



DBRG NEWS

June 2025



Decorative bracing on 1 Church Street Godalming
(see p. 19)

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From the Editor

My apologies for the considerable delay in producing this DBRG News, I have been extremely busy and this has been compounded by sickness.

Rosemary Hughesdon

Research Topics

Long-suspected Wealden in Wonersh confirmed as surviving

Wonersh is one of East Surrey pretty villages, indeed some would say it is too pretty because of all the late nineteenth century 'improvements' made to it. Two of the old buildings were captured by the architect

Ralph Nevill in his book of 1889 *Old Cottage and Domestic Architecture South West Surrey* (below).



The top illustration shows what appears to be two bays of a Wealden hall house, or perhaps a "half Wealden", but no building now has this this

AT WONERSH.

characteristic form with a flying wall plate and recessed once-open hall. However similarities with Medd House have been noted by many observers. John Baker featured the house in one of his insightful Surrey Advertiser articles *The Seeing Eye* in



AT WONERSH.

1979. He got into the house and suggested it could be some form of Wealden. Ken Hume researched Nevill's illustrations for his dissertation but was unable to visit the interior. Many years' ago DBRG was asked about surviving Wealdens in Surrey for a national gazetteer published by the Vernacular Architecture Group and I had to say it no longer survived in any meaningful form.

Below is Medd House, with a continuous jetty at the right hand end, and an extravagant display of braces in the middle and left-hand end. The chimneys have moved and it looks like a complete rebuild compared to Nevill's drawing. DBRG was invited to record the building by a new owner and I visited, just in case anything old did survive

