

Street Farmhouse 230: Canterbury Road¹

No. 230 Canterbury Road is the right-hand part of the original timber-framed house of Street Farm.² The entrance to this property is now on the side of the house. The rear of the building has a two storey, brown brick extension, added in 1720 according to the deeds for the house. The ground floor of the front, timber-framed part holds a single room, set at two slightly different levels. This room has a large inglenook fireplace, which stands back-to-back with the one next door. The bressummer above the fireplace has had to be replaced, as the old one was crumbling away when the later plaster covering was removed. The new one now runs right across from the right side of the chimney-breast to the front outside wall.

The huge beams, which run from front to back of the room, are original ones and still contain numerous different carpenters' marks. Two of the doors are very old and have handmade hinges, each of which has the blacksmith's mark [**F.H.**] enclosed in a square, stamped into them. There have been at least two forges in the village since at least 1687. Beneath the ground floor, in the centre of the higher level of the room, there is the entry to a cellar, which is lined with chalk clunch-blocks. When a recent owner was putting a brick lining over these and cleaning up the flooring, he discovered another lower hole in the cellar floor.³ He called it a 'booty hole', and is fairly certain the house was used for smuggling during the end of the 18th century and early to mid-19th centuries. Discoveries in the room above add even more weight to his theory. In the cellar hole were found several French coins and some buttons (possibly military).

¹ See Appendix No. 20

² See plans in Appendix No. 21 and 22

³ See Appendix No. 25 A.

In the renovations to the ceiling of the ground floor, all the joints and floorboards were found to be full of wheat, barley and oats, giving the impression that the upper floor was used for grain storage at some time. There are a number of empty mortises of different sizes and shapes in the large beam just in front of the fireplace in the living room. The staircase is at the right hand front corner of the room, with turned stairs at the bottom end and a wider splayed turn as you reach the junction with the new rear wing and again when you reach the room above the living room. They are narrow and steep, with an old window high up under the eaves near the top. The windows here are a later insertion into a much older, probably 18th century, frame.

In the room above the living-room is a small fireplace. When the present owner bought the house, this was hidden under plaster, although the left side of the wall still retained its wooden framework and lathe and plaster infills. He decided to uncover the plaster over the section where he thought the old fireplace must have been. When he did so, he found the right side of the chimney-breast was supported on old bricks.⁴ The left side, however, had been cut away and was only supported by a short wooden beam. He discovered there was a cavity running from the chimney across to the front outside wall.⁵ The entry into this cavity was through the triangular panel at the bottom left hand corner, nearest to the front of the house. There is a mechanism for automatically closing the door after entering the area, consisting of a very old pulley around which ran a piece of cord.⁶ This then ran down through a large iron staple about 6 inches above the floor and originally held a weight. The opening still works and is just large enough for a slim person to enter. In the right hand end of the space, there is an entry through the chimney-breast, which can then be scaled and would

⁴ See Appendix No. 25 B.

⁵ See Appendix No. 26 A.

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bring the climber out into the loft above. The beams in the cavity beside the hidden fireplace are all smoke-blackened.

The loft above also contains huge smoke-blackened timbers, indicating that there was once a central, open fireplace down below and that the smoke then found its way up into the roof space and out through the two gablets at each end of the enormous roof. When the great fireplaces and chimneystacks were inserted in the 17th century, this must have made a great difference to the quality of life that was led in the house. The front door into the house could well have been altered from a passage-entry into a lobby-entry.⁷ This would now be hidden under the later rendering on the outside and the staircase of No. 236 would hide it inside.

As can be seen from the details noted during these visits, the house is certainly considerably older than the listing states. This would have been the farmhouse for what was known as Street Farm, whose land stretched up to the edge of the old churchyard. A barn from this farm, which is shown on an old etching of about 1845, was taken down in the 1920's and re-erected in Barnet in North London.⁸ In a tree ring dating done on the barn timbers in the 1980's, it was discovered that many of the timbers in the barn had felling dates of 1450 – 1475.

⁷ See note on the Medieval Cross-passage House Plan, Appendix No. 23

⁸ See Appendix No. 30