owned by copyholders. An earlier (1760) 'Account of all the people in the parish of West Wycombe' gives the names of 98 households in the 'Towne'. Total rental income from cottage rents from 1768 to 1769 amounted to £212.12.6d, plus £2.14.9d for eleven cottages on the waste, probably on West Wycombe Hill which was and still is a registered common (Everett 1993). Inns were an important part of the village, providing accommodation and refreshment for travellers between London and Oxford. A 1577 list of Bucks Alehouse keepers (CBS D/X/423) gives one innholder and 3 aylehouse keepers, but by 1767 there were six inns on the south side of the High Street and two on the north. Associated with the inns were two malt houses, situated at either end of the village. The malthouse at the west end is still identifiable by its cowl over the drying kiln, and was probably built about 1700. That at the east end was associated with three cottages and an ale-house known as the *Chequers*, formerly the *Kings Arms*.

It was during this period that the caves were dug at West Wycombe, ostensibly to provide the chalk to make a new road to High Wycombe, but also to provide relief to agricultural labourers after a succession of failed harvests in the years 1748, 1749 and 1750 (Dashwood 1987). East of the village the earlier road lay slightly further to the south in the valley bottom, where it was waterlogged and badly rutted. The new road also created a three-mile vista

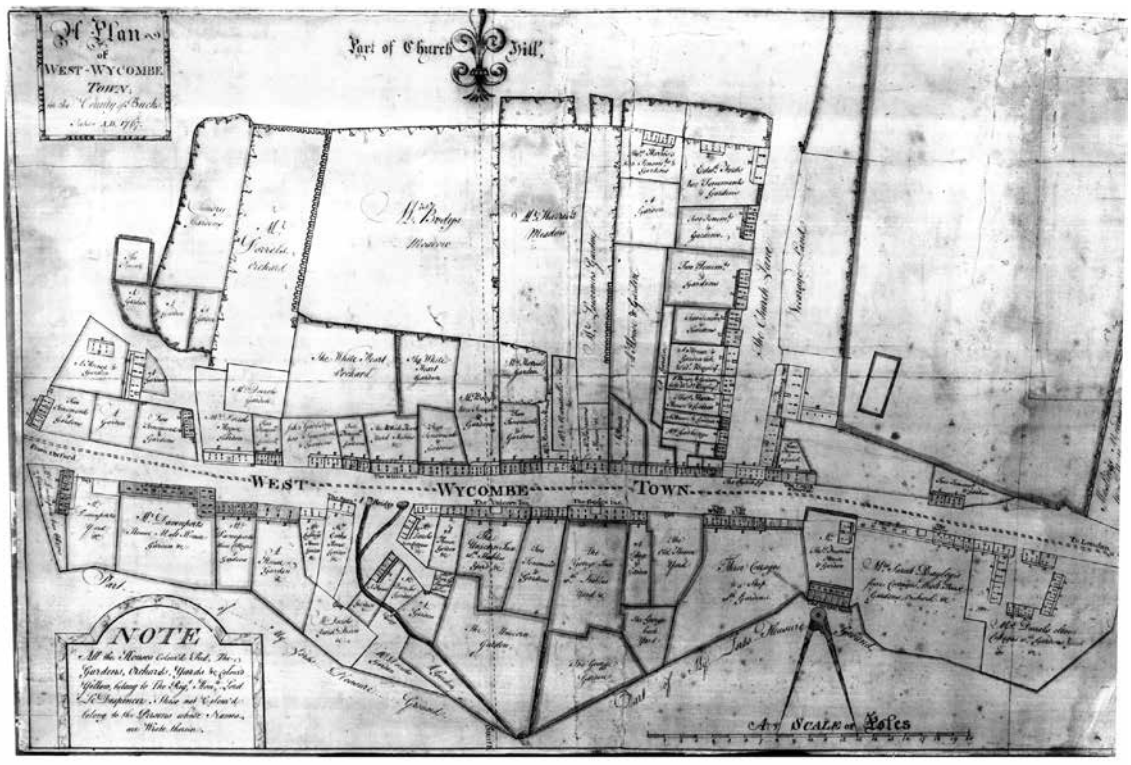

FIGURE 3 Plan of West Wycombe Town, 1767 (courtesy The Dashwood Estate)

from High Wycombe to the Church of St Lawrence, which was largely rebuilt between 1761–3 (Pevsner 2000). In 1765 the mausoleum on the hill was completed, providing an additional and far more imposing eye-catcher to close the vista.

The 1798 Buckinghamshire *Posse Comitatus* – a list of all able-bodied men available for military service between the ages of 15 and 60 – provides useful information on the sorts of trades and craft activities then prevalent in the parish. The most common trades were chair-making, shoe-making and carpentry. Large amounts of leather-working waste found under the attic floorboards of 56 and 58 High Street during building works attest to the importance of shoemaking or the work of cobblers repairing shoes. Alternatively, John Cocks is listed as a saddle-maker at 58 High Street in Piggot's 1830 Directory. Three lace merchants are listed and they would have gathered the lace produced by the wives and daughters of tradesmen and agricultural labourers. Papermaking, cabinet-making and wheel-wrighting were also important trades, and continued as such until at least the middle of the 19th century (Everett 1993).

The village saw only minor expansion during the 19th century, but several important non-domestic premises were added. Early 19th century buildings include the former Congregational Chapel (now the Band House) concealed by the houses on the north side of the High Street and the former Wesleyan Chapel (now Christadelphian) at the bottom of Church Lane. Both of these buildings can be dated by inscribed bricks incorporated in their construction, the former to 1808, the latter to 1815 (RCHME 1986). The Wesleyan Chapel was replaced by the larger Gothic-style building at the west end of the High Street in 1894. Other 19th century buildings include the village school (1874) and the furniture factory on Church Lane, built in the late 19th century on the site of a chapel destroyed by fire in 1877. Shop fronts were added, the butcher's shop windows to the Apple Orchard being a good example. Chair-making was the predominant trade in the village with 56 men listed in the 1851 census employed in two factories, the first in the yard adjacent to the Swan Inn, the second on the site now occupied by the village hall (Fig. 4). The village remained under the influence

FIGURE 4 Photograph of North's furniture factory on the south side of the High Street, 1931 (Millar & Harris photographers)

of the Dashwoods at West Wycombe Park, with the estate office located in Aston House on the north side of the High Street and the maintenance yard on the opposite side in the former maltings. The village was sold on the instructions of Sir John Dashwood by Messrs Whatley, Hill & Company at the Guildhall in London in March 1929. The purchase price from the RSA was £7,200 (!) and the sum later received from the National Trust for its acquisition was £18,000 (Gieler 2014).

