

# **Belldown, Copdock, Suffolk**

## **Heritage Asset Assessment**



**Leigh Alston MA (Oxon), Architectural Historian**

**Leigh Alston MA (Oxon), FSA  
4 Nayland Road  
Bures St Mary  
Suffolk CO8 5BX  
Tel. 07905 808322  
leighalston1@gmail.com**

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*Leigh Alston is a building archaeologist and architectural historian who for 20 years lectured on the understanding and recording of timber-framed structures in the Departments of Archaeology and Continuing Education at Cambridge University. He worked as the in-house building archaeologist for Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service for 10 years and still fulfils this role for its successor, Suffolk Archaeology CIC. He also undertakes commissions on a freelance basis for the National Trust, private clients and various county archaeological units. Leigh co-founded the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group in 1993, serving as Chairman for 13 years, and has been involved in several television programmes including 'Grand Designs' and David Dimbleby's 'How We Built Britain'. Publications include 'Late Medieval Workshops in East Anglia' in 'The Vernacular Workshop' edited by Paul Barnwell & Malcolm Airs (CBA and English Heritage, 2004) and the National Trust guidebook to Lavenham Guildhall. He has been elected to a fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries.*

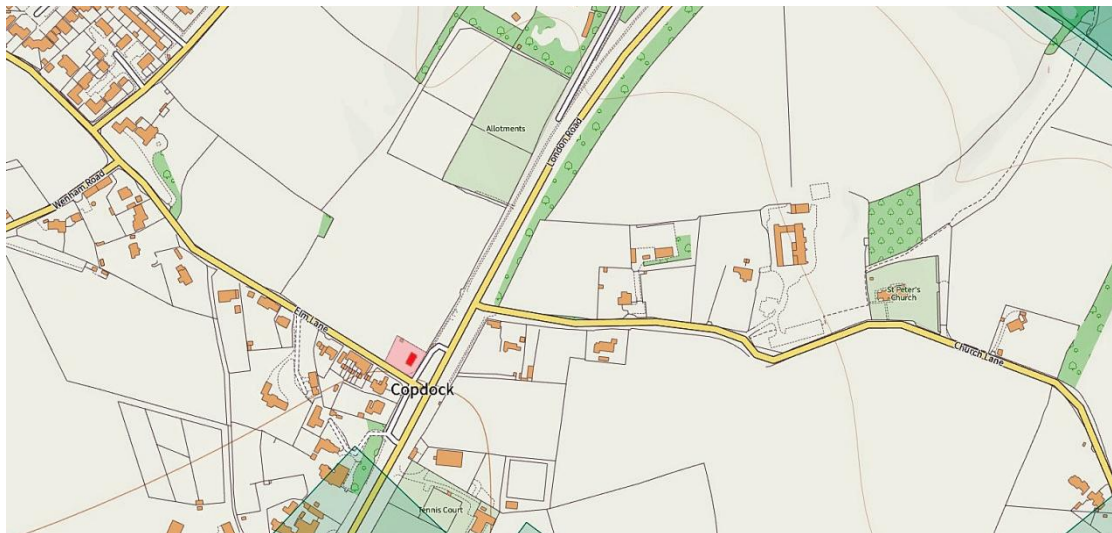
# Belldown, Old London Road, Copdock, Suffolk

## Heritage Asset Assessment

*This report provides an analysis at Historic England (2016) Level 2 of a grade II-listed building at TM 11539 41466, and is intended to inform and accompany an application for Listed Building Consent. The property was inspected on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2023.*

### Summary

Belldown is a late-18<sup>th</sup> century red-brick house that occupies a conspicuous site on the corner of the Old London Road and Elm Lane in Copdock. A major coaching inn known as the White Elm lay on the opposite corner until its demolition in the 1860s. The house was probably built as a single dwelling by John Scrivener, the last scion of a local farming family who died in 1806, and had been converted into a pair of one-up/one-down cottages by the time of the tithe survey in 1837. They were occupied by a blacksmith and a thatcher together with their two wives, no fewer than 15 young children and a lodger. The detached smithy to the south is depicted on early-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs which show the ostensibly original asymmetrical facade with two adjoining ground and first-floor sash windows to the left of the central entrance. The blacksmith also operated as Copdock's postmaster from the 1860s, and the building remained the village Post Office until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, albeit moving from one cottage to the other. The cottages had been recombined by 1988, and an extensive series of alterations in or around the 1970s included the creation of a symmetrical facade by separating the adjoining windows to match those to the right of the entrance. A probably original flat door hood was removed and concrete window lintels installed behind cement render painted in imitation of flat arches. A two-storied extension was added to the rear and a Georgian interior appears to have been recreated by importing material from elsewhere. The handsome late-Georgian facade still makes a major contribution to the historic character of the area and the property is also of local significance as Copdock's erstwhile Post Office.



