

# HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY, 37/39 LONG ACRE

## (The Old Post office)

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Number 39 Long Acre is believed to have been occupied by John Needham (born in 1646) whose inventory of 1694 survives. It is also likely that the house was built by Needham; this point and the information within the inventory are discussed further later in this report. The hearth tax returns of 1674 record John Needham (probably his father) as having two hearths, consistent with the assumption that he occupied the earlier no. 37 at that time. BHTA has produced an associated paper on the occupation history of the Old Post Office. A plan showing the main phasing of building is available via the summary; it can be kept open while you view this page.

The earliest graphical representation of the house is on the tithe map of 1840 where its full L-shape T shape with no 37) plan can be seen, together with another possibly adjoining farm range at the far north-west corner, since lost. These may have been replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the present (now converted) outbuildings in the North West corner of the “post office yard”.

The old photographs (below) show no. 39 Long Acre around the time of 1900 and at this time the adjacent property of no. 37 was a public house known as *The Vaults Inn*, or the *Vaults Hotel*. Although early census returns for Bingham fail to give house numbers it is possible that in the returns for 1891 Henry Johnson was resident at no. 39, when it and no. 37 were probably connected and tenanted as one property. Johnson is listed as a wine and spirit merchant on Long Acre West and in Wright’s Directory for 1894-95 he is listed as landlord of *The Vaults*. In the 1901 census a certain Samuel E. Coleman was in charge of the *Vaults Inn* and Hotel, with its address then given as Market Street. The Vaults as a name is clearly derived from the cellar beneath the east part of no. 37.

In more recent times the west part of no. 37 has been the town’s post office reception area and Room 3 of no. 39 has been used as a post office sorting office. The frontage of both parts predates this use and dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

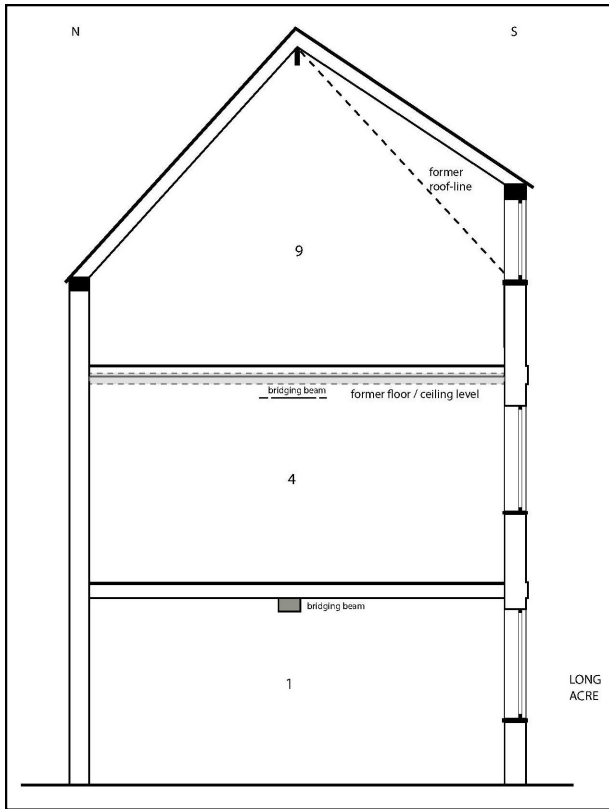
Room 3 then had an independent street entrance which may have been to an off-licence or the boarding house / hotel reception; it has since been blocked-up and hidden from view. The ground floor is now a modern retail unit (left, bottom) and has reinstated the doorway.