Recording of West Wycombe Village

Between 1990 and 1993 the National Trust undertook a major study of the West Wycombe buildings, producing measured floor plans and descriptive assessments supported by documentary research. The following description of the village buildings draws heavily on this work (summarised by Waters, 1994) but also utilises the results of the recent recording undertaken by Oxford Archaeology and the dendrochronology dating by the Oxfordshire Dendrochronology Laboratory.

15th-17th centuries

The earliest building recorded by the1990s survey is the Old Vicarage on the east side of Church Lane (Fig. 3), built originally as a Priest's house and dating from the early to mid-15th century (Garside, Izzard & Waters 1992). Though enlarged in the 17th and 18th centuries the original core of a two bay open hall with two-storey single bays at either end can still be traced. The relatively high status of the building is illustrated by the use of a decorated arched-braced open truss in the open hall. The recent dendrochronology dating of the Church Loft to 1465 suggests, however, that these two buildings may be near contemporary and can probably be joined by a third building, the jettied 37 High Street (the 'Sweet Shop'), which has been given a tentative dendrochronology date of winter 1469/70 based on a single sample returning a felling date (Fig. 5). This cluster of 15th century buildings suggests that the east end of the village may have been the focus for the late medieval village, with subsequent expansion westwards along the High Street and north up Church Lane.

The secular buildings within the village, which are those mainly concentrated on the High Street and Church Lane, were developed within two broad time periods. The first of these is the early to late 16th century: the second began in the early 18th century and lasted for approximately fifty years. The first period is exemplified by the construction of buildings fronting the High Street and Church Lane, and the second by a wave of refurbishment and rebuilding of these properties in brick. The majority of the buildings on the High Street are at least in part timber-framed. A smaller percentage of those on Church Lane are timber-framed, but of those that are, the dates of their original construction coincide with those of the High Street properties. The carpentry work employed is of the style and type commonly found in Buckinghamshire, most noticeably represented in the roof structure. The 'clasped-purlin queen post' roof occurs in the majority of the early timber-framed buildings. The main feature of this roof type is that the upper faces of the principal rafters forming the trusses are in line with those of the common rafters, and the principal rafters are generally of similar dimensions to the common rafters (Fig. 6). The purlins (one to each side of the roof) are set at 45 degrees, and secured in a clasped rebate cut both from the underside of the principal rafters and the upper face of the collars. The paired common rafters are usually secured with an oak peg where they cross over the back of the purlin (Fig. 7). At the ridges they are secured together with bridle joints (where the tenon on one end fits into a U-shaped mortise on the opposing rafter) sometimes, though not always, reinforced with a tapered oak peg driven through the joint. The advantage of a long tapered peg is that it could occasionally be driven into the joint again to tighten it. A further typical feature is the use of curved wind braces between the sides of the principal rafters and the undersides of the purlins. This roof type was widespread from the early 16th century until the 19th century.

No complete examples of the earlier style of cruck framing have been found, although 41 Church Lane does retain the upper part of a cruck truss, probably re-used in the 18th century when the building was heightened and its elevation extended further forwards onto the lane (Fig. 8). The dendrochronology suggests a date of 1753 for this alteration. Two buildings – 32-33 Crown Court and Black Boy Cottage – display examples of curved or cranked inner principals which have previously been confused with cruck blades. This is a distinctive roof type found particularly in

FIGURE 5 37 High Street and The Church Loft, c.1900 (Ron Goodearl, reproduced courtesy Sharing Wycombe's Old Past and Bucks Free Press)

FIGURE 6 Rafter structure of 3 High Street (1550s) showing common rafters set at same height as the principal rafters. Note typical use of curved windbraces.

FIGURE 7 Oak pegs used to secure the rafters to the backs of the purlins (3 High Street)

South Oxfordshire and the Wycombe district, and is characterised by a curved timber lying beneath and parallel with the principal rafter, which is tenoned into the tie beam and the underside of the collar. It probably served to strengthen the truss and prevent sideways movement, and its use generally dates from the mid-17th century to the early 19th centuries (Clarke 2004). This date range accords with the two West Wycombe examples, with 32-33 Crown Court dating from the late 17th or early 18th centuries and Black Boy Cottage to the early 18th century.

A number of the buildings display chamfered floor joists at ground floor level, but mouldings on beams have only been observed internally on 24 High Street and on the street frontage of 25 High Street. The floor framing of this period is characterised by the use of closely set substantial joists, the joists sometimes measuring 8 inches (20cm) in thickness.

The timber-framed buildings of this early period can be loosely categorised into four groups; inns, industrial premises, merchants'/traders' premises, and small dwellings. In Church Lane the majority (if not all) the buildings were small domestic dwellings, the one possible exception being no. 41, which shows some evidence of having originated as an agricultural building, notably a cluster of narrow openings in the brickwork of its end gable, suggesting its origin as a barn or dovecote. These were otherwise of modest size, and consisted for the most part of two-bayed, single or one-and-a-half storied cottages forming a terrace on the west side of the lane. Their framing was simple and plain with purely functional crude details such as jowled heads (*i.e.* inward-facing brackets) to the main posts, irregular chamfers to tiebeams and bridgers, simple chamfer stops etc.

The High Street properties include examples of all four categories, with concentrations of particular

FIGURE 8 41 Church Lane, showing the front elevation added in the mid-18th century

groups in certain areas. The most prominent buildings are centrally located, the larger inns, merchants' and traders' houses. They exhibit a relatively high standard of construction, often an expression of the status of the owner/proprietor and to some extent the property's function, in the use of jetties to the street elevation. Examples include The Apple Orchard (Fig. 9), 12-13 High Street (Fig. 10), and 37 High Street. The inns of this period include *The George and Dragon* (formerly *The George,* Fig. 11) and *The Black Boy* (formerly *The Unicorn*). These were constructed as purpose-built courtyard inns serving travellers, and both have mid to late 16th century timber-framed accommodation wings to the rear, with jetties and open-sided galleries to the first floor. *The George* retains evidence of a galleried accommodation wing divided into four bays and accessed by an external staircase. The bays probably served as dormitories rather than individual rooms (Garside, Izzard & Waters 1993). It is quite probable that the main elements of Crown Court on the southern side of the eastern end of the High Street (nos 26-35) were originally constructed as a courtyard inn (Fig. 12) which failed as an enterprise in the face of stiff competition from those more centrally placed in the village. If so, it must have served as an inn prior to 1767, as it is not shown on the 'Town' map. Samples taken for dendrochronology dating have returned dates of 1542/43 for the carriage arch over the entry to the courtyard and 1648 for the adjacent building on its east side (no. 35). The western range of the courtyard has dated to 1560/61. This is the sole example of smoke-blackened timbers having been found in a village building, the smoke blackening indicating that the timbers may have originated from an open hall building or perhaps a kitchen, though re-used in their current position.

