

**KILKENNY CAS
HOUSES AT 20-22 VICAR STREET**

SUMMARY REPORT ON BUILDING INVESTIGATION

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Executive summary

This summary report has been produced in order to provide a succinct overview of the findings of the investigations into the architectural heritage of the two houses at 21 and 22 Vicar Street, Kilkenny. Work on the buildings has shown that none of the walls are medieval.

Arising from a proposal to construct the Kilkenny Central Access Scheme, which would require the demolition of these two houses, an investigation was carried out in 2008 in order to establish whether or not these houses were of medieval date. The findings at that time were that the front, rear and internal walls of the houses were of eighteenth century date or later, but that it was not possible to date the southern gable end of the houses without further investigation.

A further report was carried out on the houses in March 2013. This was mainly descriptive, its aim being to record the houses in advance of their removal as part of the construction of the proposed road. The conclusion in the report was the same as in the previous report, that the gable end wall could not be dated and that none of the other walls was earlier than the eighteenth century.

Detailed work began on site in July 2013 to remove the plaster from the interior and exterior of the two houses so as to provide more detailed information relating to their construction. A key element of this work was to find whether there was any part of the houses that was built before the year 1700. Alongside this work, more detailed historical research was carried out to seek evidence that would help to establish dates for the construction, alteration or demolition of any buildings on the site.

The more detailed examination of the houses has confirmed the earlier assessment that the front, rear and internal walls of the houses were built later than the year 1700. The examination of the gable end wall has shown that significant parts of it were built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that these were alterations to an earlier wall. It is not possible to be precise about when the earlier parts of the gable were built, but it is most likely that it was in the eighteenth century. Some cut stones were found that could be of medieval date, but it was clear that these had been reused from an earlier building, not necessarily on this site.

The historical research examined several historical accounts that claimed that number 22 Vicar Street had been a manse house belonging to a Church of Ireland official, the Prebendary of Tascoffin. The research found that these were based on a misunderstanding of the original record. The only original source to mention a manse house at this location was written in 1679 and stated that the manse house had *formerly* been on this land. The Prebendary of Tascoffin owned the sites of numbers 20, 21 and 22 Vicar Street and a large tract of land at the rear. The document written in 1679 did not say where on the land the manse had stood, but as it had been demolished prior to that time it is clear that none of the buildings now on the site are the manse house. The gable wall cannot have been part of the manse as it was the gable end wall of building on the site next door to 22 Vicar Street, which was not part of the land owned by the Prebendary of Tascoffin.

The historical research found that there were houses on the land in the 1730s. Number 21 Vicar Street was rebuilt in 1881 and number 22 in 1908 and both houses were altered again in the 1930s.

Introduction

In 2008, as part of the investigations carried out in relation to the proposed Kilkenny Central Access Scheme numbers 20, 21 and 22 Vicar Street were examined with a view to establishing whether the houses were of medieval date. It was concluded that no opinion could be offered in relation to the gable end wall, but that the rest of the buildings were no earlier than the eighteenth century, and probably later. The findings were written in a report of March 2008 and were presented to An Bord Pleanála at the oral hearing in November of that year.

In March 2013 a report was compiled as a record of the buildings, giving a detailed room-by-room survey of the three houses. This re-stated the conclusions in relation to the dating of the buildings.

In July 2013 work began to strip the plaster from the masonry walls in numbers 21 and 22 Vicar Street, both inside and out, so as to obtain a fuller understanding of the structure of the houses and their sequence of construction. This included the removal of plaster from both sides of the southern gable wall of number 22 Vicar Street, enabling the structure of the wall to be examined in detail for the first time. In parallel with this detailed examination of the buildings more detailed historical research was carried out to understand more fully the dates and circumstances of the building works on the houses. A further aim of this research was to assess the various references to a manse house belonging to the Prebendary of Tascoffin, which was said to have been the house now known as number 22 Vicar Street.

Findings of historical research

The research established that the sites of numbers 20, 21 and 22 Vicar Street, along with an extensive tract of land to the rear, had been owned by the Prebendary of Tascoffin until the mid-nineteenth century. This land did not include the site to the south of 22 Vicar Street, which is now an enclosed car park, owned by Diageo Ltd.