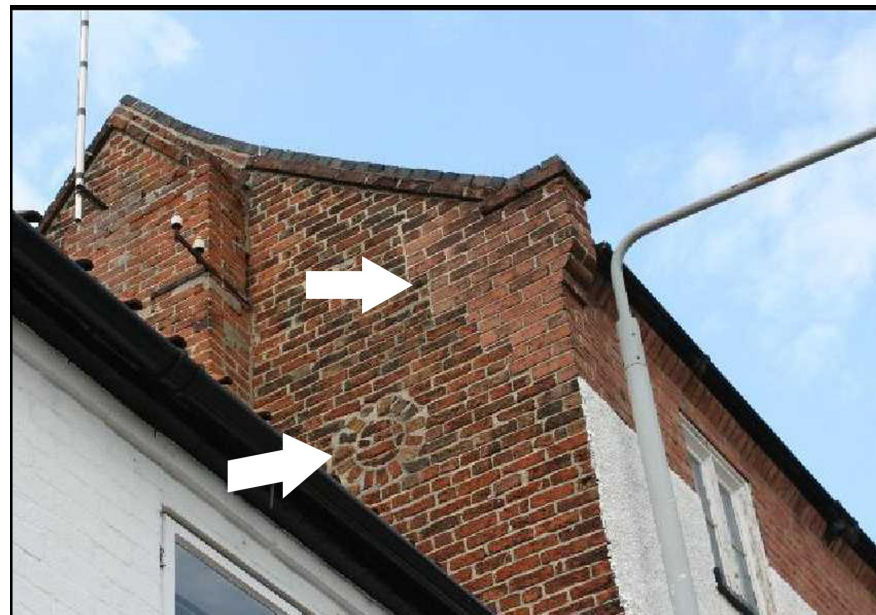
### BUILDING DESCRIPTION – EXTERIOR

Number 39 Long Acre is positioned on the north side of the long standing main east-west thoroughfare through Bingham, at the junction with the road leading to the town’s market place. The building is two storeys high with a high attic/garret level, since raised on the south side facing Long Acre to present the appearance of a third storey (See vertical section below). The building is brick-built with some stone dressings, but no stonework evident at foundation level. The two sides facing Long Acre and Market Street are heavily rendered, although not to full height (below, right). Earlier views (above left) of the building show it before the render was added. These street-facing sides also have two slightly projecting





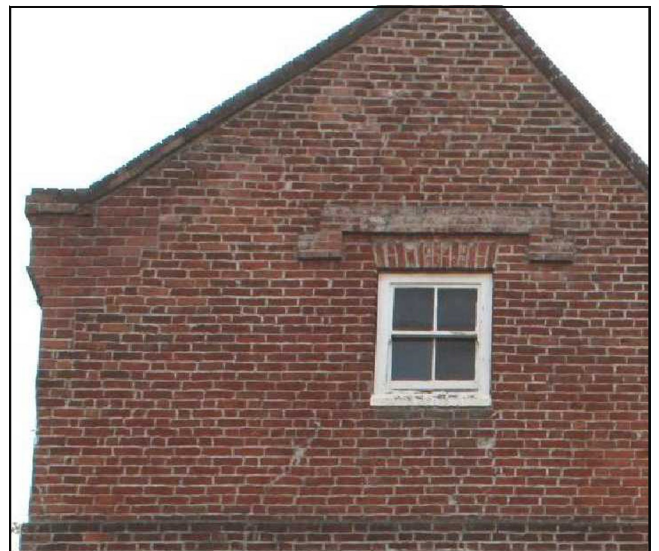
string courses, the lower one cut back where windows have been replaced and heightened. The main part of the building running along Long Acre is about 6m x 14m in size, five bays long and is slightly irregular in shape, reflecting the angle of Market Street and the former boundary with the neighbouring property, no. 37. To the rear there is a lower 2-bay long extension about 4.5m x 7.5m in size.



The main part of the building has a modern pantile roof with replacement roof joists below, and a near central stack. The gable ends are raised with kneelers (arrowed, left) at three corners; only that in the north-west corner is original. The west end has an added external chimney stack and, showing above the roofline of the adjacent property, a circular porthole window towards the road (arrowed, left) and a later square window to the rear in a similar position. The porthole window is infilled and the surround bricks are not particularly neatly set in position. The porthole may have lit an early stair to the attic.

The east end has a garret window with a so-called Artisan Mannerist-style slightly projecting band above the brick lintel, made to appear like a drip course. Whether intentional or not, brickwork in this gable end gives the appearance of diagonal banding (right).

Generally, where exposed, the original brickwork is laid in an erratic Flemish garden bond. The raising of the angle of the roofline on the south side of the building in the 19th century shows clearly in both gable ends.





On the north side (left) there is a smaller and lower extension, its apex meeting the base of the main part's roof. This has a steeply pitched pantile roof, dentilation course at the eaves, a central stack and an added dormer window capped with plain tiles. East of the extension there is a side corridor (below), brick built with a timber superstructure and an angled Welsh slate roof; it runs from a rear entrance in no. 39 to the yard behind no. 37, and curves at a corner angle. To the east of this,



what remains showing of the rear elevation of the main part of the building, between the extension and the adjacent building on Market Street, is largely hidden by a narrow staircase turret, lit from the north side at two levels. Just beyond the top right corner of this an infilled former opening can be seen in the back wall,

which may be where a former dormer window provided light to an inner attic room. (arrowed, above, right)