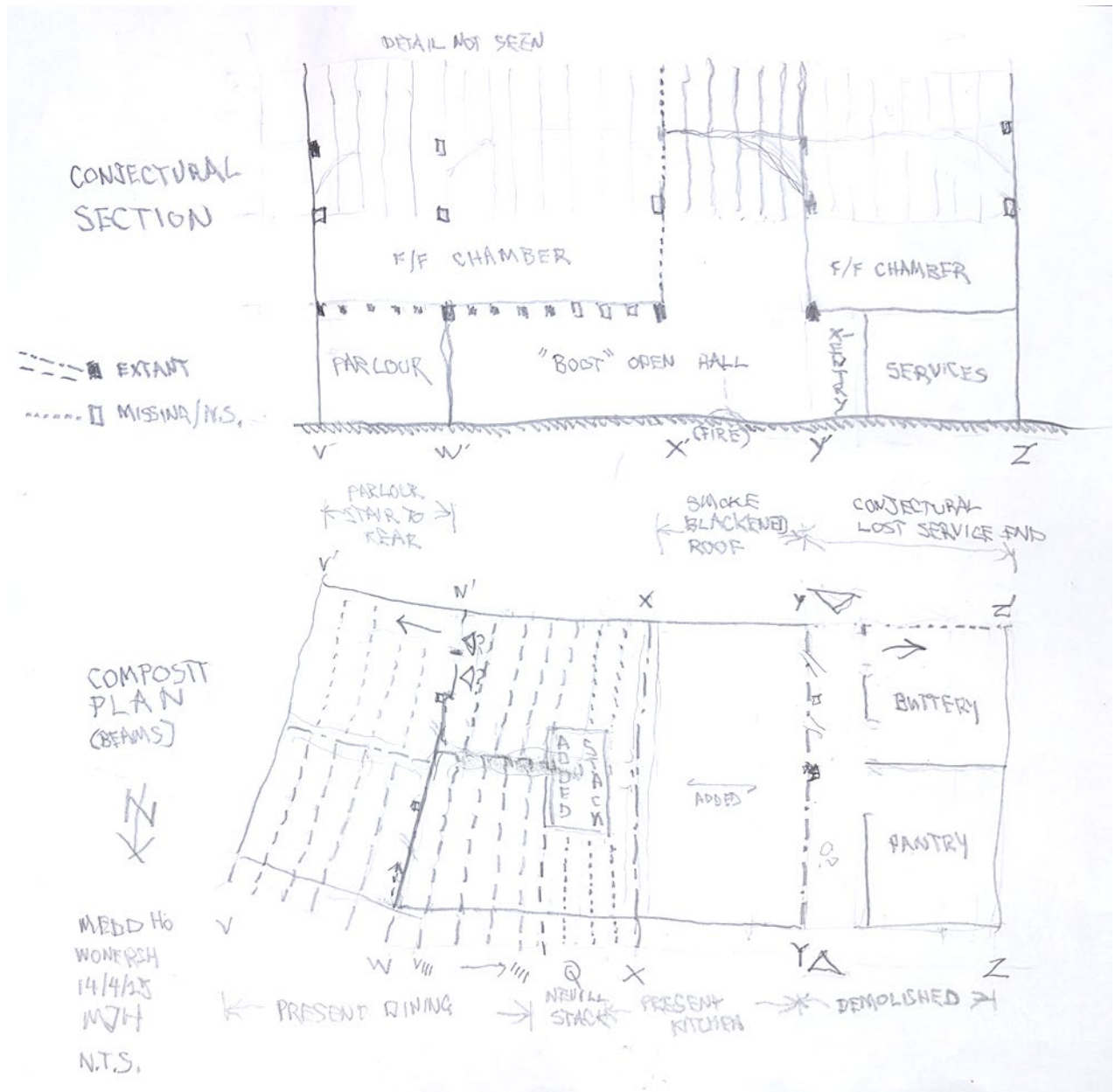


Medd House, Womersley today (Google Streetview)

Well, to cut a long story short, embedded in the right-hand end there remains a substantial part of the Wealden illustrated by Nevill, and the left-hand end is a 17th century building which has simply been embellished with multiple braces and gables. Here are my working notes on the building.

Working recording notes on Medd House

Three bays survive comprising a parlour end and "half-floored hall" also known as a "boot hall". A boot hall is where only one bay of a two bay hall is open to the roof. In this instance WXY was the hall, but only XY was open to the roof. Note that the building is three bays long, not two.



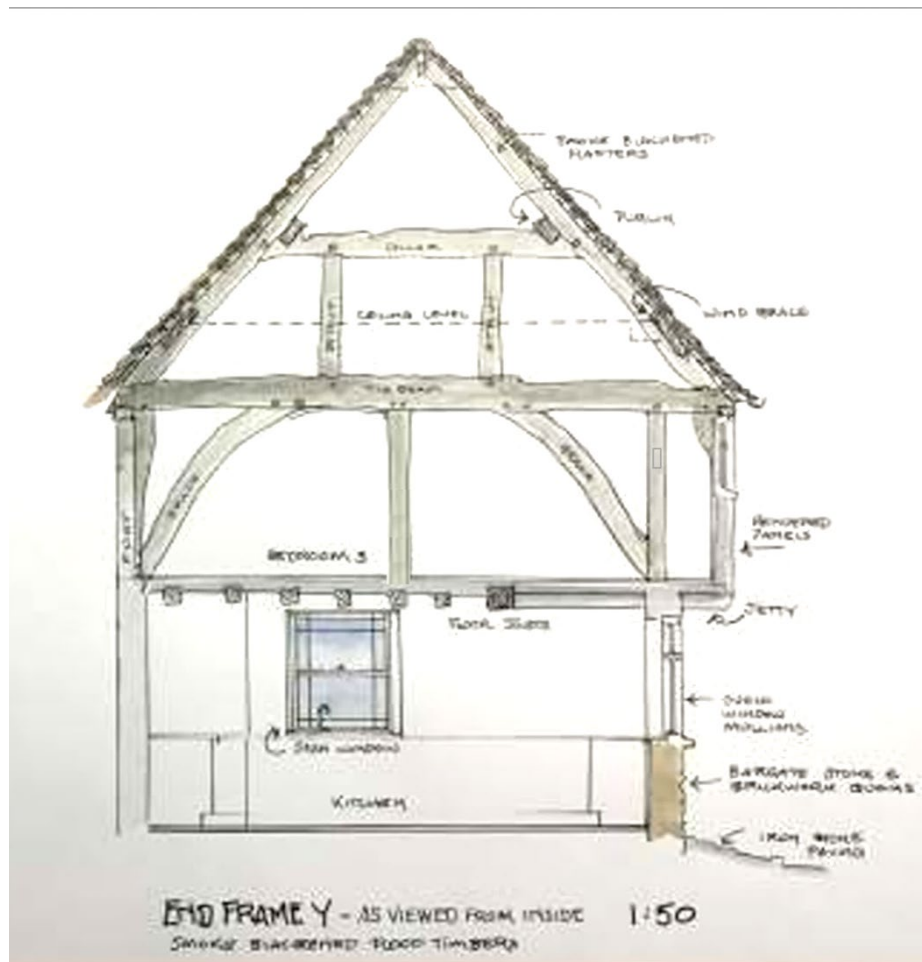
Evidence comprises:
 that only the five
 rafters in XY are
 smoke blackened;
 that the crossing
 beam XX' has no
 mortices in its soffit
 for a wall; and,
 crossing beam XX'
 has chamfers both
 sides matching those
 to spine beams, with
 the east chamfer
 stopping to



Photo looking to truss Y'Y showing smoke blackening

accommodate spine beam WX.

