



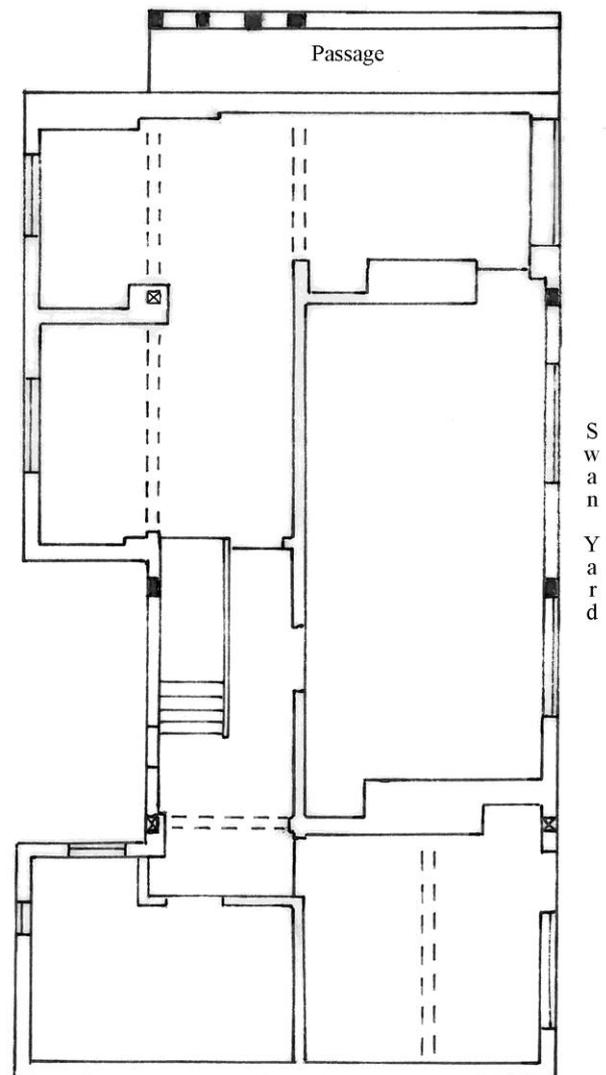
## 33 East Street

Located in Swan Yard, half way between East Street and Church Street, this is a rectangular building measuring about 52ft by 20ft, aligned north-south. Now one house, the building was once several cottages according to sale particulars of 1968. An old photograph shows it with a roughly central door, and workshop or stable doors in the end bays. There have been further alterations to convert it to a single residence, and much of the frame is now concealed.

### The timber frame

The house is of four bays, the two southern ones of 11ft, and the two northern ones of about 14ft. The timber frame incorporates reused timber, and the roof is of clasped purlin type. The two middle bays are built of substantial medieval timbers, which give the impression of being parts of a building, or several buildings, re-erected. The two posts of the central truss are a matching pair, but the tie-beam here seems not to be original to them. The posts of the other two trusses are now largely concealed. All the tie-beams are from closed trusses. Nicks for laths for wattle and daub infill in the horizontal mid rail in the east (or front) wall show that this timber was once a vertical post. The top plate on the west side has an edge-halved scarf joint 1 foot long, and a shutter groove for a window in its soffit. The groove by the scarf joint is short, lacks corresponding evidence for window mullions, and looks interrupted by the scarf joint, suggesting that the top plate is made of two reused timbers joined together. There are mortices for diamond mullions for a window in the soffit on the top plate on the east side.

The truss that forms the north wall of the post has a storey post about 6ft from the north-west corner. This is curious, making little sense in terms of conventional framing, though cut outs as if a for dovetail joints in the top plate above the post raise the possibility that there might have been a longitudinal tie across the bay at this point. At the north-west corner, in the first floor bedroom, the tie-beam and top plate are butt jointed, in contrast to the usual arrangement where the tie-beam overlies the top plates and is jointed to them with dovetails. The top plate in this bay on the west side is of soft wood. At the north-east corner, the top plate overlaps the tie-beam, again in an unconventional way, suggestive of arrangement above the storey post in the north wall where it looks as if a beam has been removed. Whereas the visible rafters in the middle two bays are typically medieval, substantial and of wide section (6-7 inches), in this end bay they are narrower (3-4 inches). The joists of the first floor in this bay, and where visible in the bay to the south, are narrow section and of soft wood.