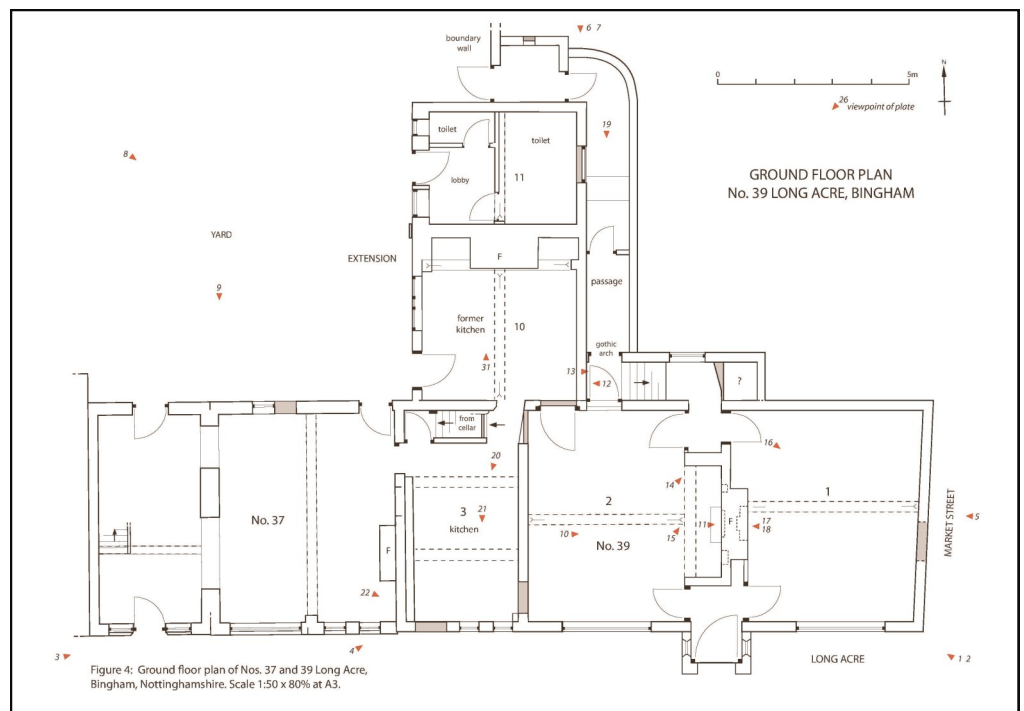


The adjacent property, no. 37 is two storeys high with a lower roofline than its neighbour (left). On the rear elevation a straight joint shows between the two buildings at first floor level but lower down the brickwork of no. 37 has been altered and is coursed into that of the north extension to no. 39, indicating perhaps a common ownership at that time.

## BUILDING DESCRIPTION - INTERIOR

### Ground floor

The east-west part of the building has three rooms of differing widths at each of its three floor levels, whilst the north extension has two rooms on two levels – these are numbered 1-13 on the accompanying plans. There is also the projecting stair-turret, the side corridor and a 19th century porch onto Long Acre, and a single cellar (Room 14) under the west end room. The rooms are described in sequence:



## Room 1:



A large room with a cross-beam and wooden floorboards (left). Heated by fireplace with a surround in early 18th century style with 'keystone,' and a grate with classical motif (right). The east wall has an infilled former doorway (arrowed, left), revealed when plasterwork was removed. The rough edging suggests it is not an original opening but has been added (perhaps to allow the room to be used as a shop), and then subsequently blocked-up. This infill can be seen on the old view (arrowed, right) [which also



hints at a former window towards the north-east corner of the room where a timber(?) sill was noted under the plasterwork. [T Kirk (bottom of the painted sign) was the landlord in 1904 and 1908 directories].

From Room 1 there is a lobby to either side of the central stack, the left one with the main entry open to an added porch, the right one open to a storage space under the stairs in the stair turret, lit by a single window. A space to the right is blocked-off.

## Room 2:



The room is dominated by a large inglenook-style fireplace, (left) with bressumer beam 11 feet (3.34m) long with a hollow and double ogee moulding (right). Exposed brickwork above the left side and the downwards return on the right indicate that the bressumer may be a later insertion. The fireplace had a 'laughing lion' fireback (right)

with date of 1644, but brickwork to right has been cut back to accommodate it and it is more than likely not original to the fireplace; firebacks with this design were not uncommon in the 17th century and this one may be one of the many 20<sup>th</sup> century copies. Two small recesses in back wall for cupboards and added tiles to support corner lights.