Much of the roof has been remodelled and trusses V, W and X have been completely removed, presumably to allow greater headroom. The front wall of the building is cranked at W with the south (rear) wall W'X' being shorter than the front wall. This means the ground floor joists fan out slightly and there is one fewer on the south side of the spine beam.



Medd House section Y'Y, the west wall of open hall from inside. The floor is added and the jetty a Victorian creation. The original hall wall aligned with the stud over the Victorian stone wall. Drawing by Sarah Sullivan.

Evidence of the Wealden form

being original comes from the design of cross frame Y'Y, illustrated below. The side purlin roof has two evenly space queen struts and the truss is symmetrical from gutter to gutter. Below the tie a central post was used, midway between the back wall and the recessed front wall. This means the mid-post is not in the centre of the queen struts. Fortunately the stud that formed the end of the recessed front (right) wall survives. The mortise to take the head timber of the front wall is well below the once flying wall plate, so there may once have been coving joining the two (although the house is notably plain in other respects).

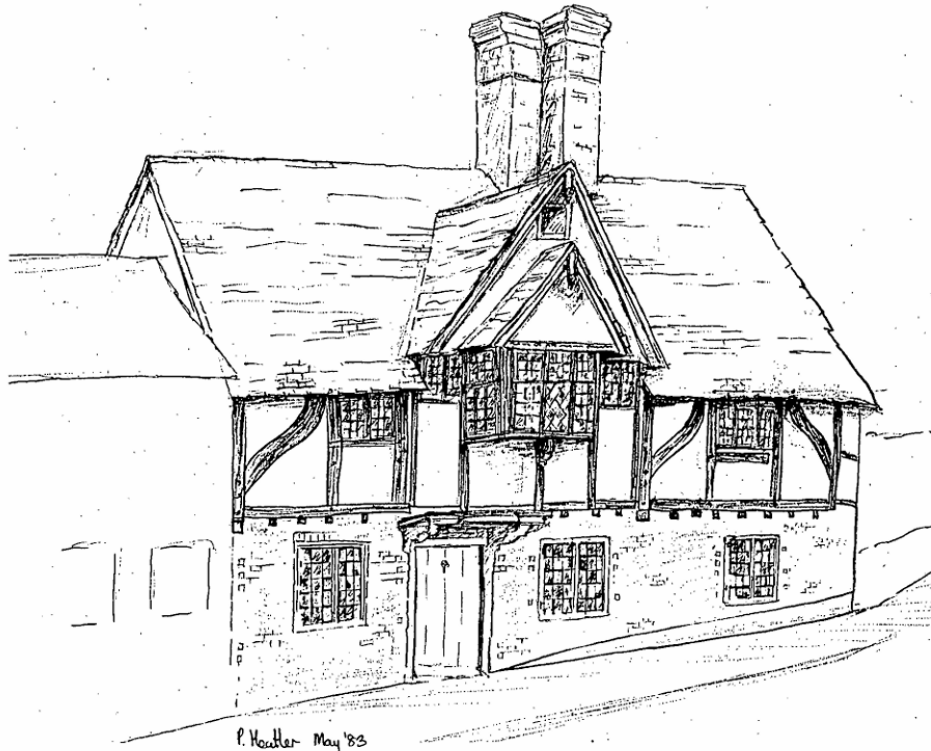
The hall XY was later floored with joists running parallel to the ridge. These are of a 17th century character, and housings continue towards the front wall where there is now a jetty. A chimney was probably added at the same time and Nevill illustrates a rear wall chimney with at least two flues in 1889. After his image was drawn some of these inserted joists were removed and the jetty extended across this bay.

So, what of the lower end? Well, despite a revisit with a step ladder to investigate peg holes in YY', no firm conclusion could be reached. The cross frame is faced-up to the hall, suggesting the building continued. However, only one peg hole was found in the ground floor beam making two wide, even-size panels towards Y', suggesting there were no doorways in the frame. The initial theory was that the present structure was built against a pre-existing low end of much the same height which had doorways in the appropriate places (See on for a revised theory).

The conjectural section shows the building gabled at both ends. Surrey Wealdens were commonly gabled, whereas standard hall houses were almost universally hipped with gablets. Proving this is tricky because the main roof timbers towards V have been lost. Also, the rafter-to-rafter numbering shows the pairs were not erected in order. All is not lost however, because the highest number, XXIII, shows there were too many rafters for there to have been a hipped end on the surviving three bay structure. It must have been gabled.

We can conjecture further from the rafter numbers. Normally there are the same number of ground floor joists as there are rafters in each bay. With four joists in VW, eight in WX, and five rafters in XY, there would have been seventeen rafters over these bays. The highest surviving rafter pair is numbered 23 so the lost low end must have had at least six rafter pairs, i.e. was bigger than XY. In case you were wondering if an allowance was needed for rafters over the trusses, the principal rafters would have had a larger scantling and be in a separate assembly sequence.