Of the merchants' and traders' houses, perhaps the best surviving example is the *Apple Orchard*

FIGURE 9 The *Apple Orchard*, illustrating the original jettied frontage dating from the first half of the 16th century

FIGURE 10 Jettied frontage of 11-13 High Street

FIGURE 11 18th century frontage added to The George and Dragon Inn

FIGURE 12 26-35 High Street (Crown Court); the carriage arch is dated to 1542–43, the section to its left to 1648

on the north side of the High Street. Whilst this building has undergone considerable change of use over 450 years, becoming at one time an inn, it still retains much of its original character, with some high quality chamfer stops on beams at ground floor level. As merchants' houses they appear to have had a dual purpose, with storerooms for goods, and /or shops on the ground floor, and domestic accommodation above for the merchant and his family. The *Apple Orchard* typifies this arrangement, originating as a four-bay structure with the ground floor divided by lath and plaster partitions into storage rooms and the first floor originating as an open hall flanked by sleeping chambers. One of these chambers may have served as a parlour or counting house (Garside & Waters 1993). 45-47 High Street (adjacent to the Church Loft) were built in a similar manner as a four-bay merchant's house, with four rooms on the first floor open to the roof, the central room serving as an open hall. These buildings had contemporary rear wings, probably used as workshops. Their main characteristics are the prominent jettied first floors (though most are now concealed by brickwork constructed beneath) and the existence of a first-floor hall open to the roof. The roof structures mostly have decorative windbracing which would have been exposed to view. Unfortunately no original shop fronts survive, with the possible exception of the Church Loft (described subsequently). The interior of the *Apple Orchard* retains internal hooks for drop down shutters and a bench below, though these fixtures originate from its use as a butcher's shop in the late 19th century.

Nos 3 and 4 on the High Street provide examples of previously jettied buildings, subsequently re-faced in brick in the second half of the 18th century. The timbers of no. 3 – a three bay structure – have given felling dates of spring and summer 1554, while those of the western section of no. 4 gave dates of winter 1554, suggesting the two buildings are almost contemporary. The dendrochronology confirms that the rear range to no. 4 was added in 1568–9. 11-13 High Street also

originated as jettied buildings, later re-faced in brick. Samples taken for dendrochronology dating failed to give results, but the recording undertaken by Oxford Archaeology has broadly confirmed previous assumptions about the phasing of the building (de Turbeville 2013), with the earliest section being the three easternmost bays along the street front (no. 12 and eastern half of no. 13), probably dating from the mid-16th century. The rear projection to no. 12 was added in the early to mid-17th century, re-using a number of substantial floor joists. The roof of the western part of no. 11 is suggestive of a 19th-century date, supporting map evidence which suggests that this corner range was added sometime between 1849 and 1876 to connect no.11 with the building to the south-west.

24 High Street, facing the village hall car park, also originated as a jettied building, but its elevation was pushed forwards by about 2m in the early 18th century. The dendrochronology gives a construction date of 1532 for no. 24, and a date pre 1531 for no. 25, which is unusual in having its gable end facing onto the High Street. During major repairs to the west elevation of no. 24 in the 1990s a complete full storey truss was exposed behind the 18th century brick elevation (Fig. 13). Mouldings on the ground-floor beam (54 on Fig.13) suggest this was a high-status building, possibly originating as a large open hall lying to the west of the truss, and demolished in the late 18th century. The surviving section represented by no. 24 appears to be the east wing attached to this open hall. The rear wing of no. 24 has been dated by dendrochronology to 1656–7.

It is harder to identify the early industrial buildings as they were frequently dual-purpose in nature. Many were no more than workshops or rooms within domestic premises, as exemplified

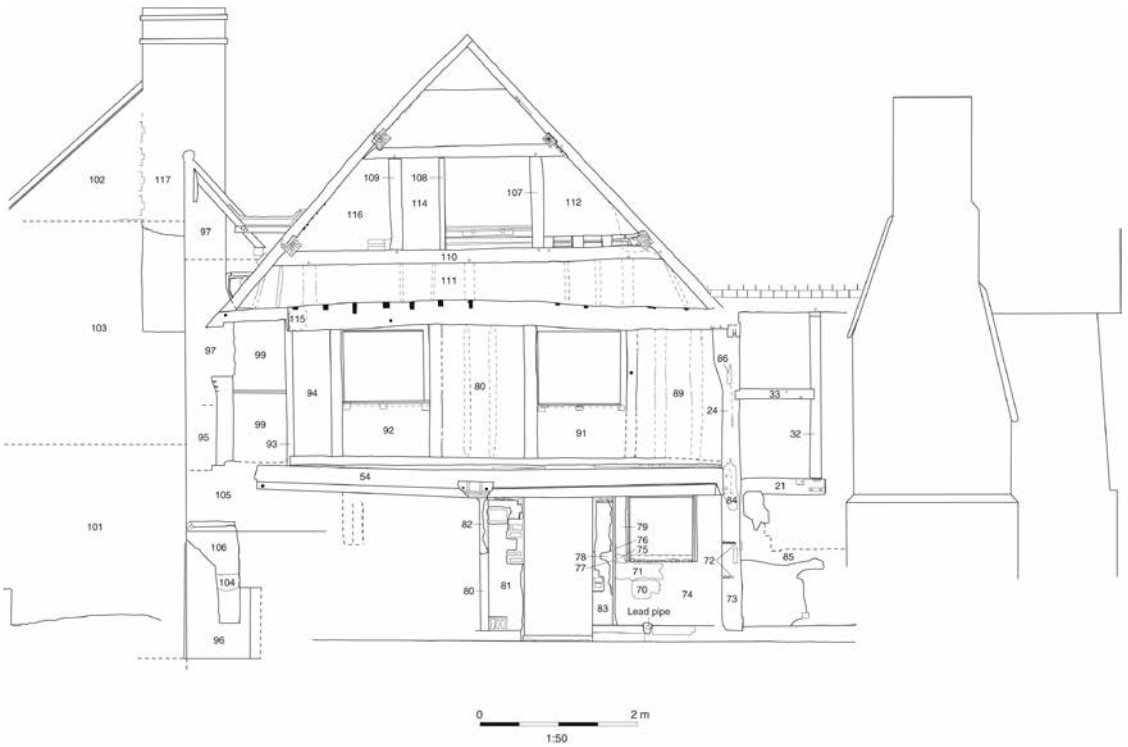

FIGURE 13 West-facing elevation of 24 High Street, illustrating the timber frame revealed behind 18th-century brick re-facing

by the leather-working workshops in the attics of 56 and 58 High Street, or situated to the rear of the merchants' houses. For purposes of interpretation it is easiest to include the domestic dwellings and industrial premises together: groups of both these building types were constructed at either end of the High Street, on the periphery of the village.

