

44 & 46, HIGH STREET

DROITWICH

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FINAL REPORT

on the building's architectural interest for

THE HISTORIC DROITWICH PROJECT

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund

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44-46 High Street, Droitwich (NGR SO 90129 63332)

Summary

The earliest surviving part of this complex of buildings is the two-bay timber-framed range built c.1550 but now set behind the present twin-gabled street frontage of no. 46. It is aligned east-west and is best seen externally in the gable end towards Worcester Road and internally at upper levels where much of the frame, particularly in the attic, is either exposed or its existence known from records made during recent restorations. In Phase 2, c.1600, the building was extended northwards to the street line by the addition of a new twin-gabled timber-framed frontage. The first and second floors were jettied, the overhangs being supported on richly carved brackets, one of which survives, while in the gables the framing pattern had quadrant bracing within small square panels. These details are still visible internally in the roof space behind the external cladding and false framing of the High Street gables. These are all signs of a highly decorative scheme which has parallels in other substantial Elizabethan and Jacobean town houses in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire. Dendrochronology for this phase provided a felling date range c.1580-1620, which is entirely compatible with the stylistic evidence for the framing detail and bracket carving.

Background

As part of the Historic Droitwich project to investigate the town's buildings and with the kind permission of the owners the opportunity was taken to visit this building on a number of occasions during recent renovation work.

The property fronts the southern side of the High Street and comprises two elements – to the west no 44, a two-bay two storey brick building with a hipped tiled roof, and no 46 at the corner of Worcester Road, a two-bay 2½ storey timber-framed building which is the architecturally significant part and as such is the subject of this report.

The National Heritage List entry (number 1095977) dates from the original 1951 survey and provides only a brief description of the exterior of this Grade II listed building.

Circa 1600. Timber frame and roughcast. 2 storeys and attics. 2 large gables restored. 2 early C19 windows. Worcester Road front timber framed with whitened brick and plaster. Large gable on left hand. Mid C19 shop fronts throughout. Old tiles.

No 46 is still known locally as Bullock's Café, a name derived from its use as a popular tearoom and local landmark from the 1920s to the 1980s. It was subsequently refurbished in extensive restoration and modernisation schemes undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s. At that time staff from the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHM) investigated the building and produced a report on their findings which can be supplemented as a record of changes made

by studying the proposal drawings produced by the project architect Ian Stainburn.¹ The RCHM report provides the basis for much of this account. During the most recent programme of repair and conversion of the upper floors to flats and the ground floor to a restaurant² the opportunity was provided to make further notes on the building and undertake dendrochronology.



Phase 1 c.1550

The earliest phase is the timber-framed range behind the High Street frontage of no 46. It is aligned roughly east-west with its eastern gable facing Worcester Road. There are two surviving bays of unequal length but the RCHM investigators saw evidence to suggest that at least another bay extended in a westerly direction. Today that evidence is largely obscured by subsequent changes carried out in the 1980s. That refurbishment also led to the replacement of many of the original studs in the frame of the Worcester Road elevation but by comparing what is there today with old photographs most of the new work seems to have followed the earlier pattern.

Internally ceiling beams and some of the south side wall frame is still visible within and immediately outside the first floor flat. The corner post of the

¹ Historic England Archive (formerly known as the National Monuments Record (NMR)) BFO 38977 file - 'Bullock's Café, Droitwich Spa'

² The premises are now known as Galleria at Bullock's Restaurant, Bistro & Tearooms.

westernmost truss is visible in the corridor, together with its tiebeam, principal rafter and windbrace. At attic level there is more clarity. Here we can see the inside faces of the end trusses and the central truss showing how the bays are of unequal length (2.44m (8') and 2.9m (9' 6'')). Although extensively altered we can establish the original form of the central truss with a tiebeam at the current attic floor level, a collar and queen struts between them. It has been suggested that the roof was of clasped purlin construction³ but close inspection of the principal rafter shows that this is incorrect; the purlins pass through a rectangular hole cut very close indeed to the inner edge of the principal which has split giving the superficial impression of clasping. In a later phase the centre of the collar was cut and vertical struts inserted to create a doorway between the two bays. In the 18th or 19th centuries, when the predecessor of the present north-south range was erected, the southern roof slope was altered again. It was probably at this time that new purlins were installed in the U-shaped trenches formed in the principal rafter on the south slope.

None of the surviving elements of this phase of construction offer any clues to the date of this range. There is a substantial curved brace in the street elevation, close studding and the windbrace already noted which is slightly curved but without a chamfer. All we can really conclude now is that this range pre-dates the High Street frontage which, as we shall see, was added c.1600. A date of c.1550 is suggested.