The form of Wealden suggested does not fit the standard model described in text books. This should not concern us as David Martin (East Sussex) and I when preparing talks for a conference dedicated to Wealdens independently concluded a Wealden was an elevation, not a plan type. We have in Surrey every form of hall house in both plain and Wealden-fronted form. A similar boot hall with a Wealden front standing in Bridge Square Farnham was dated on the dendro project at 1476.



11 Bridge Square, Farnham. A much altered Wealden front to a boot hall plan type. (the gabled section was originally the open section. A suspended floor to left hand bay formed the boot hall). A colour photo of the house is on the back cover of the dendro book.

It is thought Nevill carried out the work to Medd House himself as he mentions restoring cottages in Wonerish in the Journal of the Royal Institution of British Architects 1897 p121. The continuous jetty house illustrated in his own book suffered surface water flooding so he raised the frame by 18" (450mm) using ten manual jacks and then underpinned the frame and reformed the fireplace opening. Medd House is not specifically mentioned by Nevill but Sarah Sullivan, who helped record it, says the doors and other details match Nevill's work that she has studied elsewhere. The work to the exterior is extensive, suggesting the frame may have been in a poorer state than the other house he illustrated.

You might be interested in Nevill's advice on how to restore a country cottage. The first step is to seal all the doors and windows and then to fumigate the structure for two separate days a week apart by burning stick sulphur to kill the vermin and fleas.

In the interests of completeness should mention that Nevill's drawing shows a storey height post at Y. There is no evidence this existed and I have assumed it is shown in error, or, more likely, it represents a later

prop under the jetty. Also, John Baker describes a rafter pair with a high-set collar that he associated with a hipped end. We did not note this, but I wonder if it is the un-numbered rafter pair which is set on the crank of the building and was reused from elsewhere in antiquity or the high set collar was added because of the greater span.

The interior of the house has a thick layer of black paint over the timbers and many holes have timber patches meaning interpretation is hindered.

Nevill did work to the other building illustrated in his book: here are 'after' and 'before' prepared by Brigid Fice.



Throwsters, as illustrated in Ralph Neville's Old Cottage and Domestic Architecture South West Surrey book of 1889.

Top: modern photo of the current street scene showing the rebuilds either side.

The DBRG Recorders list is out of-date, so no longer in use. If you would like to take part in recording visits to learn how to analyse a house as explained above please drop an email to martin-higgins@outlook.com so DBRG can increase its recording rate.

Martin Higgins

Taper burns – estimating numbers and religious bias from DBRG Records

A former member, Sean Rix, wondered if the creation of taper burns was related to particular religious beliefs. It is now widely accepted that these burns were made deliberately for some superstitious purpose. Experimental archaeology published in Vernacular Architecture some years back has shown creating burns was a deliberate act. Sean thinks there was a lot going on during and after the reformation, including measures designed to stamp out 'Popish practices' such as use of the rosary. He wondered do DBRG records show when making burns was popular or even their decline over time? During house visits we often come across them and explain our current understanding to residents that they were apotropaic (evil averting, later perhaps guarding against fire).



Taper burns placed centrally and at both ends of a first-floor fire beam in Oxted (mid-17th century house). This is clearly not an accidental arrangement.



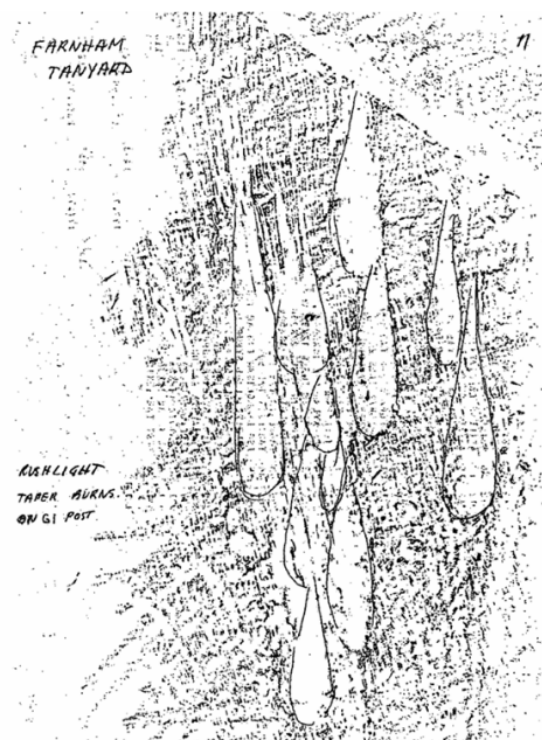
There is a relatively shallow, precise single burn close to the mason's mitre of each end of the chamfer on the bressumer, and similar one in the centre. The cluster of twelve at the left hand end are all much less cleanly executed and seem to be of another (later?) date.