18th century

The second major phase of building occurred during the first half of the 18th century, coinciding with the building of West Wycombe Park by Francis Dashwood, 1st Baronet, who had moved to live on the estate in 1707. Everett suggests that there were a number of copyhold surrenders between 1710 and 1720 of buildings in the village and outlying hamlets which were then leased to villagers. An example is the shop next to the Church Loft (no. 37) which was one of six copyhold cottages held by John Bartlett of Stokenchurch in 1715, but by 1724 was leased by Sir Francis to William and Jane Dormer for three years at £6 per annum. Three inns, *The George*, *The Black Boy and Unicorn*, and *The Swan* were acquired between 1712 and 1767, together with *The Plough* alehouse.

Most of the building work occurred during the lifetime of Dashwood's son Francis, the 2nd Baronet, who was responsible for redesigning and expanding West Wycombe Park between 1735 and 1781. By enlarging the village the 2nd Baronet was gaining greater control over the affairs of the village. There is a substantial body of documentary material available for this period, for example court fines imposed for garden plots and cottages up Church Hill (Everett 1993). The 2nd Baronet continued buying out the old copyholds, and thereafter began leasing out properties for commercial rents: for example the Old House Yard on the 1767 map, which included shops and a slaughterhouse, was acquired in 1778. By this date the public vestry meeting was the main decision-making body in the village community, rather than the manorial court.

During this period virtually all of the timber-framed buildings were given brick facades, and in many cases encased on all sides in brick. Most of the brick elevations were lime-washed, partly to unify the elevations and partly to protect the timbers and brickwork. Party walls were rebuilt in brick, replacing the earlier flimsy non-fireproof wattle and daub panels. The larger properties in the High Street, particularly those with jetties, were given a slightly different treatment to those in Church Lane. Here, some first-floor front elevations were merely given brick panels, whilst the ground-floor walls were dismantled and new solid-brick replacements constructed further out beneath the jetty. Examples include 3-5 High Street and 45-47 High Street. Some jettied properties were given entirely new brick façades to all floors of the frontage, but this would have necessitated altering the pitch of the roof. Either approach would have led to encroachment on the footway beneath, a circumstance that was sometimes the reason for the jettied construction in the first place. Both *The George* and *The Black Boy and Unicorn* inns were given entirely new brick facades (Fig. 11). In these instances the reason is clearly that this was necessary due to the addition of a further storey, and owing to alterations to the existing floor and ceiling heights. Such major alterations necessitated new, regular fenestration and the construction of a new roof, making for imposing ordered elevations that dominate the High Street.

Most of the houses in Church Lane were given solid brick facades to all floors, and this can also be seen to be linked to internal alterations to floors and ceilings and the construction of additional floors. Single-storey dwellings were either given full-height extra floors or had attic floors lit by dormers installed. Some new cottages were built at this time entirely of brick, both on the High Street and Church Lane: 43 Church Lane, with its canopied door case and date stone of 1722 embellished with masonic symbols and the initials 'C.R.A.', provides a good example. Its symmetrical elevation with raised entry to the ground floor is rather at odds with the other cottages on Church Lane, and its builders clearly intended it to stand out. As single buildings they probably represent infilling of decayed tenements, most likely earlier timber-framed buildings, rather than expansion of the village beyond its then existing limits.

Steps House, on the north side of the High Street, is the clearest expression of 18th century rebuilding in the centre of the High Street. It dates from the early 18th century and almost certainly replaced an earlier timber-framed building. It has a symmetrical double-pile plan with a raised entrance over a basement, and has characteristic sash windows and a hipped roof (Fig. 14). This period is also characterised by the construction of additional service buildings to the larger inns, as exemplified by the

construction of *Black Boy Cottage* at the rear of the yard behind the former *Black Boy* inn. This was erected during the early 18th century as a brick-built two-storey coach house with hay loft above. It was converted to a domestic dwelling as part of the RSA works in the 1930s.

An unusual example of decorative fake brickwork found on the front of 21-22 High Street during the removal of lime-wash in 2010 illustrates the importance attached to building in brick. The buildings date from the 16th century and are timber-framed with brick panels inserted between the timbers in the 18th century. In order to conceal the timbers a red ochre paint replicating a brick colour was first applied to the elevation, covering both the original timbers and the inserted brickwork. Fake joints were then meticulously painted over the ochre paint in a white lead-based paint to replicate Flemish bond brickwork (Fig. 15). The building is named on the 1767 map as the *Lion Inn,* and as one of eight competing inns it may have been decorated in this eye-catching manner to attract custom. It was also noted during the 2010 works that the render of the gable to 19 High Street had been painted in narrow lines following the three-sided outline of the top of the gable.

Construction of this period is characterised by the use of patterned brickwork laid in Flemish bond with the use of darker headers to create a chequerboard effect. *Aston House* at the western end of the High Street is an example, as are 57 High Street and 41 Church Lane. Flint was also used as a walling material, as exemplified by 59 High Street and the *Dower House*, built by 2nd Baronet in the mid-18th century at the east end of the High Street. Other characteristic details of this period are the incorporation of rubbed brick lintels over windows (no. 57), panelled chimney stacks (the *Apple Orchard*), dentils under eaves and the inclusion of string courses. The village buildings also retain a number of fire insurance plaques, with five different companies represented.

FIGURE 14 Steps House, dating from the early part of the 18th century

FIGURE 15 Decorative fake brickwork applied to the elevation of 21-22 High Street

Post 18th century

There was perhaps surprisingly little 'Victorianisation' of properties in West Wycombe: what does exist is confined to external details such as period door-hoods and replacement front doors and windows. Most of the work was done more in the way of internal details such as new partitioning of rooms, new fireplaces and kitchen ranges. The new buildings that were constructed are of typical period brick construction with clay tile roofs. They are mostly public buildings such as the Methodist Chapel, which was built in 1894 in Victorian Gothic style on the site of two cottages. These non-domestic properties were excluded from the 1929 sale, as they were freehold properties when constructed. Photographs taken prior to the RSA works of the 1930s show the *George Inn* as having a stuccoed street frontage: it is believed that this was applied in the early 19th century. The RSA removed this stucco but re-applied it to the pilasters on the 1720s brickwork.

