

No 49 High Street
(Currently Lawrence Estate Agents)

The reason for the group interest in this building stems from the fact that in its original construction it was a medieval hall house. On 19th May 2015 the buildings project team toured the property. All measurements are imperial due to the plans being expressed in that medium.

The south elevation faces onto the High Street. The property front of No 49 and 51 measures just over 30'. Most of the extent of the property runs south to north and under previous ownership used to extend to Bartholomew Street some 96'

The first and second floors cover both No's 49 and 51 as did the ground floor prior to 1902. The ground floors being commercial premises would have been subject to much cosmetic change over the years.

The first floor layout was a rabbit warren of small passages and rooms, the floor is accessed by a flight of stairs at the eastern extent of the ground floor of No 49 with steps to a small access hall off which are stairs to a back office to the north, stairs to a room stretching to the eastern extent, and to the south stairs to the second floor, and two doors to private rooms, one apparently used by a religious order the other to a spacious lounge. All three of the levels from the access hall are higher than that of the access hall, in consequence leaving a void between the ceiling of the ground floor and the raised floor of the first. Quite what may be contained in the void is unknown.

The second (top) floor is accessed by means of some steep steps which ascend to the east end of the property. The floor comprises two sections. To the east is an attic office 11' E-W x 19' N-S with a closed truss on its western wall and a purlin running east to west.

The other side of the office western wall is a roof void 18' E-W x 28' N-S. The floor of the void is about 2' 3" above the office floor and is accessed via a small door. On examination of the roof void it becomes evident that this was the upper limit of a former medieval hall house. The roof at some stage has been completely renewed the new roof with its new joists and supports being put over the top of the old roof. In consequence the old shortened crown post in the middle of the void and braced to the old collar and purlin is now redundant but is still in situ. The eastern wall of the void has a closed truss, which is smoke blackened suggesting that maybe in the buildings original state as a hall, there might have been an open hearth or grate which, in common to hall houses would have been in the centre of the hall on the ground floor somewhere beneath the crown post.

Above the eastern wall of the void and above the level above the attic office ceiling, the roof void continues to the wall at the east end of the property. The western wall of the void has a chimney stack and more modern construction to the party wall of No 47. There is a mortise to the underside of the collar purlin close to the existing western side wall. This indicates that there was a former arch brace to the collar purlin springing from crown post in the former closed truss on the line of the western wall. Thus the extent of the hall was from the western wall to the smoke stained closed truss to the east. Any ranges to the rear of the property would have been added later, as would the extension to the east of the blackened closed truss, below which is the attic office being that of a more modern construction including a north facing dormer window.

The first floor eastern end comprises a separate room L shaped 180'² in the middle of which is an old supporting beam with small side braces, an interesting item but use unknown. The far extent the room is traversed by a separate range running north to south. At the time of our tour the ceiling had been damaged and we were lucky enough to be able to take a look at the roof void of the separate range this being collard and went beyond the extent of the room running north. This range is 18' N-S and 12' E-W reducing to 9' E-W at its southernmost extremity.

The obvious sign of age was within the roof void on the second floor. I am not sure which way the old hall would have run.

The open truss in the void with the short crown post would be in normal hall houses, in the centre of the hall. This is not exactly the case with this property as it stands, so the question is what was the extent of the old hall? Which way did it run? Was the mysterious beam in the centre of first floor room to the east, the extent of the hall and perhaps the remnants of a closed truss halfway up the old building? Was the separate range added at some later date? Are there any signs of a dais beam giving further clues to the layout of a hall?

My thoughts on the roof space and the adjoining office to the east suggest to me that this was the surviving areas of the original hall house which ran east to west. I think the east wall of the office was the original end east wall of the hall house, now faced over. The purlin running east to west remains, together with the end curved brace. The roof space shows the original collar-rafter roof with crown post and east to west purlin (collared purlin roof). The east closed truss is soot stained on its west face, as are all the roof timbers in this area. I believe someone took a photo through an opening in this closed truss showing the original roof timbers (above the lady's office) which were completely soot free. I don't think the open truss was always in the centre of the open hall area, in 82 North Road it was well towards the "lower" end, so, maybe similar here. I think the open hall extended westwards roughly to the wall of the Midland Bank, the west closed truss no longer being there. The crown post is off the open truss and braced to the collar-purlin running east to west and to the collar. We didn't have time to examine it carefully but could not see any carpenters marks. Crundens allegedly has markings, be interesting to know if the crown posts are very similar, maybe similar age. A poke about in the roof space at the bottom of the closed truss might reveal a moulded tie beam, probably indicating the "lower" end of hall house.



Crown Post



Smoke Blackened east wall in roofvoid