Sean's partner and I helped him look through DBRG recording from Capel and Farnham to search for recorded examples of taper burns. Sean knows Farnham houses while Capel is an area I know.

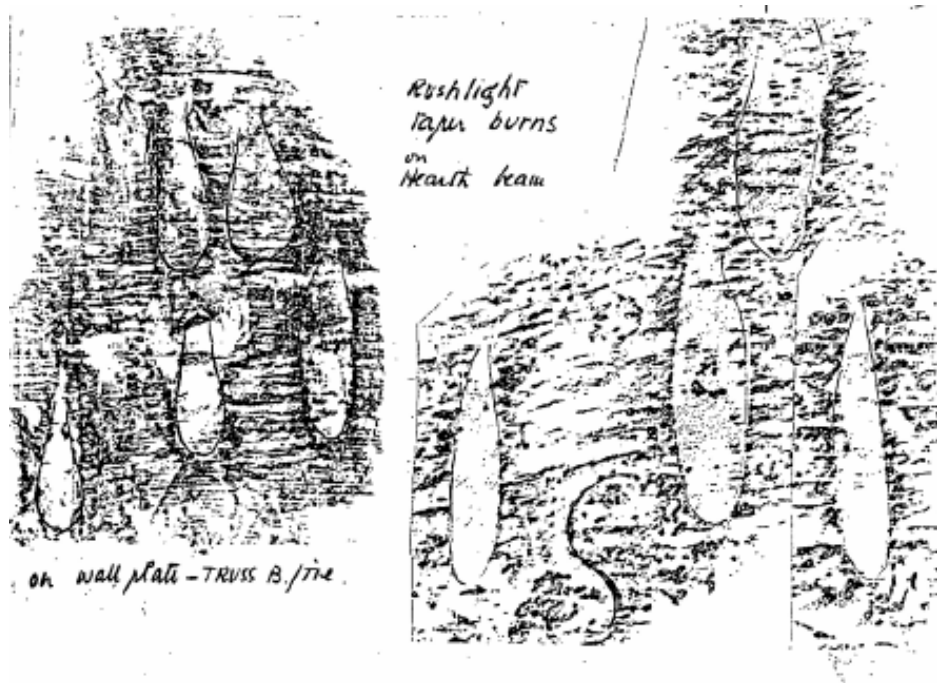
Of the 74 recordings in Capel and over 100 for Farnham less than 10% showed or mentioned taper burns.

We were both confident that this was a massive under representation of taper burn true frequency. We felt that the figure should be closer to 40-50% of timber-framed houses in Surrey having them.

It is important to note that until relatively recently the burns were thought to be accidental, so there was no reason to record them. This disinterest is reflected in the Farnham reports where three large clusters of burns were recorded in two reports by Joan Harding, presumably because they were unusual compared to the single burns.



Right: Tanyard, Farnham



29/31
West
Street,
Farnham
Rubbing
of
multiple
taper
burns in
Farnham

Our conclusion: old DBRG reports greatly under-record the occurrence of taper burns and are of very limited use for investigating their distribution geographically or within buildings. It is not possible to link burns with past mainstream religious beliefs using DBRG Reports.

We hope that future recording burns (or more importantly their absence) will become a standard part of the recording process. Perhaps someone will undertake a project to record burns in churches in Surrey to see how prevalent they are in religious, non-domestic settings.

Martin Higgins

Visits

Guided Walk Around Godalming.

Godalming has a number of fine old buildings, together with some particular decorative features which are indicative of quite narrow dating ranges. We visited upon a warm sunny day, and a broadly circular walk was proposed which terminated in a walk back to the group meeting venue via the river bank and an impromptu detour into a shop undergoing refurbishment – some members such as myself do find it hard to resist such urges.

Firstly, we visited 37 and 38 Bridge St, which has been dated via dendro to 1496 to 1510. The building has obscure origins, with it not being certain whether it was residential. The building may indeed have



37 and 38 Bridge Street

been both, with a right angled range which is now lost. The present building is in two bays, with a 17th century added bay to the side. The rear stack is also conjectural in provenance, the front range possibly being unheated at the outset (further increasing the

likelihood of this originating as a commercial building).

The building was always fully floored (notwithstanding the lost range) and has an early example of a queen strut roof. This is possibly due to the geographical position of Godalming being on the very western side of Surrey and closer to Hampshire where such roofs appear from a much earlier date.