The research also found that there is only one primary source¹ that mentions the manse house of the Prebendary of Tascoffin. This was written in 1679 and stated clearly that the manse house “formerly stood” on the land, without saying exactly where on the land it stood. Of all the other writings that refer to this manse house, only one seems to have been based on that primary source and did not quote it in full. Later writers appear to have used this second source rather than the primary source and added their own opinions or interpretations, without supporting them with evidence, with the result that it came to be believed that number 22 Vicar Street was the manse house itself. Thus the historical record has become distorted over time and analysis of the written documents shows that the manse house has not existed, either as an occupied building or as a ruin, for more than three centuries.

There were houses on the land owned by the Prebendary of Tascoffin in the 1730s. Although exactly where these were is uncertain, they were probably on the street front, on the site of 20, 21 and 22 Vicar Street. Number 20 and 21 were rebuilt in 1881 and number 22 in 1908 and all three were altered in the 1930s. This is known from the historical record and it fits with what was found in the work on site.

¹ A primary source is a document or other source of information that is based on first-hand knowledge.

Evidence for dating buildings

It is very difficult to tell with any certainty when a rubble stone wall was built. Sometimes there may be timber built into the wall, or straw embedded in the mortar, and this may be suitable for carbon dating. Where there is cut stone the type of cutting can sometimes give an indication of the period of construction. Care is needed however, as stone, whether rubble or cut stone, was often reused and old buildings were often demolished to recover stone for building.

Brick can be a good indicator of the age of a wall or building in certain circumstances. Although brick is an ancient building material, it was not generally used in Ireland until the mid- to late sixteenth century. Brick became more common during the seventeenth century and more so in the eighteenth, though this varied from area to area, depending on the availability of good building stone or clay suitable for making brick.

Due to the reuse of building materials following the demolition of a building brick can be present amongst the rubble in a stone wall and this can indicate that the wall cannot have been built before the sixteenth century at the very earliest. Care must be taken to ensure that brick present in a wall was not introduced later, for instance when a wall was modified or repaired.

Where brick is present, whether as a building material in its own right or as a fragment making up the rubble in a wall, the nature of the brick can give an indication of its age. This, in turn, may indicate the earliest possible date for a wall. It cannot suggest a latest date for the wall, as the presence of an early brick may be a result of its being salvaged from a previous wall and reused. The dating of bricks into broad periods is as follows:

- Up to the early eighteenth century bricks were hand-made and tended to be thinner than later examples.
- From the early eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries bricks were thicker and were hand made.
- From the mid-nineteenth century some brick was machine made, though it was often still relatively soft
- From the end of the nineteenth century machine-made brick was the norm, and tended to be harder. These often had a recess in the top, known as a frog, and frequently this was stamped with the maker's name.

Where brick fragments are found as part of the rubble in a wall any fragments that show the full thickness of the brick may be used as a guide to the period of the brick and hence the earliest date for the wall.

The absence of brick from a wall is not evidence that the wall is of early date and may simply indicate that it is not possible to date the wall.

Investigations on site

Front and rear walls



Plate 1: Front of numbers 21 (left) and 22 (right)

The photograph above shows the front facade of number 22 and most of number 21 after the removal of the render from the front facade. The red brick around the windows of number 22 is typical of the early twentieth century and dates from the reconstruction in 1908. The majority of the stone in the facade is from the same period, though some at the very bottom to the left of the door is earlier – possibly as early as the eighteenth century, but not earlier. The brick around the windows in number 21 is typical of the later nineteenth century, which is consistent with the date of 1881 for this building. Both houses have areas of concrete on their facades, representing the work carried out in the 1930s.



Plate 2: Rear of number 22 (left) and part of number 21 (right)

The removal of the render from the rear of the houses showed a similar pattern of brick and stone, indicating the same dates for the reconstruction. The lowest part of the rear wall of number 22 has older masonry, probably eighteenth century.

Features at front and rear



Plate 3: Buttress at front of 22 Vicar Street

A feature similar to a buttress projects from the front of number 22, at the right-hand or southern end. The investigations showed that the front wall of number 22 is built up against the gable end wall, showing that the front wall was built later. The buttress is the end of that gable wall and is built of rubble, some of the stones of which are clearly reused as they have lime-wash on the surface, while other stones do not. There is a significant amount of brick between the stones, suggesting that this end of the gable wall dates from the eighteenth century or later.