Phase 2 c.1600

A timber-framed extension was added to the north side wall of the east-west range bringing the frontage out to the line of the High Street. This new frontage was 2½ storeys high and two bays wide. Its first and attic floors were jettied, the main posts having carved brackets, one of which survives, albeit not in situ. It is shown in its original position at the jettied junction of the first and second floor in historic photographs of the Worcester Road elevation as late as the 1960s. It was subsequently removed but the shadow left by the bracket is clearly visible today by the later brick filling.⁴

The framing of the twin gables at attic level was highly decorative with small square panels and quadrant braces from which a single spur at the mid-point of each brace extends outwards towards the centre of the panel, thus creating a quatrefoil pattern. The pegs for the braces are of smaller dimension than those used to secure the studs and rails of the panels. Externally none of this is visible as the gables are covered by vertical boarding with applied false framing, bearing no resemblance to the original design. However, in the roof space visible from

³ Christopher Pancheri *Historic Droitwich: its streets and its people – initial assessment of properties ...* (typescript report, May 2014)

⁴ The bracket is a vernacular version of the richly carved console brackets that have a scroll profile with carving on three faces. The carving on this example is confined to the front face and comprises a repeat pattern of elongated concaved recesses with arched tops and divided by incised lines.

the attic of the main range we can see that the framing of the twin gables survives behind the cladding. Many of the braces with their distinctive spurs are visible but where they have disappeared their former presence is detectable by the small pegs still in place around the panels. Overall the decoration produced a pattern resembling quatrefoils.

Small panel framing with decorative braces like this are well represented by many fine examples of both urban and rural timber-framed houses in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire at the end of the 16th century and early decades of the 17th century. The Bailiff's House in Bewdley displays the same pattern at an upper level; the felling date of its timber was established as 1607 by dendrochronology while a doorhead of the completed house is inscribed with the date 1610.⁵ In Ludlow there is a group of early 17th century town houses which display the same motif in the decorative framing. Perhaps the best example there is no 2 Dinham, which was erected c.1600.

In an attempt to establish closer dating Ian Tyers was commissioned to advise on the building's potential for dendrochronology. He found that the majority of the building was constructed of timbers with too few rings for sampling and analysis. He was however able to obtain a date range within the last quarter of the 16th century or early part of the 17th century for the felling of the timber used to make the bracket.⁶

Later phases

The major changes of the 18th and 19th centuries involved the under-building of the jettied High Street frontage, leaving only the framing of the twin gables visible. Historic photographs of the High Street from the 1860s to the early 20th century allow us to chart these alterations in some detail. By c.1900 the original gables had been covered and false framing applied, giving no clues to what lies behind.

Conclusion

This report revisits previous architectural accounts of the property in the light of recent work and confirms that there are two principal phases of development for the timber-framed elements in no 46. In its fully developed form in Phase 2 around 1600 this building occupied a prominent position at the corner of High Street and Worcester Road. It was distinguished by its close-studded elevation to the east and by its use of decorative framing to the north or High Street elevation. Fortunately, enough remains for us to disentangle the building's

⁵ For the Bailiff's House see F.W.B. Charles *Timber Trades Journal* 30 October 1971 supplement pp14-19; John Fletcher 'A List of Tree-Ring Dates for Building Timber in Southern England and Wales' *Vernacular Architecture* vol. 11 (1980) pp32-38 – Fletcher gives the results as 1605 +/- 5; for the many Shropshire examples see Madge Moran *Vernacular Buildings of Shropshire* (Logaston Press, 2003) which includes a discussion of the date of 2 Dinham.

⁶ Ian Tyers 'Tree-ring analysis of 2 buildings in Droitwich' August 2015

architectural history to visualise its appearance in the early 17th century when it was already an impressive landmark in the townscape of Droitwich.

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Acknowledgments

I owe particular thanks to the following people. Firstly, owners Steve Weaver and Andy Probyn have been very helpful providing access to what was often a busy building site. Paul Jones LRPS made a photographic record of the building during the recent refurbishment and has shared historic images from his own collection that are particularly illuminating. Peter Walker helped on site with recording and Claire Lloyd facilitated access on many occasions.



East elevation to Worcester Road.



South side wall frame. The studs above the wall plate are secondary and were inserted when the brick wing in the foreground was added on to the south wall.



East-west range: showing (above) the central truss, (below left) details of the main post and tiebeam and (below right) windbrace and purlin.