We moved on to 39 and 40 Bridge St a former brewery grain and malt store with a striking frontage and rear wing. The building dates to the early to mid 17th century, but much altered and restored. It was owned and occupied by a mealman and maltster Jon Janaway who bequeathed the malthouse in 1689 – though this will have been the previous example replaced by the present building. The interior is supposed to have excellent examples of stopped and chamfered heavy set cross beams, though access was not



39 and 40 Bridge Street

possible. The roof is predominantly a queen strut example with the majority of interior timberwork being comparatively large scantling for the date, likely due to the commercial usage.

Next was 47 Bridge Street, a small, later 16th century building, now mostly a commercial unit with rooms above and a long rear bay viewed down an alley between this building and the next which it is understood served as a kitchen bay. 2 frontage bays remain of a smoke bay house, with the right third being the smoke bay, which is now floored

The roof comprises a queen strut side purlin example with diminished rafters.

The rear kitchen wing of two bays at the back, the rearmost of which is a further smoke bay. Though not of the same build phase, the frontage and kitchen wing are thought to be a similar

date.



47 Bridge Street, rear wing



The Square

Moving on to the High Street itself and set back from the street frontage is The Square, which is today a restaurant (though presently closed). The building is evidently a former open hall house with a cross wing,

though there is no record that this was looked at by Joan Harding/DBRG. The building has a three bay front range, with the fourth bay likely having been replaced with the cross wing. It is probably later 15th century with the cross wing being 16th.

The Kings Arms Hotel was just further along. This building was rebuilt in around 1753, but is said to have incorporated some interior fittings from the earlier inn (at least one fireplace and various elements of panelling are mentioned), and there are ample records to show that there was a previous inn on the site in the mid 17th century and possibly well before. Apparently Peter the Great stayed there in 1698!

The building engendered much debate on the provenance of the sash windows, some of which were old and others considered 19th century replacements.



Kings Arms/Royal Hotel
Venetian window



40 to 46 High Street and Crown Court

We moved on down to 40 to 46 and Crown Court, a group of commercial buildings ranging in date, but very much altered and with an enclosing rear archway wing built in the 1950s (utilising some

reclaimed material and in a complementary style). The jetty brackets engendered some interest, the middle of the western section being mid-



40 to 46 High Street and Crown Court, detail

16th century in date and the earliest range of the group.

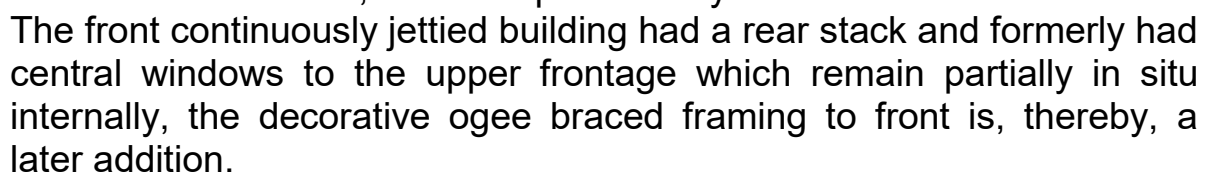
68 to 70 High Street was next, this being the former 'little George inn'. The building dates to the mid-17th century and is predominantly timber framed, but with an early to mid 18th century re-fronting as is common along the High Street.



Entry to Harts
Yard

This was followed by looking at a nearby arched entryway to 53 to 55 and Harts Yard. These buildings are mostly later 16th century commercial premises and the carriage arch to access the yard behind (which now contains mid-Victorian worker's cottages) has some large scantling timber framing and looks also to have had an alternative arrangement of spanning beams, cut off in

The house is as depicted below:



We moved on to 74 to 76 High St a double pile house dated to 1663, but with notably revised fenestration of circa 1840 with openings generally enlarged. There was a little debate over whether there was sufficient evidence to suggest the interpretation of 'Dutch' gables in this instance. The parapet was now fully continuous. Whilst internally inspection was not possible, it is said that the roof frame is a butt purlin variant and lambs tongue stops abound around the house.



74 to 76 High St
Above
General view
Left

The pattern of stone and brick is perhaps suggestive of Dutch Gables

80 High St was also looked at as we progressed west. This is a building of similar design and date to 74/6. However, the dormers retain the 'Dutch gable' aesthetic.

Further on was 77 High St, now a branch of Natwest Bank. The building, at first glance, looks to be a pastiche. However, it does have some in situ elements that show that this is likely a 16th century house within, but almost completely hidden behind modern (probably 1930s) rebuilding. The attic, though not seen, apparently has some braces and



Left
80 High Street with Dutch
Gables

timbers visible and a single in situ queen post truss. We also viewed the much restored wool merchant's house adjacent.