At the back of number 22 the opposite end of the gable wall was revealed when the render was removed. This is not a projecting buttress at the rear, but the corner of a building, embedded in the wall at the end of the rear facade. There are some large stones in this corner, including some that have been dressed, one of which is clearly part of a door or window jamb from the late medieval or early modern period. It is not in its original location, however, and represents the reuse of the stone from some other building. There is a significant amount of brick between the stones of this embedded corner, indicating that it dates from the eighteenth century or later. The rear wall of the house is butted against this feature, showing that it is of later date.



Plate 4: Corner embedded at rear of house

Interior

As has been noted above, the front and rear walls of number 22 butt against the gable end wall and hence are later than it. Most of the masonry in those walls dates from 1881 and 1908, with a small bit dating from the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Investigations inside the houses has resulted in similar conclusions in relation to the internal walls. The only wall that requires more investigation is the gable end wall. There are other features, however, that were revealed by the investigations and that need to be examined. This includes some individual cut stones that were found in the walls, one small cut stone window-type opening and a brick feature that is part of a disused chimney.

Cut stone

Several stones built into the walls were found to have been cut or dressed and some of these were of late medieval or early modern date. In all cases they appear to have been salvaged from an earlier building and reused. The adjacent photo shows a stone that may be medieval and which is built into a wall that was built in 1881.



Plate 5: Chamfered stone window or door jamb in return at rear

Some cut stone found during the works is in its original location and was provided as new stone during the construction of the houses. Cut or dressed stone was common in buildings until the late nineteenth century at the corners of buildings, chimneybreasts and arches. These are frequently found at railway bridges from the 1830s to the 1890s.



Plate 6: Cut stone in the arch over the carriageway

Old chimney



Plate 7: Feature in corner of main ground floor room, 22 Vicar Street

When the render was stripped from the internal walls a feature appeared in the rear corner of the main room on the ground floor of number 22 Vicar Street. This was an area of brickwork on the face of the wall that narrowed towards the top. The brick did not run down to floor level, but stopped a little above the height of the window sill.

After consultation with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, it was decided to remove the brick to investigate the rear of the feature. The brick that was removed was a mix of types and many of the bricks were machine-made, with the maker's name stamped into the brick. This suggests that the feature was blocked up in 1908 when the house was rebuilt.

Behind the brick fill there was a channel built into the wall, sloping back into the thickness of the wall as it rose and narrowing towards the top. The rear of the feature was constructed of brick. This feature rose to the level of the ceiling, at which point it had penetrated through about half of the thickness of the wall. The top coincided with the level of the later construction in 1908. When stone was removed from the top of the feature to reveal the adjacent stonework of the end gable wall some soot blackening was seen on the stones.

This feature has been interpreted as a chimney that would have either had some form of canopy, such as the wicker canopies found in many farmhouses and cottages, or, alternatively, a corner chimneybreast. The style of the bricks suggests that this feature dated from the eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

Stone-lined opening



Plate 8: Stone-lined opening in gable wall

The removal of plaster from the walls in the large room at ground floor level revealed a cut stone in the corner of the room. The stone was in the end gable wall, but was partly hidden by the front wall of the house. When stones were removed from the front wall a stone-lined opening was revealed. This consisted of four cut stones with bevelled edges forming the sides of a rectangular opening. Square recesses in the inward-facing sides of the stones would have held bars, with two vertical bars and one horizontal. This opening appears to be a small window

The style of the stonework suggests a late medieval or early modern date and can be compared with the stone found in the rear return of number 21, shown in plate 5 above. It is also similar to a stone built in to the embedded corner at the rear of number 22, seen in plate 4. Both of those stones are from earlier buildings and have been reused. A later date cannot be ruled out and stonework similar to this can be found in the nineteenth century.

The window is an enigma. It does not penetrate through the wall, and the wall at the rear is of brick and stone. There is no sign of it on the opposite side of the wall. If it was originally intended as a recess or cupboard the holes for bars would have no purpose. In its present position it would have been concealed as soon as the front wall of number 22 Vicar Street was built and if it was a window it must have predated the construction of number 22.

One possibility is that this is just another example of dressed stones that have been reused from an earlier wall. The presence of brick at the rear, and also in the wall beneath it and to the left, suggests that this gable wall is no earlier than the late seventeenth or the eighteenth century.