The RSA reports of the period give a comprehensive description of decrepit and derelict properties, with tenants living in poor conditions. They are captured on film by a sequence of high-quality before-and-after views taken by photographers Millar and Harris, commercial photographers based at Lavender Hill in Clapham. Of particular interest are the alterations to kitchens and sculleries: many houses had coppers within the kitchen or scullery and these were removed to newly-built wash-houses constructed to the rear of the buildings. Another characteristic feature of the 1930s works is the addition of dormer windows to attics, thus allowing for the installation of additional rooms into the cottages. Additional accommodation was achieved by the conversion of previous service buildings to form dwellings, as exemplified by the conversion of the stables (*Black Boy Cottage*) at the rear of Black Boy Yard in 1932. The licence of the inn was relinquished by the RSA in 1932. Recognising the increasing importance of the motor car, garages were built behind the *Swan Inn* in 1932. Gardens were cleared of rubbish and new dwarf-boarded fences erected to formalise garden plots (Fig. 16). Mains drainage was introduced and electricity brought in for the first time. Problems of rising damp were addressed by inserting damp-proof courses. The RSA article describes the use of wheat straw as insulation material under the clay tile roofs, which explains the large amount of such material found loose in attic spaces during the recent works.

The village has experienced little alteration since the 1930s, although the National Trust has carried out periodic repairs and upgrades to its properties. The one exception is the building of the village hall in 1960 on the former site of North's chair factory (Fig. 4). The construction of the village hall was somewhat symbolic as it conceded that changes were taking place in the organisation and viability of the furniture industry. Its construction also recognised the previous absence of any public meeting space in the village, with the exception of the Church Loft.

FIGURE 16 Rear of 2-7 High Street (1932), showing re-arranged rear gardens (Millar & Harris photographers, reproduced courtesy English Heritage)

RECORDING OF THE CHURCH LOFT

History of the building

The Church Loft is located on the north side of the High Street straddling Church Lane. It is a grade II* listed building and is used by the parish as a community meeting room. The upper storey is currently used for the storage of books, and is opened at weekends to allow visitors access to the roof space and the 17th century clock. Dendrochronology dating of the roof timbers has provided a felling date of spring 1465 (Miles 2013). It is therefore likely that the building was constructed in the latter part of 1465, or early 1466 if a seasoning period of nine months for the oak timbers is taken into account. It is possible that it was built by the monks of Bisham Priory, sometime after Cardinal Beaufort gave them possession of the rectory in 1417 (*Records* **X.3**, 160–66). The ground floor originally contained four rooms of uneven size divided by wattle and daub partitions, as shown on a sketch plan of 1910 (Fig. 17). A slightly later drawing accompanying an article published in *Records* in 1912 shows a different configuration which is probably a conjectural reconstruction (Fig. 18), although it refers to the remnants of two pairs of cells. There have been various interpretations of these rooms, which would have each measured 7½ x 9½ feet (2.28 x 2.89m). They may have formed small shop units: alternatively they were small habitable units for parishioners, or for travellers and pilgrims using the road from Oxford to reach London and Canterbury (*RSA Journal* 1933, 906). The presence of a large fireplace at the east end of the ground floor might have provided a communal cooking facility for either function.

Evidence for major alterations to the building can be found in the Churchwarden's accounts held by the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, which for West Wycombe cover the years 1663–1774 and 1830–1866 (the author is grateful to Karen Pepler for researching these accounts). Those for 1676 show a distinct increase in costs for both the church and 'church house' with the sum of £64-17-2¾ spent on both buildings. This is a considerable increase to the preceding and succeeding years when the sums of £14-19-7¼ and £12-11-2¼ were spent. The figures relate to