Moving along west, we viewed the substantial former Antelope Inn (originally the Old White Hart Inn). This double jettied building ranges over three main floors and dates from around 1570, but with much alteration, suspected to have been

carried out in the 17th century. The building also underwent considerable restoration in the 1930s when the first floor jetty was rebuilt and there was some debate about what constituted original material on parts of the frontage. Unlike the fairly well documented and accepted visit of Peter the Great further up the high street, this pub has the usual trope about Dick Turpin staying the night! We shall leave the truth of this statement in abeyance.

In the square opposite lies The Pepperpot, a former market house/town hall dating from 1814 and built by John Perry. The building remained in use for some time and was altered in 1890 to include the stair tower.

We turned our attention to 109 High Street – The Godalming Museum. The brick façade masks two mediaeval build phases, a two bay crown post cross wing connected to a three bay Wealden hall house. Dendro of 1445/6 was obtained. Wealden houses are rare in West Surrey and so this building is significant. Being a variant some distance from the usual, there are some slight (possibly locally driven) differences. The roof is an unusual gabled variety rather than a standard hipped roof for instance. A fine crown post roof remains in situ inside.

We then turned north into Church Street to look initially at 1 Church St, another building where dendro dating was successfully obtained, a date of winter 1570 being confirmed. (*Photograph on front cover. Ed.*)

This house is the possibly the most striking building in the centre of Godalming due to the frontage decorative bracing (completely extraneous) and is built in three bays with a roof story. The alignment

of the building is slightly skewed to fit the site rather than the roadway itself. The roof has a twin butt purlin arrangement with the purlins in line rather than staggered. There are also Queen strut principles and additional collars. All this is probably somewhat overkill, but may well indicate experimentation and a builder getting to grips with changing roofing technology/methodology.

3 Church St was next, again with dendro of winter 1556-7 applied. This building is a three-storey townhouse in three bays running back from the street frontage. The building has a decorative scheme of matching pairs of ogee braces, something of a local fashion for a short period in the third quarter of the 16th century. There is tall lateral side chimney.

The roof is of clasped purlin construction with raking Queen posts and wind braces and was originally gable ended before later alteration.

Interestingly, the house is one of the earliest positively dated chimney houses in the county.



3 Church Street
(with a small section of 1 Church Street showing on left)

Below
6 to 8 Church Street



We then continued north up towards 6-8 Church St, which comprises a Continuous jetty building on the east side of the street. The building is considered a commercial building from the outset and dates from the 17th century, but with much

later alteration and restoration.

Immediately opposite and on the corner of Mint Street is 11 Church St. The building has a frontal jetty and ranges over three stories (there is an attic room with a blocked window in the gable end wall). The building is listed as early to mid 17th century. However, the prevalent use of ogee braces might date this building a little earlier.



11 Church Street

We strolled on north to view 12 Church St, though we did not linger due to much structure being hidden. This building being a gable jetty fronted 'townhouse' of likely later 16th century date. It is in 3 bays, with the central example a narrow smoke bay and a clasped purlin roof frame. It is speculated that it could have been the solar wing for an adjacent building (now lost or substantially altered).