**Figure 1. A location map showing the property on the corner of Elm Lane and Old London Road approximately 0.5 km west of Copdock parish church.**

## Documentary History and Map Regression



**Figure 2.** A current site plan highlighting the rectangular building in red.

Belldown was previously the Post Office in Copdock and lies in a conspicuous location facing the former main London-Ipswich road to the north of its junction with Elm Lane. The road remains a dual carriageway, but was by-passed by the present A12 in the 1980s. A major inn known as the White Elm lay to the south of Elm Lane in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as marked on Hodkinson's map of 1783 (figure 3), so the junction would have been an important landmark on the route when Belldown was built. The substantial red-brick house is listed as early- to mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, but its structure is more consistent with the end of the same century and this is consistent with its absence from the 1783 map. The inn was demolished in the 1860s and replaced by two Mock Tudor red-brick houses, with a replacement of the same name built 0.75 km to the south. Belldown appears to have been designed as a single dwelling, but by the time of the Copdock tithe survey in 1837 it had been divided into two cottages: one occupied by Robert Cooke described as a 'cottage and blacksmith's shop' and the other by John Pallant as a 'cottage and garden'. The detached blacksmith's shop to the south survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is shown in figure 8, but nothing now remains. The property was owned by Jonathan Scrivener, who appears to have belonged to a family of Copdock yeoman farmers who left wills in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He possessed nothing else in the area, and the family survived locally only as agricultural labourers. The Suffolk Poll Book for 1790 includes a John Scrivener of Copdock whose qualifying freehold lay in nearby Bentley, and it is possible he was responsible for building Belldown a decade or two before his death in 1806. The property contained just 22 perches in 1837 (i.e. one-eighth of an acre), and the additional 'garden' of 17 perches to the rear belonged to James Martin of the Elm Inn. The two cottages were more than a little crowded as the 1841 census records John Pallant as a 40-year-old thatcher living with his wife and 6 children ranging from 5 months to 12 years next door to Robert Cook, a 45-year-old blacksmith living with his wife and 9 children between 1 month and 20 years together with a 25-old lodger who worked as an agricultural labour: making a total of 20 souls in a two-up/two-down house with a rear lean-to. Both families were still there in 1861, but Robert Cook had taken on the duties of postmaster and was recorded as both a blacksmith and postmaster in White's Directory for 1874. The combination of these very different roles was common in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, with smiths' wives often running the Post Office. By 1911 the latter had moved to the right-hand cottage, with John Cook working



as a smith to the south and Peter Plumb living with his wife and 5 children at the 'Post Office' on the north. Peter was evidently a mainstay of the village as Kelly's Directory for 1912 lists him as 'assistant overseer, collector of taxes, sub-postmaster & clerk to the Parish Council'. The house was no longer the Post Office by the time of its listing in 1955 but remained subdivided, and probably acquired its present name when it became one dwelling prior to 1988.