It should be noted that there is a very similar stone-lined opening facing in to the adjacent yard owned by Diageo on the western side. This is also complete with holes for bars, but no bars, and also blocked up at the rear.

Kilkenny CAS, Vicar Street

Ground floor room

The southern end wall of number 22 Vicar Street can be seen in the main ground floor room and in the two rooms above it, while its southern face is seen in the adjacent yard or car park belonging to Diageo Ltd.



Plate 9: Interior of gable wall at ground floor - left



Plate 10: Interior of gable wall at ground floor - right

The interior of the gable wall at ground floor level has had three fireplaces, in addition to the one in the adjacent wall that was blocked up, and which is pictured in plate 7 above. All three are intrusions into the original wall. Those parts of the wall that have not been affected by these alterations are comprised of rubble limestone. There are fragments of brick through much of the wall, indicating that this wall is not medieval. The fragments are mostly too small to be sure what size the original bricks were and so cannot show whether the wall is seventeenth century or whether it is later. The fireplaces are discussed further below after consideration of the first floor.

First floor

The first floor is divided into two rooms by a timber partition. The section of the partition near to the gable wall was removed to allow for full examination of the masonry in the wall.



Plate 11: Gable wall, seen in smaller first floor room



Plate 12: Gable wall, seen in larger first floor room

The gable wall in the first floor rooms is built with limestone rubble. There is a small amount of brick in this wall, and as with the ground floor the fragments are too small to indicate what size they were originally. This wall has a fireplace inserted into the centre, with a brick surround. This is discussed further below. The masonry in the main part of the wall is roughly coursed in the left-hand section, over the hearth and in the left-hand room, while the masonry to the right of the fireplace is not coursed. This suggests a possible difference in dates between the two ends of the wall.

The diagram below indicates the later intrusions into this wall. The red hatched area indicate those alterations that date from the early twentieth century, while the blue hatched area may be either late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