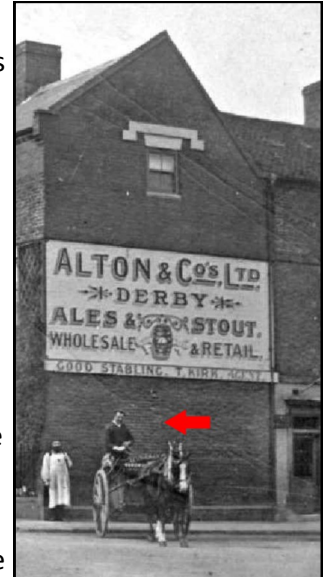


The room is crossed by beam with heavy chamfer and chamfer stops (left). The west wall has a bricked-up former opening into Room 3 by the north-west corner and a later opening near south-west corner is also now blocked-off. A low three-plank door standing next to this opening looks early.

The fireplace has provided an ideal vehicle for displaying the of products sold by the new tenants (right) .

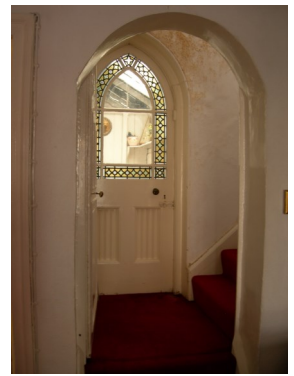


There is a modern replacement window in the south wall and two entries in the north, one formerly into the north extension, the other has a three step raise to the stair turret and corridor. Although the latter entry has a rounded head, the door here is an early 18th century style panelled door with an unusual triangular head and side projections (left). The head was made to look similar to a pediment above a doorcase . The back of the door has an 18th century style heavy latch (right).





At ground floor level beyond the staircase, an added doorway with a gothic arch and door (right) opened into the corridor which runs alongside the north extension, dropping down three steps close to a blocked side entry into the extension (arrowed, left). Unfortunately neither door could be retained after the re-development.



The corridor curves round, its outer wall then abutting an earlier small space, with doorways in both side walls and a small blocked window in the north wall. The west doorway leads into the yard behind no. 37. In a sale bill the corridor was rather grandly described as an orangery! During the recent works a sizable soft water cistern capped by a large flagstone was revealed in the floor of the corridor.

Within the stair turret a straight flight of stairs with twister at the top rises to the first floor. During the redevelopment works, a blocked doorway through to number 2 Market Street was identified at the top of the straight flight, suggesting that at some time the two buildings did indeed operate as one.

### Room 3:

At the time of the survey, this, the narrowest room, was a kitchen area for the adjacent property. Its west wall had been thickened, the two longitudinal cross-beams boxed-in and narrow windows in the south wall appear to have been added; it is now impossible to see how this end was originally lit. A doorway in the west wall from no. 37 may have been moved from a position just south of this where there appears to be a cupboard. Another narrow doorway leads into the north extension. To the side of this there is the base of a staircase to the first floor and opposite, the blocked entry into Room 2.

### Room 14:

Beneath the staircase another flight descends into a single cellar immediately below Room 3). This is an open space with no thralls and a flat ceiling, unlike the cellar under no. 37 which is barrel-vaulted with side partition walls. A break through the side wall gives access into the neighbouring cellar, the connection suggesting that the latter is later and was built with an arched side for access to Room 14 (arrowed, right).



### North extension Room 10:



Probably a former kitchen. Prior to the survey the fireplace had been blocked up (left). The three plank door gave access to the rest of the extension. That entry has been recovered since renovation but unfortunately without the plank door. The fire place with side recesses, was (is) overridden by long chamfered beam running the full length of the room. The doorway from Room 3 is narrow and is clearly cut through the existing wall when the extension was added. Both the bressumer over the fireplace and the longitudinal ceiling beam have heavy beams chamfers. Before the recent renovation as a cottage, this room was used a commercial kitchen (bottom left).



**Room 11:** This room has been modernised and converted into three spaces by partitions – a lobby, a small toilet cubicle and a larger toilet for the disabled. Originally with doorways on either side, that on the east side is no longer usable.

The rooms have now been returned to domestic use within the “Postman’s Cottage”.



## First floor



Evidence in a side wall of the ceiling level of Room 4 having been raised.

