

LIST XXX: EARLY FABRIC IN TOWCESTER PROJECT

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The dates in this list were commissioned by Historic England, and I would like to thank Shahina Farid and Cathy Tyers for their assistance in these projects. The Towcester sites were part of the Historic England funded 'The Early Fabric in Historic Towns: Voluntary Group Projects' as a National Heritage Protection Plan project, developing from the recognition and acknowledgement of the excellent work being undertaken by local vernacular groups in the study of local architecture. Coordinated by Rebecca Lane (HE) and Brian Giggins (who has provided notes on the buildings), with thanks to Shahina Farid (HE) and Cathy Tyers (HE), the Towcester project's aim was to encourage this type of study and train more people in analysis and recording. Although many buildings were assessed as having timbers with too few rings for conventional dendrochronology, those chosen should benefit the analysis and interpretation of the development of the town. Only one building there has previously been dated (Bridge VA 42, List 237). A sapwood estimate of 11–41 rings (95% confidence limits) has been used.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

1. TOWCESTER, 21 Park Street, Old Mint House (SP 6919 4871)

(a) Rear range

Felling date range: 1575-97

(b) Front range

Felling date range: 1569-1601

(a) Collar (1/2) 1568(8); Tiebeam (1/2) 1568(18); Principal rafters (2/4) 1569(14+2NM), 1575(12). (b) Collar (1/1) 1568(8). *Site Master: 1499-1575 PSTWt5 (t = 7.3 MAGDALN7; 7.2 HUDSON; 7.1 OWSTON2).*

This property is potentially the service end of Towcester's Tudor manor house, which was a cadet manor on the Easton Neston estate of Sir Richard Empson (executed 1510), who acquired the manor of Towcester in 1505. The building is constructed with stone walls up to 0.55m wide, has a frontage of two bays and has an ornate oak door with a wicket gate that leads to a through passage. A rear addition of several phases contains only service rooms on the ground floor and bedrooms on the first floor. This rear addition abuts upon and uses the stone gable of an earlier building in the rear yard, suggesting that it replaced an earlier building, predating c. 1570. The trusses sampled have tiebeams with the principal rafters crossed at the apex and recessed to take a square-set ridge piece.

2. TOWCESTER, 12 Park Street (SP 6921 4874)

Felling date: Winter 1747/8

Principal rafters (2/2) 1727(h/s), 1743(14); Purlins (5/5) 1738(19), 1738(20), 1739(18), 1741(12+3NM), 1747(34C). *Site Master: 1635-1747 PARK12t7 (t = 7.5 WRD-B; 7.2 STOWE7; 6.9 THUBSQ01).*

In 1708 this house was sold to William Bowman, an innkeeper, passing to his daughter in 1718, and was sold to John Blaxley, a joiner, in 1739. The building has some good joinery features, notably the first-floor doors and the framed staircase which rises from the ground floor to the attic. The vase shaped balusters on the ground floor are not dissimilar to some from Surrey dated to 1745 (Hall, Linda 2005 *Period House Fixtures and*

Fittings (Newbury: Countryside Books), Fig 4.26, p. 112). This would suggest that the building was completely rebuilt, rather than just the roof being replaced circa 1747/8. The Towcester Fire which consumed 36 dwelling houses plus barns and out-offices occurred on the 25th March 1749 and did an estimated £2000 worth of damage; it broke out 190m SE of 12 Park Street. Evidence that the earlier building on the site of No. 12 may have burnt down is that it contains partially burnt limestone building stones. These occur randomly on the front wall and may be stones salvaged from an earlier building affected by the fire. It is not possible to be certain that the rebuilding was a result of the fire, but it is plausible.

3. TOWCESTER, Chantry Lane, The Vicarage (SP 6938 4867)

(a) Roof

Felling dates: Winter 1689/90, Winter 1824/5

(b) Ground floor fireplace lintel

Felling date range: 1574-79

Principal rafters (2/2) 1634, 1670(4+15NMC); Purlins (2/4) 1685(8), 1685(8+2NM≤5C); Common rafters 1689(24C), 1824(19C). (b) Fireplace lintel 1574(26+≤5C).
Site Masters: 1534-1689 TVICt6 (t = 6.5 STOKES; 6.5 BALLNGDN; 6.3 mer16); 1761-1824 tvic06 (t = 8.2 TATCSQ02; 7.4 PTSTONE1; 6.9 BAYH); 1397-1574 tvic06 (t = 6.6 TANWRTH2; 6.5 OVERTON3; 6.4 CRUCKOX1).

This house has a principal rafter and collar roof with two tiers of purlins. The Rev. Charles Palmer, who was vicar of St Lawrence, Towcester from 1685 to 1734, is credited with building the Vicarage and spending about £500 in doing so. It seems to have taken some time to complete the building as, in 1695, he requested that seven ash trees in the churchyard of St John the Baptist, Abthorpe, be felled for the building. The nineteenth-century common rafter must date a renovation. The date of the fireplace lintel is of interest; in 1547, the Vicar of St. Lawrence was to be provided with a house or manse, as a condition of the advowson being granted to the Bishop of Coventry and Litchfield (Baker G, 1822-41, *The History & Antiquities of the County of Northamptonshire*, vol 2, 325-6). The inglenook fireplace in the kitchen abuts the east gable of the building with the chimney breast on the first floor being 0.6 m wide by 0.75 m deep. It encloses a modern hearth 2.55 m. wide and 0.92 m. deep, with a coursed limestone jamb on the left hand side and on right hand side is a deep window recess set with stone jamb which appears to be original but has been altered. The oak fireplace beam is slightly cambered and has a deep chamfer with swept stops that align with both jambs.