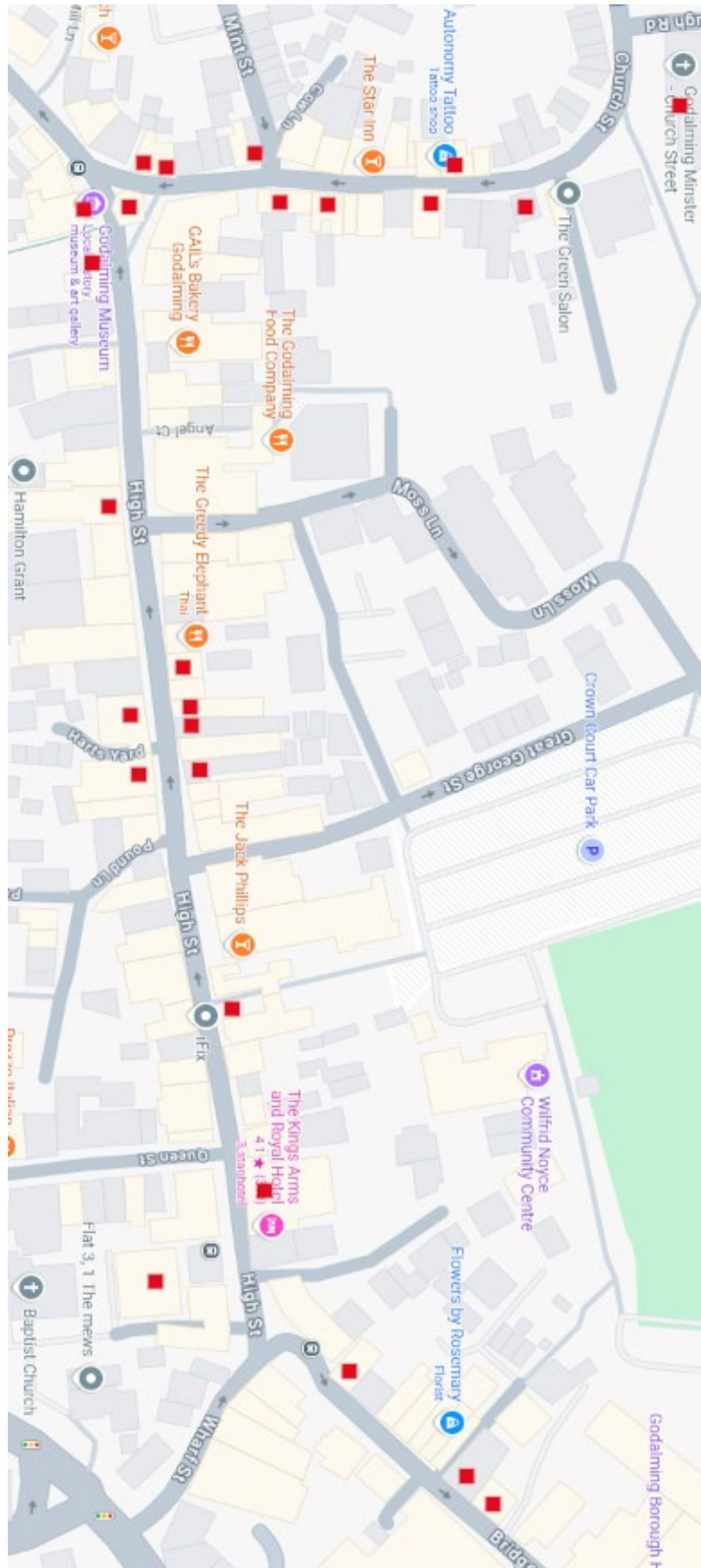
We moved on to Old House (16-18 Church Street). As is often the case with building entitled 'old house', much seems not particularly old. The building is very heavily altered in the modern era, but probably comprises a 16th century house and cross wing.

29 Church Street was next, which had considerably more material on display. This is a 3 bay house with frontage jetty which likely comprises a cross wing to a formerly attached building which is now replaced, or perhaps a solar wing to a much altered contemporary lateral build which has been re-fronted. There is some suggestion that the building might indeed have been a narrow townhouse stretching back from the road frontage, as there is a small open hall element in a rear bay.

We gained access to part of the adjacent building, which is without doubt a completely different build phase, though probably on the same alignment as whatever no. 29 may have been attached to originally – this being the distraction prior to returning to the meeting venue. No. 29 had a Crown post roof. We cannot help ourselves sometimes.

In all, a very rewarding and entertaining walk, albeit on a quite hot day!

Text Richard Pocock
Photos Rosemary Hughesdon



Map of Godalming showing location of buildings mentioned

DOMESTIC BUILDINGS RESEARCH GROUP (SURREY)

Surrey is rich in the smaller mediaeval timber-framed buildings. The Domestic Building Research Group (Surrey) is a voluntary group that has recorded, analysed and reported on more than 4,000 domestic and farm buildings, mainly in Surrey, over the past fifty years.

The DBRG has a few remaining publications for sale

George Howard, *The Smaller Brick, Stone and Weatherboard Houses of Surrey, 17th to mid 19th century. A statistical analysis*

Peter Gray, *Surrey Medieval Buildings An analysis and inventory*

Joan Harding, *Granaries in Surrey - An Obituary.*

Currently available from Rod Wild, 01483 232767

and

Marion Herridge & Joan Holman, *An Index of Surrey Probate Inventories.*

Available from Martin Higgins, 01737 842625)

For an index of recorded buildings, glossary and membership forms,
visit www.dbrg.org.uk

DOMESTIC BUILDINGS RESEARCH GROUP (SURREY)

Chairman:

Mr Martin Higgins M.Phil.,
55 Middle Street, Brockham, Betchworth, Surrey, RH3 7JT

Vice-Chair:

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Mrs Sarah Jones, membership@dbrg.org.uk

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Mr John Crane, icenimerde@luftfhartsbunker.co.uk

Data Secretary:

Mr Rod Wild,

News Editor:

Mrs Rosemary Hughesdon,

Committee member:

Mr Patrick Moyle,

I would welcome items for the next Newsletter
to reach me by 20th September, please

Please send them to me at
20 School Lane, Addlestone
KT15 1TB 01932 846428

If it is possible, it is always very helpful if contributions could
be sent by e-mail, as an attachment, to
rosemary.hughesdon@virginmedia.com
Illustrations as separate jpegs please – you can always indicate in the
text approximately where they should go.