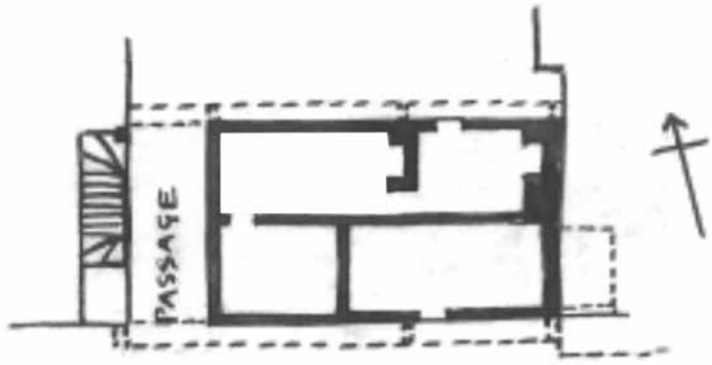

FIGURE 17 RCHME sketch plan of the ground floor of the Church Loft, 1910

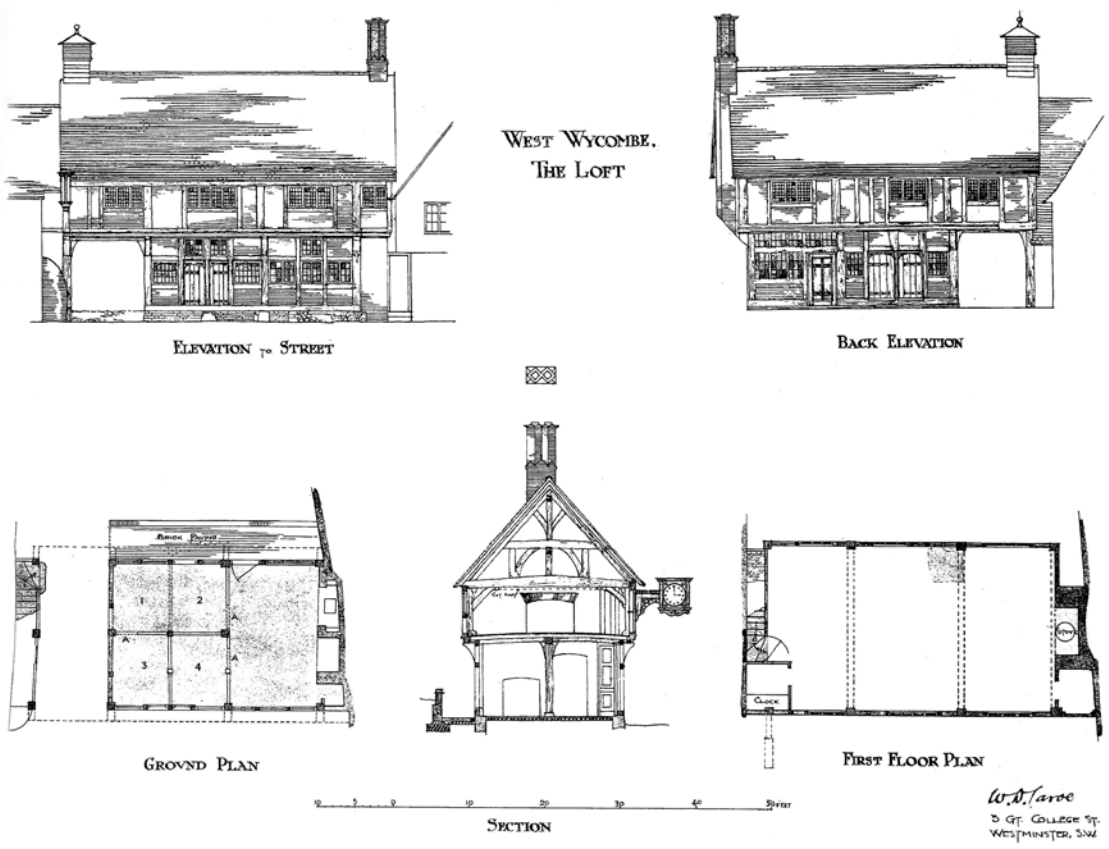

FIGURE 18 W.D. Caroe's drawings of the Church Loft, published in Records X.3, 1912

building materials such as timber, bricks and lime and the individual sums are quite high, such as £10 for timber and £7 for bricks, lime and sand. This large sum suggests extensive building work, rather than general maintenance. Entries in the account books are headed 'The accounts of John Parker and Peter Chalfont Churchwardens from Easter 1676 to Easter 1677'. Their initials are the same as those inscribed on a post in the roof, and as the post is dated '1676' it seems almost certain that the initials refer to these parish officials mentioned in the accounts.

Taking into account this evidence it seems almost certain that the Church Loft is the 'church house' mentioned in the documents. This assumption is backed up by the dendrochronology date of 1465, as the majority of church houses were erected during the 15th and 16th centuries (Cowley 1970, 53), often supported by money from local benefactors. Other Buckinghamshire examples include Haddenham, Long Crendon (1485) and Beaconsfield (1524). Another common thread is their subsequent usage after the turn of the 17th century as poorhouses or schools. The Church Loft was used as a Sunday school during the 19th and early 20th centuries and there is also mention of it within the churchwardens' accounts as being a place for widows to lodge:

> *Feb 1845, Let Elizabeth Franklin a room under the loft at 3 pence per week.....Let widow Newell and widow Dobson, the front rooms at 9 pence per week.....Widow Dobson declined having it.* (CBS PR227/4/5)

It may be significant that the building is only referred to in the churchwardens' accounts as 'church house' until around 1700, after which it is described as the 'Church Loft'. There is one mention of the name 'Church Loft' in the year 1673–4, but no other mention until after 1700. Perhaps this is a result of its gradual change of use, and of changing social and religious attitudes at the time.

One of the most interesting surviving features is the village lock-up built into the ground floor half-bay beside the carriage arch. Little is known about the use of this feature, although it was described in 1787 has having two garrets with 'the windows almost closed up by strong planks nailed across for security'. The keeper's salary was £20 per annum (Everett 1993, 26).

The building was extensively restored between 1912 and 1914 under the direction of the architect William Caroe. Prior to this, in 1910 the former Royal Commission undertook a brief examination of the building as part of their county inventory (the record card is held by the English Heritage archive at Swindon). At this time the ground floor was divided into four uneven-sized rooms, the two back rooms apparently heated by fireplaces. One of these was described in 1910 as being in use as a carpenter's workshop, and several old photographs show chairs stacked up outside the front, suggesting chair making (Fig. 5). In 1912 it was also described as having a lumber room and coal store on the ground floor, while the upper floor was used as a Sunday school and for meetings (*Records* **X.3**). The restoration followed an earlier appeal for the sum of £367 in 1912, when the building was described as being in poor condition with the walls in need of repair and the angle post of the north-west corner leaning and lacking a proper foundation. Caroe's drawings, published in the 1912 edition of *Records,* are re-printed here (Figs 18 & 19). His 'restoration' was by his own admission somewhat contentious, involving the removal of the wattle and daub partitions from the ground floor which had divided this space up into four small rooms:

> *The building, or rather the ground floor, has no doubt been made more convenient by sweeping away these cells, but as an Archaeological Society we can only regret this part of the recent alterations. The architect employed, Mr. W.D. Caroe, as reported in the Bucks Herald, said: "It seemed a sad task to remove the wattle partitions, but if the building was to be brought into a fit state for modern use it was inevitable.* (*Records* **X.5**, 341–2).

Caroe had clashed with William Morris over designs for the restoration of Westminster Hall in the Palace of Westminster in 1884 (Freeman 1990). He was passionate about the preservation of historic buildings but his approach was somewhat at odds with that of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (established in 1877) whose principles espoused making new work distinguishable from old. He favoured the introduction of date stones and this is exemplified by the prominent '1914' date carved onto the central ground-floor post

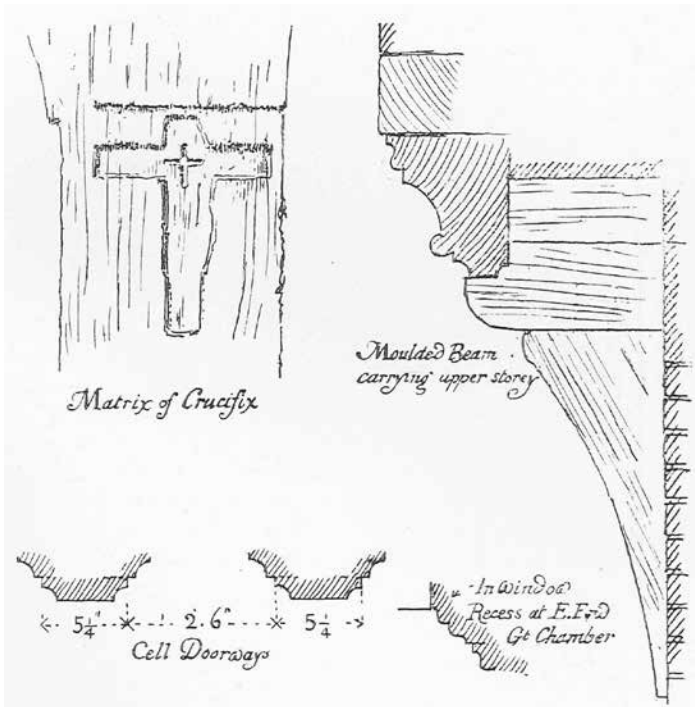

FIGURE 19 Timber profiles and detail of the crucifix setting on the Church Loft by Caroe (*Records* X.3, 1912)

after the removal of the aforementioned partitions (though interestingly he also included the initials of the existing Churchwardens – 'ICF' and 'WAD' – thus maintaining a tradition evident in the roof timbers). He was also keen to recycle materials where possible: this is exemplified by the use of tile stitching on the Church Loft. Other works carried out by Caroe included the removal of 'modern' window and door fittings and the substitution of others more in the style of the original building. The use of crosses on the iron door furniture such as the latches is a particular characteristic of his work.