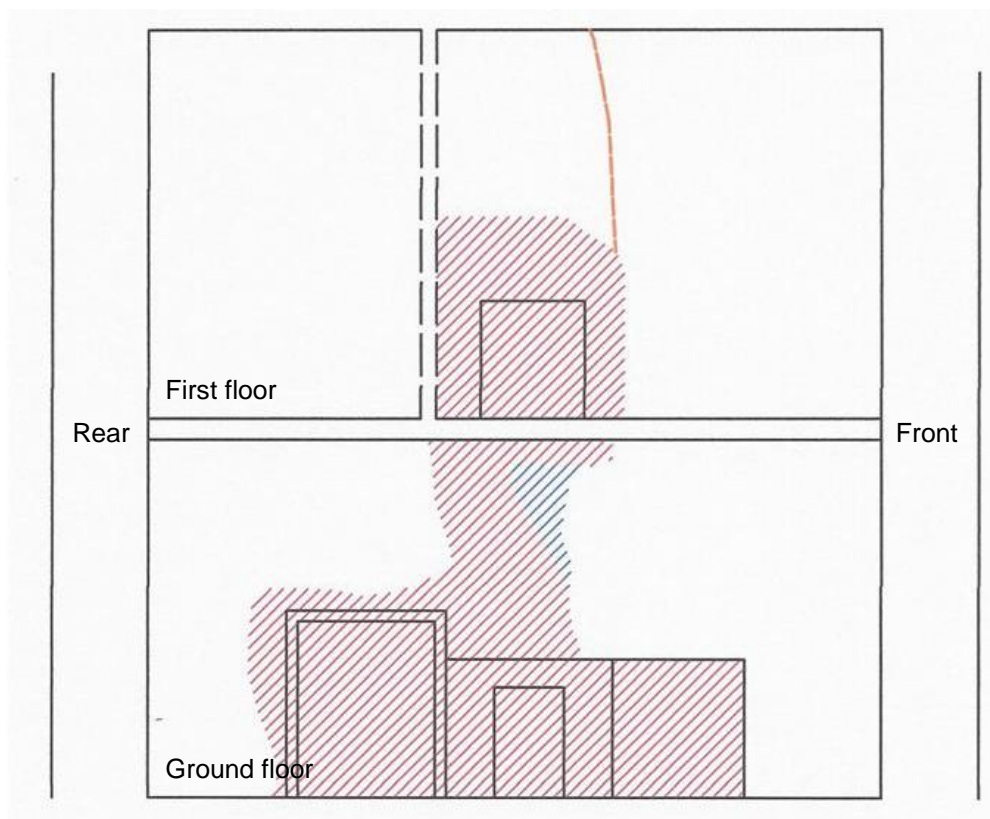


Figure 1: Internal face of gable end wall showing alterations

What appears to have occurred here is that the house that was reconstructed in 1908 had two rooms at ground floor level alongside the gable end wall. Each room was given a fireplace and the old fireplace in the rear wall was blocked up. The provision of these two fireplaces necessitated digging into the masonry of the gable wall, but the flues to serve these fires were taken out through the rear of the wall and did not involve cutting into the masonry over the chimneypiece. At first floor level there was one room and this had its own fireplace, again taking the flue out to the rear of the gable wall. When the house was altered in the 1930s the two rooms were opened up into one large room and a new hearth was provided in the centre of the wall. This necessitated opening up the wall above the hearth to tap in to an existing flue at the rear. The right-hand hearth downstairs was stopped up with mass concrete, while the left-hand hearth was boxed in and turned into a cupboard. This would explain why all of the intrusions into the wall are of twentieth century date, and it is noted that the central fireplace is surrounded by mass concrete and has bricks of a late type stretching up from it. The bricks crossing to the right of the hearth at ceiling level were inserted to support the beam that replaced the dividing wall and are seen in plate 10 above. On the upper floor the opposite occurred, with the division of the room into two, while the fireplace went out of use.

The broken orange line in the diagram shows the boundary between the coursed limestone wall, to the left, and the uncoursed wall, to the right.

As has been noted, those parts of the wall that are not of twentieth century date contain fragments of brick and hence cannot be medieval.

External face of gable wall



Plate 13: Southern face of gable wall

The southern side of the gable wall, which is the external face, forms part of the northern boundary of the yard or car park owned by Diageo Ltd. As has been noted, this wall is earlier than the present house at 22 Vicar Street and the front and back walls of the house were built up against it. The projecting buttress on the front of number 22 and the embedded corner at the rear of the house have been described above and these are strong indications that this gable wall formed part of an earlier structure that stood on the land now occupied by the Diageo yard. At the right-hand side of the photograph above the column of darker stone, edged with brick, represents a twentieth-century facing onto the rear corner of the building, which is the corner that is embedded at the rear of number 22.

There have been significant alterations to this gable wall at various times and these are picked out in colour in the diagram overleaf, showing the period during which the alterations took place.