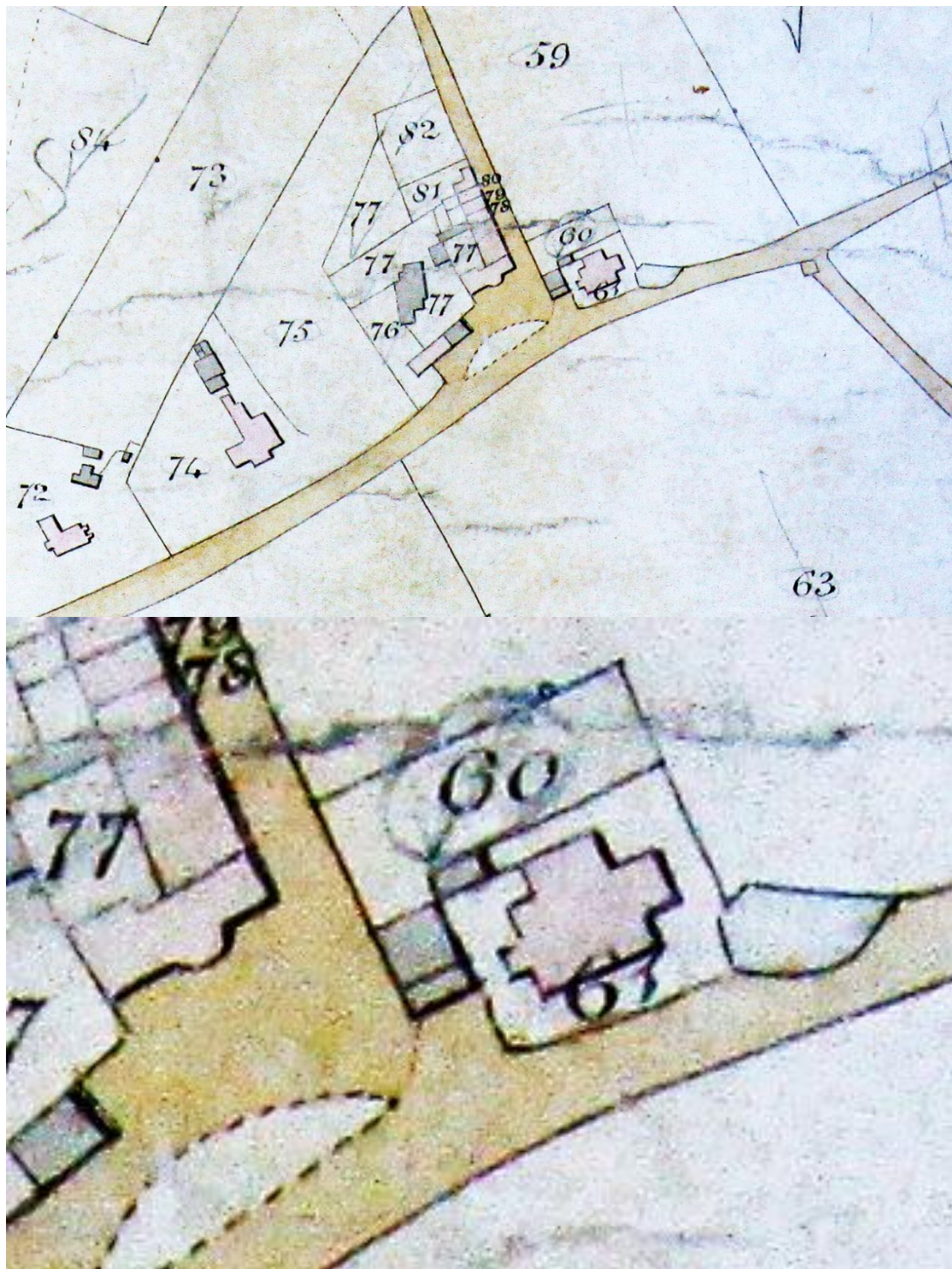


Figure 3. Hodkinson's map of Suffolk published in 1783, which marks the White Elm Inn to the south of the London road junction but shows nothing on the site of Belldown to the north. A substantial house in such a conspicuous location would normally be depicted on this generally accurate map, and its omission suggests it had yet to be built.



Figure 4. The First Edition one-inch Ordnance Survey of 1805 by Col. Mudge, showing a building to the north of the White Elm, suggesting Belldown had been built since 1783.





**Figure 5. The 1837 tithe map of Copdock parish, with a detail below. North lies towards the top right-hand corner. Belldown is shown in red at plot 61 with a pond to the right and a blacksmith's shop in grey to the left with a separate rear 'Garden' (60) owned by the White Elm Inn at plot 77 which faces the broader road junction. Chimneys project from both gables, just as today, with a smaller lean-to against the back wall that does not extend to the left-hand gable and a small additional lean-to adjoining the right-hand chimney (figure 10). Plot 77 was the 'Elm Inn Yard & Bowling Green with the waste [land] in front' while plot 76 was the 'Elm Tap & Garden'. Plots 78-80 represent the remaining cottages. The field to the rear of Belldown was 'Cobb's Acre' (59) and the land on the opposite side of the road 'White Elm Field' (63).**