**Room 4:**

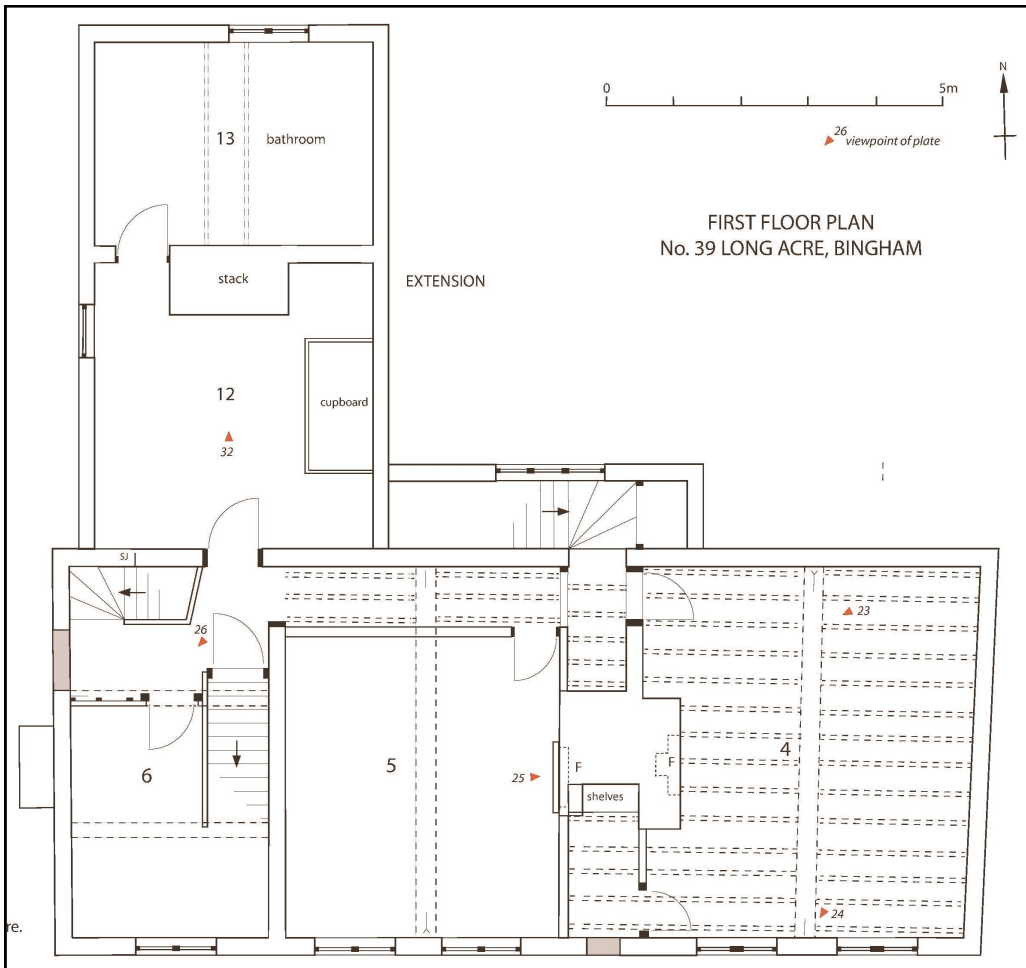
This room, the largest of the bedrooms on the first floor, has a bridging beam and joists exposed (right), with indications in the walling that the ceiling has been raised by about 4 inches (100mm; photo below). This probably coincided with the installation of replacement and taller windows. The room was heated by a fireplace in the central stack with a Georgian surround and what was probably an early 19th century grate. An entry in a partition wall to the left gives access to a store room with shelves to one side and a blocked former window the other. The door to the right leads into a back corridor.

**Room 5:**

Smaller bedroom, well lit by two replacement windows and a fireplace with a nice Georgian grate but a 19th century or later surround (Plate 25).

**Room 6 and corridor:**

Small unheated room with restricted space due to including the present staircase to the attics. This end of the first floor has been much altered to accommodate the latter staircase, a back stair from the ground floor and a former through-entry into no. 37 (through which a large beam from no. 37 was transferred to be left in the corridor). A short partition wall with three studs underlies a cross-beam which somewhat curiously was dated to 1330 by the dendrochronology (below).