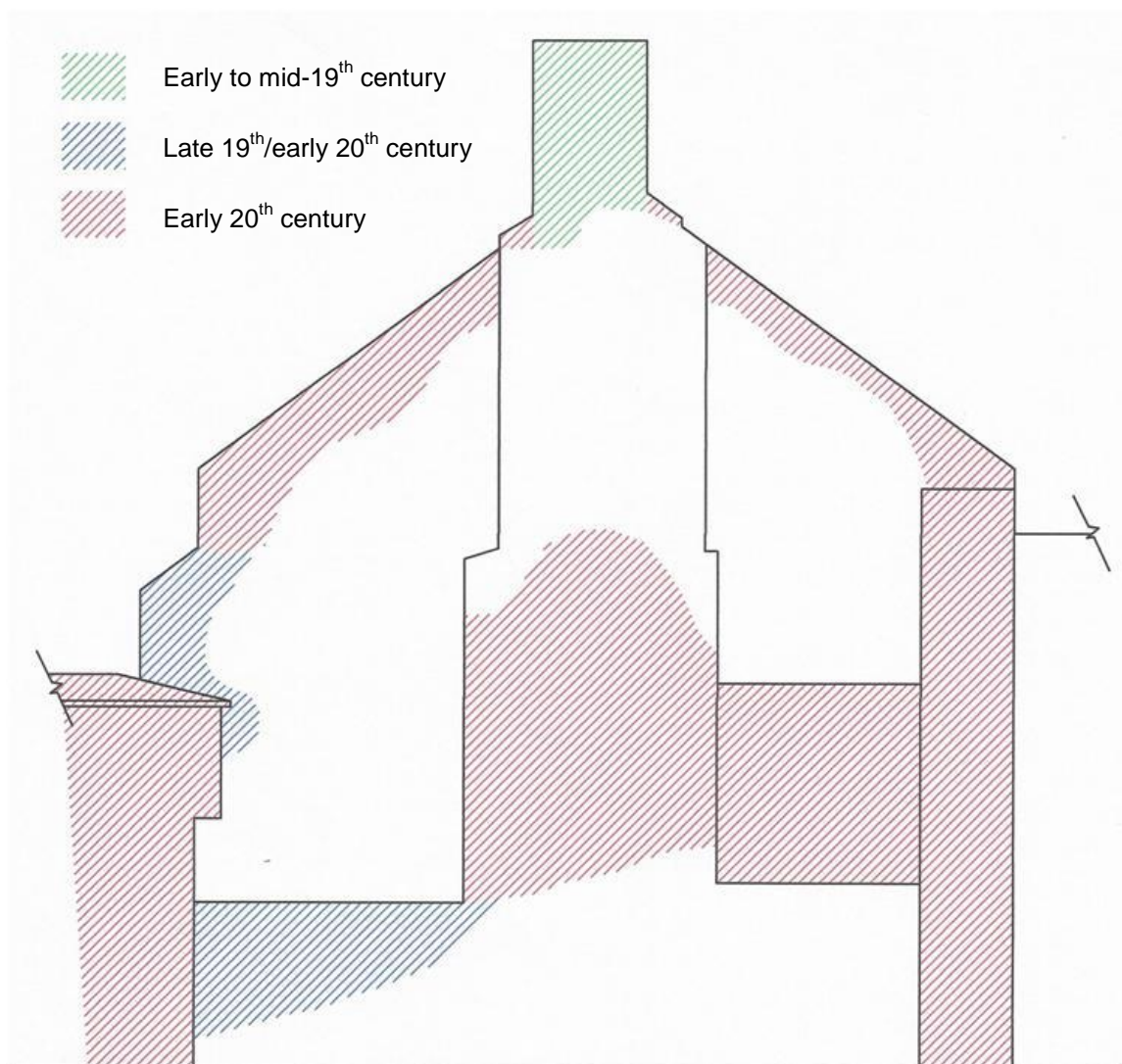


Figure 2: External face of gable wall

This diagram shows a number of separate alterations. Those that run across the top of the building, just below the roof, indicate the alterations made when the house was rebuilt in 1908. The chimney rising above this is in brown brick and seems to date from an earlier period. Along the right-hand side the corner of the previous building has been clad in brick and stone, as noted above. At the left-hand side the boundary wall abuts the gable. The three alterations at and below the mid-point of the gable represent the insertion of the fireplaces into the house in 1908 and the 1930s. This necessitated opening up the gable and adding new masonry to house the flues as they turn towards the chimneybreast in the centre of the facade.

The unknown factor in this is the original chimneybreast and chimney stack. There is no hearth on this gable wall in the house that is as early as this chimney stack, which may be as early as the late eighteenth century. It is possible that this chimney relates to the building that stood on the car park site and not to the house at all.

The stonework that is not coloured in this diagram, and which forms part of the earlier gable wall, contains some fragments of brick and hence cannot be medieval. It seems probable that this wall dates from the eighteenth century, as indicated by the significant amounts of brick, particularly in the two corners of the wall.

Conclusion

The descriptions above cover the main elements of the findings of the investigations into the two houses at 21 and 22 Vicar Street, from a historical and architectural heritage perspective. Descriptions have not been offered in relation to the remaining walls in number 22 Vicar Street nor the walls in number 21, as these are clearly of late date and their dating is not contentious.

The findings have confirmed that the front and rear walls of the two houses and their internal walls are of late date, mostly dating from 1881 and 1908 respectively, though with small remnants from the eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

Prior to these investigations there was no clear understanding of the gable wall that forms the southern end of 22 Vicar Street. This has now been shown to date in all likelihood to the eighteenth century, but with significant alterations and additions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The stone-lined opening that had been concealed behind the junction with the front wall of number 22 remains an enigma. Although the style of stonework is found in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its location behind the wall suggests that it was there from an earlier date. There is a strong possibility that it was taken from an earlier building and incorporated in this wall, in the same way that many other individual stones were built into the walls and were found here and there during the works.

Whatever the date and the circumstances under which this stone-lined opening came to be in this location, the evidence for the date of the gable wall shows that it cannot be of medieval date.