

66 Westgate Street is a timber framed building on the north side of Westgate Street close to the Cathedral. It stands just inside the west gate to the city on one of the principal thoroughfares into the centre of medieval Gloucester. Occupation of such an important site would indicate that its builder had considerable means and the quality of its construction is indeed proof that this was a building of high status.

This 3-storey timber-frame building with cellar, dates from about 1450, as confirmed by dendrochronological dating on the timber frame. The upper floor is from about 1600, built as an alteration or heightening of the building, which is Grade II listed.

Originally built as a merchant's house, it later became two shops and a dwelling. Further alterations were carried out in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The entire structure above ground level is timber-framed, with some original wattle-and-daub panels. The chimney stacks are in brick.

The ground floor frontage is an early example of large plate-glass windows, made possible by the technology gained in building the Crystal Palace for the 1851 Exhibition. These are set in slender iron framing. The windows on the first floor were inserted in the eighteenth century.

Structure

It is built on a tapering site, slightly angled to the street frontage, suggesting that the plot boundaries were already established by the time this building was constructed. It is three stories in height, jettied on both the first and attic floors, and is two bays wide by two bays deep, with gable ends to the front and rear elevations. The ground floor frontage may have been brought forward in the 19th century to almost fill the lower jetty. There are cellars beneath each of the two front bays.

The framing pattern is particularly noteworthy for the huge sections and lengths of oak used in its construction. It consists of four immense posts each nearly 8 metres long by 300mm square, which rise through the entire height of the building on the outer of the wall frames. These posts are connected at the first and second floors by the intermediate floor beams and girding beams, and at the wall plate by tie beams. The longitudinal wall bracing is provided by wide relatively straight braces which descend from the uppermost point of the rear wall down through each floor to ground level in Bay 1. The internal bracing is provided by means of knee braces rising up from the outer posts to the cross beams. There are additional braces on the south wall which descend down from the posts to the cross beams, probably to provide additional bracing on the south wall which was not propped by any adjoining structure. (It is difficult to see how it would have been possible to construct a frame of this size had it been constrained by buildings on both sides)

The front wall frame was an easier piece of construction since it would have been built up in stages off each jettied floor. At ground level, there is evidence of two entrances from the street, one per bay.

The building was rescued by the City Council and renovated in 2003-9. The timber framing on the frontage was rendered to replicate stone quoins, said (perhaps rather tenuously) to have been the fashion in the 15th century. The gables now bear the dates 1450 and 2003.

The Cellars

The cellar shows a coursed sandstone rubble wall to the west, presumably original, whilst the remaining walls are in later brick, starting with a large patch of Tudor brickwork on the east wall. There are two staircases, the western one blocked off by a modern floor, and the dividing wall has been breached in its front part to unite the cellars. The brick patching to this suggests 20th century work, with even more recent concrete blockwork and brickwork on the street wall, which probably infill coal chutes from the pavement, if not even separate coal

cellars under the pavement. The cellars appear visually to extend just about to the front of the present ground floor, so not extending under the pavement. (This should be confirmed by measurement.)

The west half contains a very large brick-built bread oven with stone flagged baking floor (about 6 x 10 ft internally), suggesting this shop was a substantial bakery. Such a large oven in so confined a space must have led to unpleasant, if not Dantean, working conditions, even with ventilation from the coal chute.

The cellar is not normally open to the public, but the ground floor is open as Hedley's restaurant.

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