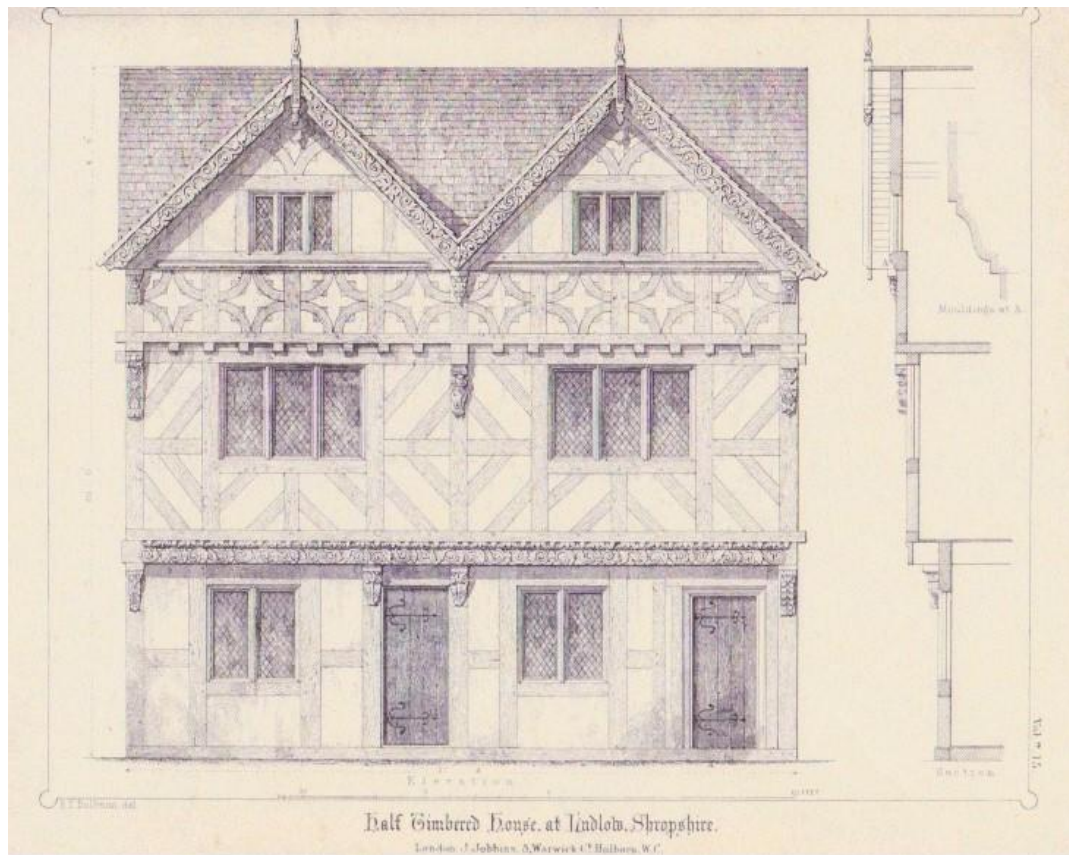
East-west range (composite) showing central truss.



East-west range: detail of purlin housing in the central truss showing the split principal rafter. Photograph by courtesy of Paul Jones, LRPS.



Above: the High Street elevation. Below: 2 Dinham, Ludlow from Dollman & Jobbins' *Ancient Domestic Architecture* (1863), provides a close parallel for the twin gables and the likely appearance of the High Street frontage.



High Street frontage – timber-framed gable with decorative bracing visible above the collar internally, August 2014. (Photograph by courtesy of Paul Jones, LRPS.)



Decorative bracing below the collar in the attic of the High Street frontage, August 2014. (Photograph by courtesy of Paul Jones, LRPS.)



Decorative bracing below the collar of the High Street gables. (Photograph by courtesy of Paul Jones, LRPS.)



Close studding and brace in the side wall frame of the phase 2 extension visible internally at attic level. (Photograph by courtesy of Paul Jones, LRPS.)



The Bailiff's House, 68-69 High Street, Bewdley, erected between 1607-10 with spurred quadrant braces to the front wall of the upper floor and gables. These braces are very similar to those used in the gables of 44 High Street, Droitwich.



Shadow of
jetty
bracket

Left: photograph c.1878, showing the original twin gables prior to external cladding and the application of false framing (photo courtesy of Paul Jones, LRPS). Right: shadow of the removed jetty bracket to left of the downpipe.



Front elevation and profile of the carved jetty bracket preserved inside the building.