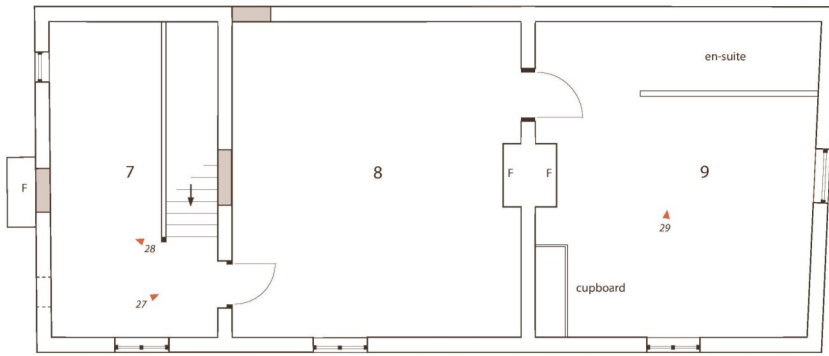
**Rooms 12, 13:**

Two unheated rooms in the north extension, with the stack standing in the middle (below). The first room was used as a bedroom and the back room as a bathroom. These are now domestic rooms for “Postman’s Cottage”. The wall between Room 12 and the main part of the building has a straight joint showing on the south side, suggestive of marking the west edge of a former window which would have been well placed to light the end of the corridor.



**Attic / garret Room 7:**

This small attic room is reached by a straight flight of steps off the back corridor. The flight crosses a former central doorway into Room 8, now blocked-up (arrowed, left), proving that its position is not original. The west wall of the room has a blocked up fireplace which is also not original, as the stack on the far side of the wall is a later addition serving rooms in the neighbouring property, no. 37 (above,



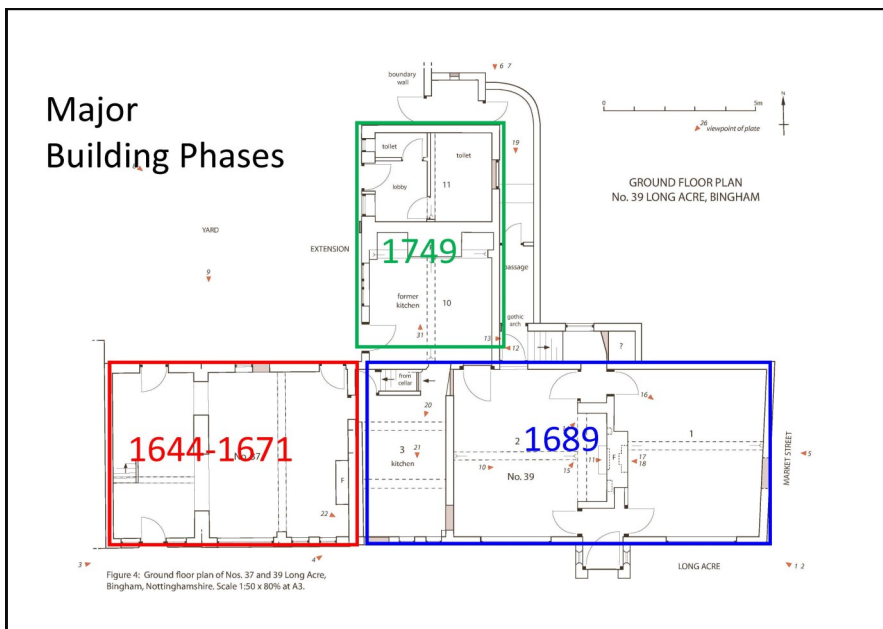
above, right). This wall has an added small window towards the north-west corner and a timber plate (arrowed) indicates where the circular opening shows on the outside wall, as previously mentioned. The position of this opening and its exclusivity suggests to the author that it may have been positioned to light a corner stairwell. Unlike Room 9, this end room lacks evidence for having had a centrally placed garret window.

### Room 8:

This space and Room 9 are of near equal size and were capable of being heated by the near-central stack, although blocked-up fireplaces are not obvious. Both rooms benefited by the raising of the south wall in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to this the attics may have been open to the roof, and with a lower floor level may have provided extensive storage space. Room 8 now has a non-central window in the south wall and indications of a blocked low window in the north wall.

### Room 9:

The last garret room was lit by an end window. The space now includes a wooden barrier with a high window, which is best interpreted as being a private en-suite unit (although without an obvious water supply) (right).



## INTERPRETATION

The outward appearance and the three-cell plan of the main part of no. 39 Long Acre point to a building dating from the second half of the 17th century. The plan of three rooms or cells, two with back-to-back fireplaces, went on being used in a rural context up to c.1730 (Brunskill 1997). The presence of external Artisan Mannerist details and the use of bricks 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ -2 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (60-63mm) thick and on average c.9 $\frac{1}{4}$  ins (235mm) long, would in themselves probably

place the building in a date range of between 1675-1725. Results obtained from the dendrochronological sampling include four timbers in Room 4 with a felling date of 1689 and a likely construction of the building in that year or not long after matches the general structural evidence.