Description of the building

The building is of timber-frame construction with later brick panels of various dates between the timbers and consists of 3 bays divided between four trusses. The posts forming the trusses carry integral projecting brackets ('jowls') carved from the same timber. Large irregular sarsen stones with flint and brick filling the panels between support the horizontal sill. These large stones are likely to be a surviving element of the original building, and attest to the use of local materials. The most westerly bay is open at ground-floor level to provide access to and from Church Lane, and at one stage there may have been a loft hatch under the arch, as some of the floor joists are trimmed. There are half bays at either end beyond the first and fourth trusses where the Church Loft meets with the adjacent buildings. Number 36 on the east side has been tentatively dated to 1469 and is therefore only slightly later. Number 45 on its west side has not been dated, but is a former jettied building and probably a former merchants' shop dating from the mid-16th century. There is no evidence to suggest that the Church Loft continued beyond its current outlines (as suggested by the 1912 Records article) and the half bays have been added at a later date into the short gaps left between the ends of the building and the adjacent buildings. If it had continued there would most likely be evidence for further brackets on the frame posts, but this is not the case. The upper storey of the Church Loft is open to the roof and is also jettied to the front and rear. At its

east end the roof is pierced by an elaborate brick chimney stack serving the ground and first-floor rooms, whilst at its west end it is pierced by the timber construction of the bell tower. It is reached from a narrow dog-leg timber staircase built into the half bay at the west end of the building. This staircase is a later insertion within the additional half bay. The original staircase arose from the rear elevation on Church Lane: its location is indicated in the timber-framed panel above the carriage arch, where there is a moulded rebate for a door on the left hand stud and a discontinuity of the moulding on the jetty beam.

The jetty beam on either elevation has a prominent lower roll moulding and deep chamfer above. It projects forwards by about 0.4m from the ground floor elevations, thus exposing the bull-nosed ends to the first-floor joists.

The central bay on the front elevation contains two round-headed vertical plank doors designed by Caroe, set either side of a central post. Further vertical posts separate the doors from flanking leaded-light windows. Both the doors and the windows are set beneath lintels carved with a shallow four-centred arch on the soffit and triangular indents in the spandrels. The doors and windows are Caroe's designs, presumably based on his interpretation of evidence; pre-1912 photographs show the doors blocked with brick and the window openings occupied by decayed 19th century (?) casement windows. They also show a door set within the eastern bay and accessed by a flight of two brick steps. Unfortunately the timber surrounds to the windows are early 20th century and any evidence for what may have been original drop-down shutters has been lost, although there do appear to be peg holes in the surviving original sections of the jambs. There are further leaded lights above the two doors. It is interesting to note the height of the door sills as they are set about half-a-metre above the current pavement level, suggesting that they were always reached by a flight of two or three steps. The sill of the left-hand door is heavily eroded. The east bay on the front elevation is occupied by three leaded lights set between two vertical posts, with a further lead casement above the central window. At first-floor level there are four window groups arranged as either double, triple and quadruple lights, incorporating small rectangular quarries set in lead cames. The central opening casements are of wrought iron: they appear to pre-date Caroe's restoration and could even date back to the 1670s works. Careful examination of the front elevation suggests that originally the whole of the first floor would have been glazed, as there are moulded rebates cut into the vertical studs between the existing windows. The original fenestration would have consisted of leaded lights set between vertical mullions. Evidently the original windows were slightly taller than the current windows, as the rebates extend below the current window sills.

Entry to the building is now by a Caroe-designed vertical plank door set into the east bay of the rear elevation. To the left of the door are three sets of leaded lights, with a further group of leaded lights above the horizontal rail over the door. The central bay is occupied by a similar arrangement of doors and leaded-light windows to those seen on the front elevation: however, there is no glazing above the doors, and the doors and windows have flat heads. At first-floor level there are two sets of leaded triple lights and a single set of double lights but again there is evidence for a more extensive fenestration scheme with rebates cut into the vertical studs indicating the location of missing frames.

The roof construction is pretty much as illustrated by Caroe's section drawing, though he shows a further tier of diagonal braces and a post above the tie beam. The two central trusses each have massive cambered tie beams which still retain moulded chamfers on their lower edge, though the central sections of the chamfers have been cut away, probably during the 1670s to increase headroom. Diagonal braces join the undersides of the tie beams with the main frame posts. The tops of the tie beams support queen struts which in turn support a collar. There is a second tier of inner braces between the struts and the collar. Two tiers of diagonally set purlins are butt-jointed and pegged to the faces of the principal rafters. The coupled rafters are carried over the backs of the purlins and are secured with pegs driven into the purlins. An interesting detail displayed on the side faces of the common rafters is a single augered hole *c.*25mm in diameter which is always to be found on the west face about 0.6m above the wallplate. Similar holes have been found on several of the 16th century roofs (e.g. 3-5 High Street): they have been identified as forming part of a procedure for correctly framing each coupled

rafter unit on the ground. Pegs driven into a base board on the ground allowed for the coupled rafters to be pivoted, thus achieving the correct angle and spacing for each couple (Johnson 1987).

The short dated post with the churchwardens' initials has been previously referred to. The identity of a third group of initials – 'RHP' – remains uncertain. There are corresponding chamfered posts on the other trusses supporting a horizontal timber running the length of the building. The presence of redundant mortises in the timber confirms that there was formerly an inserted ceiling here which must have been added as part of the 1676 works. It is not known when the ceiling was removed, though it was possibly under Caroe's direction.

