

# Oxfordshire

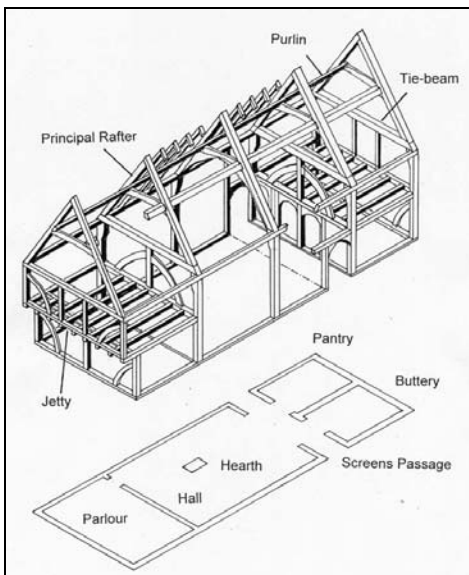
## 20-22 HART STREET: A MEDIEVAL HALL-HOUSE



*Nos 22 (left) and 20 Hart Street, in origin the cross wing and hall of a medieval house*

Many buildings on Hart Street have brick frontages dating from the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. But most of Henley's medieval houses were timber-framed, and at Nos 20 and 22 much of the original structure is still visible.

Most medieval houses were grouped around a central hall, which was open to the rafters and heated by a central open hearth. Smoke escaped through an opening in the roof, and often left tell-tale signs of sooting, which can help to identify houses of medieval origin. Usually there were two-storeyed wings at either end, one of them containing service rooms, and the other one private chambers. The main entry was generally through a passage at the hall's lower (or service) end.



*Generic drawing of a timber-framed medieval house, with a central hall and hearth, and two-storeyed cross wings at either end. In their original form Nos 20 and 22 would have had a broadly similar form, with No. 20 forming the hall, and No. 22 the cross wing. (NB, however, that the drawing is generic and does not correspond to the building in detail.)*

*(Drawing by David Clark)*

Nos 20 and 22 Hart Street probably began as the hall and wing of a fairly substantial medieval house. The hall (on the right of the picture) still has its medieval cross-passage entry, while the wing still has its curved arch-braces and a projecting first-floor jetty, which added space and stability. On the first-floor, the east wall contains Henley's earliest known timber window (c.1400), now blocked by the adjoining building. The window is narrow, with only its cusped head showing; it was unglazed, but shows evidence of a sliding shutter to keep out the cold.



*Remains of a cusp-headed timber window of c.1400 in the first-floor east wall of No. 22. This was built as a private first-floor chamber adjoining the hall, and though the window was unglazed there is evidence of a sliding shutter to keep out the cold. The window has since been blocked by the adjoining building - when No. 22 was built, either the neighbouring plot was empty or the building on it was much lower.*

Like most such houses it was modernized in the 16th or early 17th century, when old-fashioned open halls were generally floored over, providing new first-floor rooms, and smoky open hearths were replaced with fireplaces. Here too an upper floor was built over the hall, and chimneys were inserted. The street front was later plastered over, as with many of Henley's timber-framed houses, and was given new casement windows. The roof is now tiled, something that had occurred in most of the town by the 1690s, judging from Jan Siberechts's paintings of Henley around that date. In the Middle Ages many roofs in the town were probably thatched.

*Account based on architectural investigations by Ruth Gibson for the EPE project.  
Read more in our forthcoming EPE book Henley-on-Thames: Town, Trade and River,  
by Simon Townley (Phillimore 2009)*

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