Two other buildings in Bingham, at no. 21 and nos. 61-63 Long Acre, previously surveyed by the author, have a similar three cell plan. Number 21, probably of mid-late 17<sup>th</sup> century date, is c.12.5m x 4.25m in overall size, and with rooms 3.65m (12 feet) wide and of varying length, and an overall height of 7m. Number 61-63, is c.13.5m x 4.8m in size, with all three rooms 4.4m (14 feet) across and about 4m (13 feet) long; the height is 6.7m. This building has been dated to 1617 by dendrochronology. Number 39 is a bigger building than either of these at 14m x 6m in overall size and a height of c.10m. The rooms are 5.5m (18 feet) wide, with two 5m long and one 2.9m

long. Whilst the plan may stay generally similar and the overall length of these buildings not vary greatly, no. 39 stands out from the other two as being a noticeably wider and taller building. It is also unusual in having had a side entrance onto Market Street but this is almost certainly not original.

The interior of no. 39 is somewhat confusing as there are a number of fixtures and fittings that may date from as early as 1644 up to the 19th century, and none of which can be positively identified as original to the building. The fireplaces have surrounds and grates of varying 18th century dates. This suggests that the building was only basically fitted up on completion and that finer fixtures were added later, perhaps from about 1720 onwards. Since then certain items appeared to have been moved into new positions.

The building lacks an original staircase, a detail that is common to many of the older buildings in Bingham. Whilst structural timberwork is commonly on show in ceilings with bridging beams chamfered (with decorative ends), there appears to be a general lack of decorative woodwork of 17th century date in the town. In the case of no. 39 the building has three flights of steps between the floors, all in different places, and another to the cellar under Room 3. None of these appear to be of any great age. A flight situated in the north-west corner may be seen as the back stairs, whilst another flight (also with a twister at the top) within a stair-turret projecting out at the back of the building is the main stair. However, the projection is difficult to date as access to its exterior was not possible at the time of the survey and its juxtaposition to the building's back wall could not be seen. Whilst it may be a later addition or a rebuild, back projections to late 17<sup>th</sup> century houses such as this were not uncommon (Barley 1987, 213). Nevertheless, the north-west corner may still be the original position for a back-stair, allowing servants to reach a designated upper chamber or the garret level without disturbing the other occupants. Both staircases gave access to a back corridor, a feature sometimes found in later 17th century houses.

How the garrets were originally reached is not clear as the present rise is not in the original position. [The recent redevelopment has removed this and the main staircases and added a new stairway to access the two new apartments above no. 39]. A static flight or a ladder may have been set along the inside face of the west wall, possibly lit by the circular opening in the gable wall. Whilst attics were sometimes entered through openings in the outer wall from ladders set up externally (and Room 8 has such a blocked opening in its south wall) this is unlikely as the garrets here were clearly important, being relatively tall and spacious they provided useful space for storage and extra bedrooms.

The building was eventually enlarged with the northern extension added. This provided new kitchen and service space at ground floor level, with a connection through to Room 2. The upper level provided additional storage or bedroom space. The tree-ring dating evidence from here provides a felling date of 1749. The extension is built with bricks almost indistinguishable from those in the existing building, but generally more likely to be 2½ inch (63mm) thick than 2⅜ (60mm). At its south-west corner where it adjoins the north-west corner of the existing part of the house, the brickwork is coursed into that of the adjoining no. 37. Both buildings are composed of similar brickwork, have a dentilation course and are pantiled. Number 37 probably combines two earlier properties - a 1-bay bay part to the west and a 2-bay section with a cross-beam to the east. In plan, the 2-bay part projects out slightly on the south side and on the inside it appears to lack an east wall and so abuts no. 39.

## SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENT

The evidence suggests that nos. 37 and 39, although separate builds, have been linked under a common ownership since at least the mid-18th century, and perhaps earlier. As part of the survey two timbers from no. 37 were sampled for comparative dating. A long beam moved from no. 37 to 39 when the former was renovated for its present use, failed to provide a date. Another *in situ* timber gave a felling date of somewhere between 1646-71. This fails to match the brickwork evidence and it may be suggested that the building was possibly rebuilt in the mid-18th century at the same time that the north extension was built, with some existing timbers reused. Timber reuse is common to both properties. Number 39 has an unusually early beam from c.1330 and two beams with mortices used as purlins in the roof had felling dates somewhere between 1603-28.