Fixtures and fittings

The few fixtures and fittings surviving in the building attest to its former use. The village lock-up is built into the ground-floor section of the western half-bay and has a horizontal weather-boarded front inserted below the west truss. It is secured with an ancient vertical plank door hung on strap hinges. A small aperture in the door has been boarded over. Above is a wrought iron grille for ventilation. To the right of the door a second plank door probably designed by Caroe provides access to the roof staircase.

High up on the most easterly truss post of the front elevation a cross measuring 0.33m in height and 0.28m in width has been inscribed into the timber to a depth of 25m. This is illustrated in the 1912 *Records* article (Fig.19), and is described as the setting for a crucifix. It had been removed by 1910, as it was absent when the Royal Commission undertook their survey. It is also absent from the c. 1900 photograph (Fig. 5). Below the post the sarsen foundation stone has been crudely scalloped with three mason's chisel indents still evident on the back edge. It is believed to have provided a kneeling stone for travellers wishing to pray on the course of their journey to and from Oxford. They may also have left goodwill offerings and perhaps money for fellow travellers and for the village poor. Above the crucifix three dates have been crudely incised onto the bracket of the truss post: one is illegible (possibly 1771), the others read 1739 and 1765.

Upstairs the first floor retains evidence for its use into the early part of the 20th century as a Sunday school. Pieces of what appear to be 17th century panelling have been used to form a pew for the master, placed conveniently adjacent to one of the windows for natural light. The pew retains a built-in seat and also a small moveable lectern. Along the side walls of the building are wooden benches, and the wall-plate above carries a number of surviving wooden clothes pegs. A watercolour painting illustrates the Sunday school when it was still in operation in 1925 (Fig. 20). The clock is of a type known as a 'turret clock'. The bell mounted in the bell tower is dated 1668: however, it is thought that the external clock overhanging the High Street was put up in the middle of the 19th century (source 'The Church Loft Clock', leaflet available in the roof space).

Caroe's work to the building can be identified by the use of crisply cut oak timbers, leaded light windows and iron fittings following vernacular tradition. It is unfortunate that the only available drawings relating to his work appear to be those published in 1912, and they show his proposals rather than the evidence on which he based his work. To be fair to Caroe, he seems to have adopted an archaeological approach, as three of the carved spandrels over the front elevation doors and windows replicate a surviving spandrel still in-situ (the Royal Commission report mentions two surviving in-situ in 1910). Typical of his work are vertical plank doors hung on heavy straps with hand-wrought diagonally set nails securing the battens to the rear of the doors. Latches are of wrought iron and carry cross motifs similar to those found on church furniture, the cross perhaps symbolising this as a church house.

Discussion

The evidence presented in this article suggests that there has almost certainly been continuity of settlement in West Wycombe since the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age. Factors which seem to have been attractive to early settlers are the natural valley defining a communication route, the presence of the spring-fed river Wye and the hill, which may have provided a place of refuge in times of conflict. Continuity of settlement into the Romano-British period is confirmed by the recent discovery of the cemetery on Church Lane and by metal-detected finds and the large number of coins and pottery sherds found in West Wycombe Park. Precise evidence for early settlement remains elusive and it may be that the

FIGURE 20 Undated drawing by F. Colmer of the upper storey of the Church Loft

15th/16th century phase of building has swept much of this evidence away. The probability is that it coincides with the present village site but much more research remains to be done on this subject. The discovery of the Romano-British graves on Church Lane has flagged up the importance of maintaining watching briefs over invasive groundworks in and around the village. The size of the cemetery remains uncertain but earlier discoveries of graves in the 1960s and 1980s on Church Lane (mentioned in the County Historic Environment Record but not recorded) suggest that it may have been extensive and may have shown continued reverence and respect for the religious and ceremonial importance of the hill. The construction of the church of St Lawrence in the 13th and 14th centuries continued this tradition, as did the later construction of the mausoleum in the 1760s.

A significant gap exists in the archaeological record between the late 3rd century AD and the mid-1400s, when the earliest extant village buildings were erected. This is perhaps surprising as there are rent rolls for the manor dating from 1207 onwards, though these point to the importance of sheep and dairy farming until the 15th century. The village must have been badly affected by the Black Death as the rent rolls for 1350 record a 'deficit of rent on account of the pestilence'. It is still cited as a reason for the deficit in rents in 1389. The annual value of the manor remained at about £40 up to the end of the 15th century but increased to £64 at the beginning of the 16th century (British History Online). These tie in with the building record which suggests that there was an intense period of building construction during the first half of the 16th century. The dendrochronology dates (1530s–60s) are spread either side of the 1551 date when the manor was surrendered by the Bishop of Winchester back to the Crown, so in reality most of the buildings were constructed outside of any planned scheme implemented by the Bishops. There was clearly a significant stimulus to the expansion of the village during this period with the construction of a number of merchants' houses and shops, served by several inns and alehouses. The important road from London to Oxford probably stimulated this trade.

A key area of outstanding research is to establish whether the size and configuration of property boundaries shown on the 1767 map is evidence of the presumed 15th century planned town. The plots shown on this plan are somewhat irregular in size and shape and lack the linear shape typical of other medieval town plans such as Winchelsea (Martin & Martin 2004). There is some evidence for long linear plots extending north from the High Street to the lane ascending West Wycombe Hill, but by 1767 they had been amalgamated to form meadows and orchards e.g. 'Mr Body's' and 'Mr Harris' Meadow'. They are rather more regular on the west side of Church Lane and their westerly extent appears to have been limited by one of the aforementioned linear strips. On the south side of the High Street they were probably constrained by the damp low-lying ground associated with the river Wye, and perhaps by the boundary of the park itself. The extent of the original common is another area of research to be addressed: it was possibly much more extensive than today's common embracing the limits of West Wycombe Hill, and may have included the lower part of the hill west of Church Lane. There are considerable variations in the size of the West Wycombe plots, but these seem to have determined the extent of the street frontages of the jettied buildings constructed during the first half of the 16th century.

Understanding of the evolution of the buildings has been greatly assisted by the dendrochronology dating, though unfortunately only a limited number of the buildings were sampled during the recent works. A much greater understanding could be gained from further dating of a number of significant buildings such as the Vicarage, the Apple Orchard and the two inns on the south side of the High Street, the George and the former Black Boy. The process does have its limitations, however, as some buildings have timbers with too few rings or the rings are too fast grown – the massive frame posts of the Church Loft being a good example. At least three of the buildings from which samples were taken – 32-33 Crown Court, Black Boy Cottage and 11-13 High Street – failed to produce dates. The failure of samples from the latter is particularly frustrating as its proximity to 2-9 High Street and similarity of construction could have provided a chronology of construction along the High Street.

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