



Wealden Buildings Study Group

www.wealdenbuildings.org.uk

Researching traditional historic buildings in the Weald since 1964



Who we are and what we do

We are a voluntary group of about 40 members, the majority living in Sussex, Kent, Surrey and Hampshire. Members have diverse academic and practical experience of the inspection, measurement, drawing, analysis and recording of buildings and their context. New learners are welcome: we actively share our expertise among ourselves and with other bodies in allied areas of work.



Our objective is to widen the understanding of vernacular architecture and historical settlement in the Weald. We study the lesser traditional buildings in the Weald including many built by the lesser gentry.

Our main activities during the Summer are visiting, recording and documenting houses across the Weald. We compile a record of each property and over 600 records have been completed since we began in 1964.

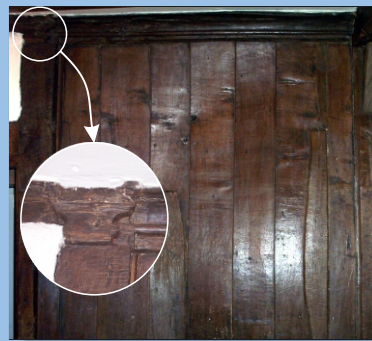


Right a rare **solid brace** between **baypost** and **tie beam** in a **Wealden style** building with **jettied bays** either side of the **open hall**.

What do we look for?

Evidence for original layout

Early houses often had an **open hall** where the cooking and heating **hearth** was located. Beyond one end of the hall there might be a high status **parlour**, at the other end there might be a **cross passage** and **service rooms** beyond such as a **buttery** or **pantry**.



This **panelling** was at the **high end** of an **open hall**. The detail shows the remains of the **spere** which projected into the room. The **spere** was a screen to deflect the draughts from a doorway and therefore shows that the doorway from the **open hall** to the **parlour** was to the left of this **panelling**.

Roof Structures

The roof is often the best place to learn about the history of a building as different roof types were popular at different periods. The roof can also identify multiple building **phases**.



The **side purlin** roof with **raking struts** (top left) is from a later period than the **crown post** (right) and the **clasped purlin** (bottom left) can overlap both periods.

Sooted Timbers

Sooted timbers have been exposed to wood smoke for a significant time. This can show whether the smoke from the hearth was controlled by a **timber flue** or **brick chimney**. The **purlin** roofs above are clean whilst the **crown post** is sooted and was above an **open hall**.

Assembly or Carpenter's Marks

The frames of a timber building were normally manufactured at a carpenter's workshop. They were then transported to the site and erected. The main timbers were often marked so that it was easy to see which parts join together, different types of marks were used by different carpenters, so again these can help identify multiple phases of construction. The marks can be **scratched** into the timbers or **incised** with tools.



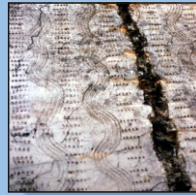
Windows

The locations of original timber windows can help identify status and function. They very occasionally survive intact, but are often identified by the **mortices** or even by the presence of **peg holes** for the bottom **rail** of the window.



Decoration

Some traditional decoration techniques can still be seen today. Timbers could be **chamfered**, **moulded** or even pierced with **tracery**. The way that a **chamfer** is stopped can help date a building. **Daub** panels could be **pargetted** by scratching patterns into the wet **daub**.



How do we date a building?

It is very unusual that a single feature of a building forms the basis for a date estimate. It is the combination of all the features that can be seen and the **timber size and quality** that enable an estimated construction date to be determined. **Stylistic dating** (as it is known) can generate date ranges within 50 years. Owners may want to learn more about their property either through **documentary research**, a thorough **building survey** or by **dendrochronology** (tree ring dating of timbers). **Dendrochronology** has enabled the date ranges for building features in specific areas to become more refined, and can even date your house to a specific year.

Why invite us to your house?

Householders invite the Wealden Buildings Study Group to visit their property for two main reasons:

- To help the Group in its mission to identify, understand and record old buildings in the Weald and surrounding areas.
- To find out more about their house.

The Group's members are skilled in analysing the remaining physical evidence to understand the construction of the original building. Our visits are free. We are an entirely voluntary body, doing this work because we are dedicated to the identification and recording of vernacular buildings.

If you think your house (or barn or other old building) might have early origins, a Group member may be able to make an initial visit to assess the building.

The Group then makes a full visit. The number of members is restricted to suit you and your property, but typically there are about 10 of us on a visit.

We spend a number of hours surveying the building inside and out, including the roof space, and the cellar if you have one.

If you give permission, we take photographs to help us in writing our report later. They are never reproduced elsewhere unless we seek and obtain your specific permission.

At the end of the visit we sit down for a group discussion, in which we encourage you to participate. We discuss and agree our broad findings.

Later, we produce a short report and a plan drawing. We focus on the original building's form rather than later changes, and do not take modern changes into account.

We aim to date the original building - typically to the nearest 50 years - and sometimes to date some of the later alterations.

See our website for details of how our Rules protect your Privacy. Distribution of the final report is strictly controlled to within our membership. All other requests for access to it are vetted by our Secretary.

Membership Enquiry

Do you want to get involved in research into traditional buildings? Or perhaps you are already.

Such work may range from the recording of individual houses, to studies of complete parishes and their related documents as part of landscape studies.

Our members include amateurs and professionals - archaeologists, historians, architects, surveyors, engineers, and geographers. Some of us have no formal qualification.

If you have little or no experience but would like to read some of the standard literature, and have a commitment to learn more, we would still be glad to hear from you.

Our members are mainly from Sussex and Surrey, and a few from Kent and Hampshire.

Membership is accepted from those who show an interest in the subject, an ability to learn and are willing to assist with building recording and reports.

The Group aims to provide both experienced and newer members with diverse experience in 'hands on' work in inspecting, measuring, drawing, analysing and recording buildings. We also encourage study of the extensive literature covering vernacular buildings.

Membership benefits include;

- Copies of the previous years' visit reports, and access on request (for approved purposes) to WBSG's archive of over 600 reports.
- Access to the Building Archaeology Research Database which allows users to search by criteria such as building type, constructional feature, date and location.
- A free library of books and reports.
- Training and mentoring for inexperienced members.
- Informative Winter Lecture Programme.
- Our website has a Membership Enquiry form you can complete, or you can contact the Secretary using the details listed at the bottom of this page.

House visit enquiry

If you think your house (or barn or other old building) might have early origins then use the contact form on our website to tell us about your property. Otherwise you can contact us using the details listed below.

Wealden Buildings Study Group

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