The inventory of John Needham, mentioned above, only makes sense if an adjoining property is included. Needham was a yeoman who typically for the time and place had most of his wealth tied up in his job, in his livestock, seed, materials and equipment. However, he also had some furniture and household objects and equipment and these are listed in the rooms of the house(s). The rooms mentioned are as follows:

*The Hall:* with fire irons and chimney hooks this was probably Room 2, and clearly a room used for cooking

*New parlour:* most likely Room 1



*Best chamber:* most likely Room 4

*Chamber of the Hall:* most likely Room 5

*New kitchen and booting room:* most likely Room 3, perhaps with external buttery

*Cellar:* that beneath Room 3

*Kitchen chamber:* most likely Room 6

The inventory also mentions the *Old parlour*, the *Old kitchen* and the *Store chamber*. It is quite possible that before being rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century no. 37 was a 2 unit building with a central stack heating a kitchen to one side and a parlour the other. The *Store chamber* may have been above the so-called *Old parlour*, or refer to the full garret space of no. 39.



Whilst the adjoining property on Market Street is an alternative possibility (it is almost certainly older than no. 39) there are no connecting doorways between the two properties that are evident, as with no. 37. However, during the redevelopment a connection was discovered (see above **Room 2**) and the dividing wall (left) between the two properties at loft level was wattle and daub rather than brick with a possible doorway through (the “new” pinker plaster arrowed in red), suggesting that the two may have been under the same ownership when number 2 was built, perhaps actually later.

The first John Needham died in 1683, according to the parish register, and was probably the one noted in the hearth tax and we suppose lived at number 37. His son, another John, was born in 1646 and married Sarah Derry in either Bingham or Newark in 1681; they had several children including William (christened 1683), Mary (christened 1688) and John (christened August 1694); the last child was clearly born just prior to his father’s early death. If indeed John Needham had died so soon after building no. 39 Long Acre then this could explain the lack of contemporary fireplaces in the rooms apart from the hall, fittings that were to be added later, perhaps after the house was sold on.

The rebuilding of no. 37 Long Acre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century included the digging out for a new barrel-vaulted cellar that appears to have fitted the footprint of the east two bays of the property and probably resulted in the name of *The Vaults*. It is likely that use as a public house followed and possibly dictated this rebuild. The north extension of no. 39 included a kitchen, with access both into the existing hall (Room 2) and with a door close to the back door of no. 37, signifying a functional link. If indeed serving both properties then it allowed the full ground space of no. 37 to be used as a public room.

The addition of the north wing to no. 39 in c.1749-50 can be seen as a second phase in its development. Other changes that followed included the possible rebuild of the stair-turret and the addition of a corridor along the east side of the extension. The brickwork here is  $2\frac{5}{8}$  -  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inch (67-70mm) thick and suggests a late 18<sup>th</sup> century date for this third phase.

A fourth phase, probably in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, involved the raising of the first floor ceiling level, thereby heightening the bedrooms, and the raising of the front elevation to increase the space in the garrets (with its ceiling level possibly added and possibly the roof changed at the same time). A new staircase was added up to Room 9, its fireplace blocked up and the doorway into Room 8 moved. A row of three windows was added to the south frontage, their irregular positioning respecting the positions of the single and paired windows on the first floor level below. All the front windows were also probably changed at this time and the front porch added. The frontage to the ground floor of Room 3 was also drastically altered to include a door and two narrow windows. The side entry on to Market Street was blocked-up. Existing staircases may have been replaced as well. All this work suggests improvements connected to the building’s use as a hotel.

Some further changes occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ground floor windows onto Long Acre were replaced and heightened, and the lower string course cut back in so doing. The two properties were divided up but somewhat oddly. The outside doorway into Room 3 and entries between this room and the north extension connecting through to the rest of the old part of the building were blocked-up. The tenancy of no. 37 now included Room 3 (but

not Room 6 above it) and the lower level of the north extension, with a new entry created between these two parts and the adjacent back stairs blocked off.

The building has had a varied history, having started as a yeoman farmer's home and farmhouse, having at some point been partly used as a shop and then later as a boarding house and then hotel, then part post office and part home. In 2014 the building was completely remodelled to produce residential and retail accommodation.

here remains scope for tracing more of its documentary history. Although not listed (perhaps in part due to its partial disfigurement by having been rendered) the building is of some age and is of local historical importance.