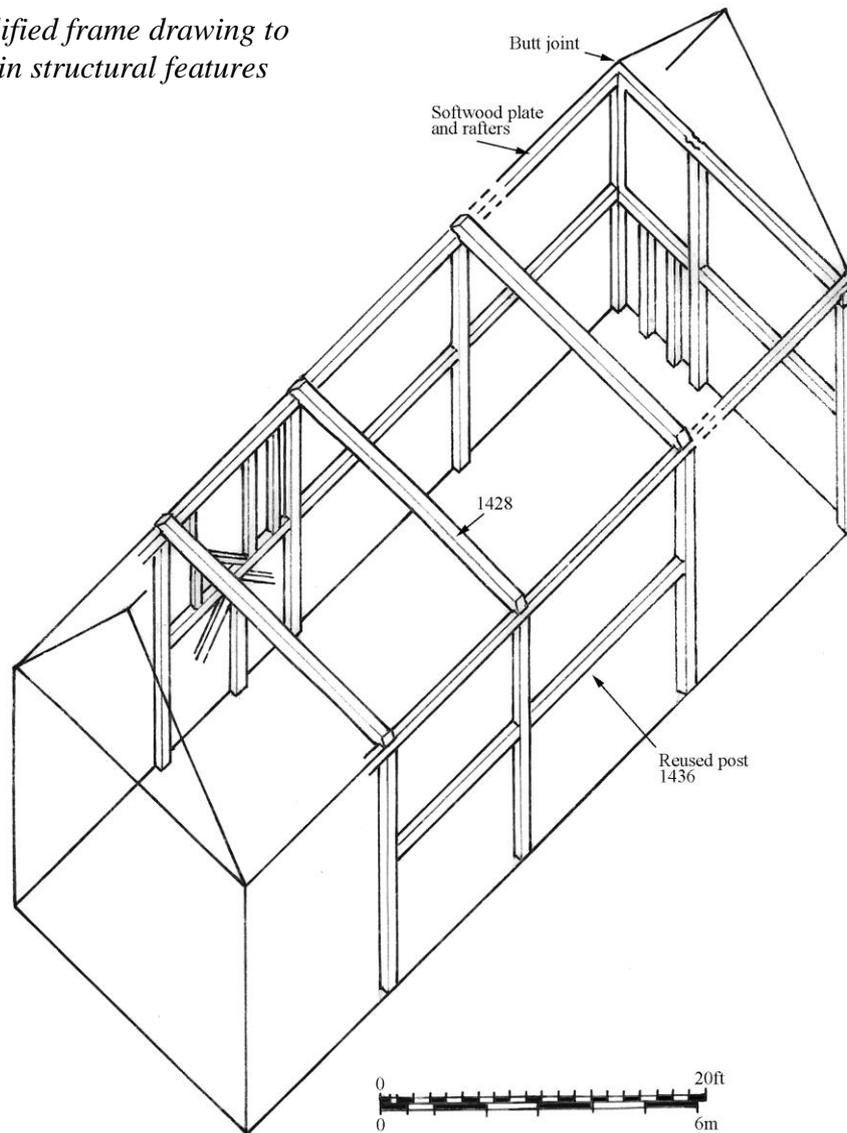


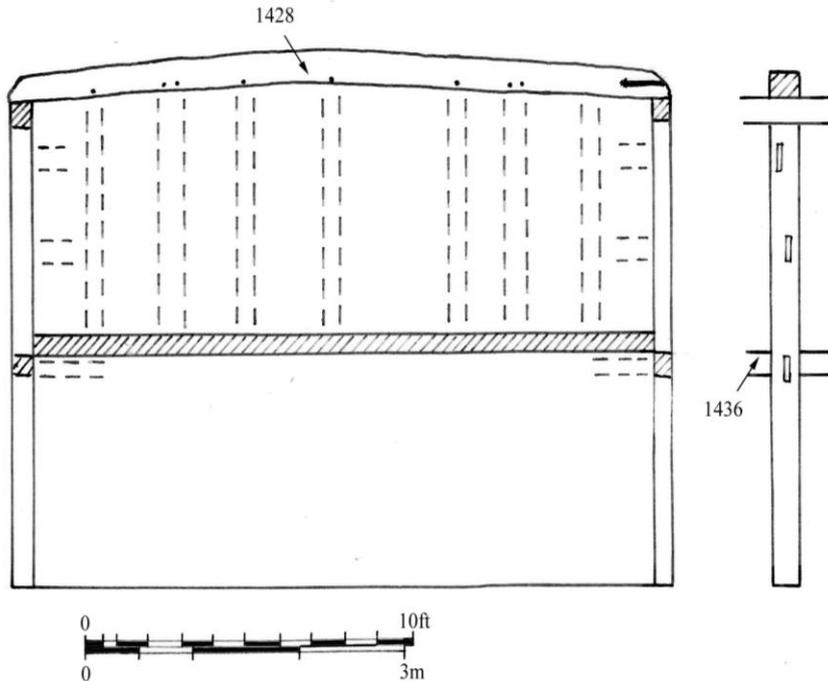
*Ground floor plan after a survey by Ann Smith*

In the southernmost bay, the timber frame is concealed except in the attic, where the clasped purlin roof, unlike the rest of the roof, has a ridge piece.

Most of the attic space is now a bedroom, but at the north end, a repair to the roof is recorded by a chalked inscription: A COOK J HILLS A MATTHAMS CARPENTERS 1907. This work probably involved the insertion of extra collars to reinforce the purlins and nailed on windbraces.

*Simplified frame drawing to explain structural features*





*Central truss, with side view of eastern post, made of reused timbers, showing empty mortises reconstructed. The timbers in the posts may have been braces, but the original angle is unclear.*

### **Tree-ring dating**

Four cores were taken for tree-ring dating. Two, from the central tie-beam and from the mid rail in the front wall (which as has been seen was a reused post), were complete to bark edge, giving dates of 1428/9 and 1431/2 respectively. This is consistent with the pattern of reused timber evident in the building, suggesting its components came from at least two buildings.

### **Discussion**

The two central bays of this house came from two or more 15th-century buildings. The northern and southern bays are different. Although there is reused timber, it is different in character and softwood is also present. There are late carpentry features in these two bays, such as the ridge piece in the southern one, something which normally occurs from the end of the 18th century in Essex, and the butt joint of the top plates in the north bay, again usually datable to the 18th century or later. Contemporary with these bays, or approximately so, are the two chimney stacks, the brickwork of which is late 18th or early 19th century. The house may therefore have been built of two bays (or more) of reused timber in the 17th or 18th century, and functioned probably an outbuilding in view of its backland location. The end bays were built later, presumably as extensions, in the late 18th or early 19th century, and with the chimneys converted the building into a row of cottages. Alternatively it may have been built from the first as a row of cottages, incorporating a mixture of old and new timbers, making use of which gave rise to inconsistent carpentry features. It should be noted that throughout the building the joints at the tie-beams and top plates

are strapped, a practice which became normal from the later 18th century, though such straps are often later reinforcements.



*33 East Street, looking north up Swan Lane*

The 1575 rental shows Church Street properties having long boundaries to the south, whilst those on East Street north only had small plots, suggesting that the building was associated with 20 Church Street, known as Herrings, which belonged at that time to Ellen Scarlett. Access seems also originally to have been from Church Street, as old maps show there to have been none from East Street before the Swan was demolished. It is interesting that a tree-ring date of 1428 was also obtained for floor joists in 18 Church Street, but this may be no more than coincidence. The property was formerly part of a group of buildings which belonged to Browning Butchers who had premises in Church Street.