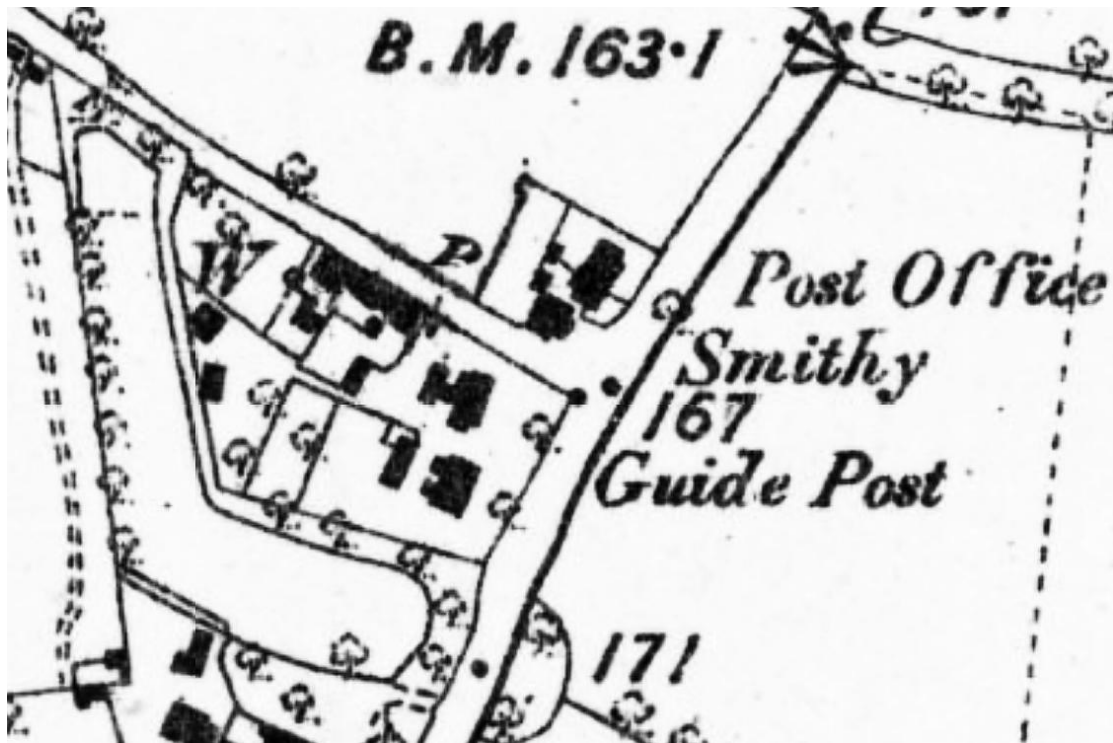


Figure 6. The 6 inch Ordnance Survey of 1881, which shows the present Mock Tudor houses on the site of the 'waste' ground in front of the demolished inn.

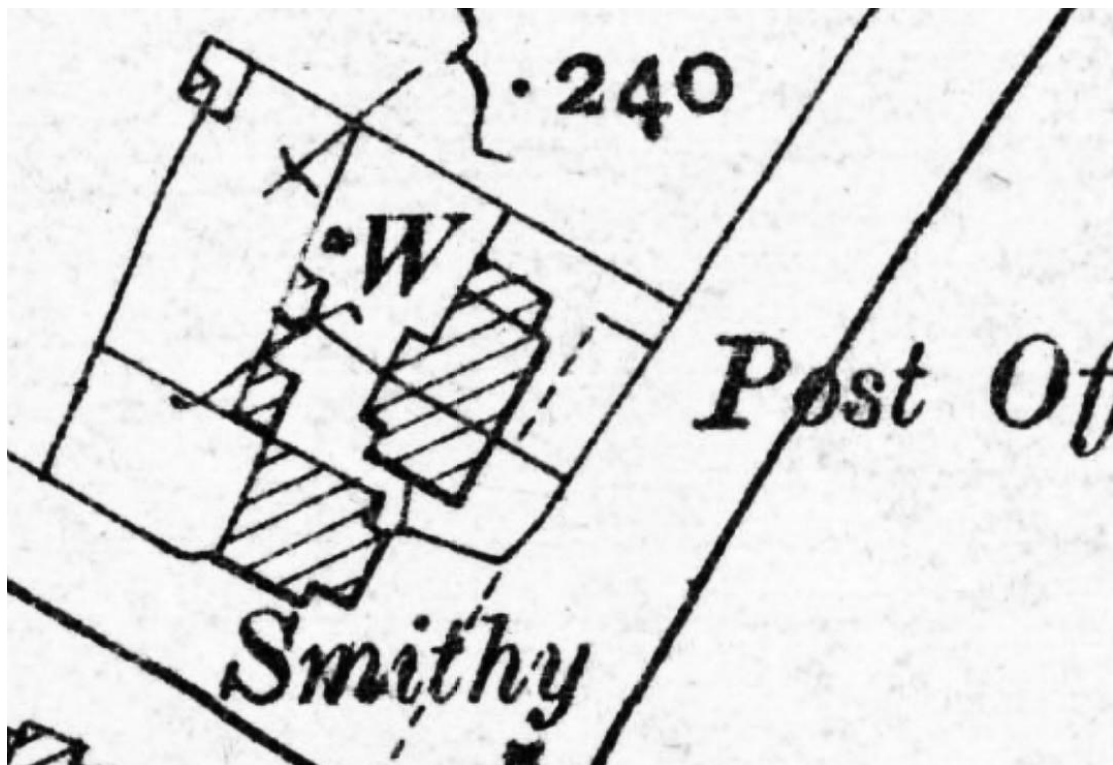


Figure 7. The 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1902. The partition between the two tenements is consistent with the early photographs in figures 8-10, which show the modern central entrance passage serving the northern cottage. The gable chimneys are too small to have been outlined, but the boarded lean-to in figure 10 is depicted along with the rear lean-to which stops short of both gables. A well lies in the back garden (W). The 1924 map is identical.



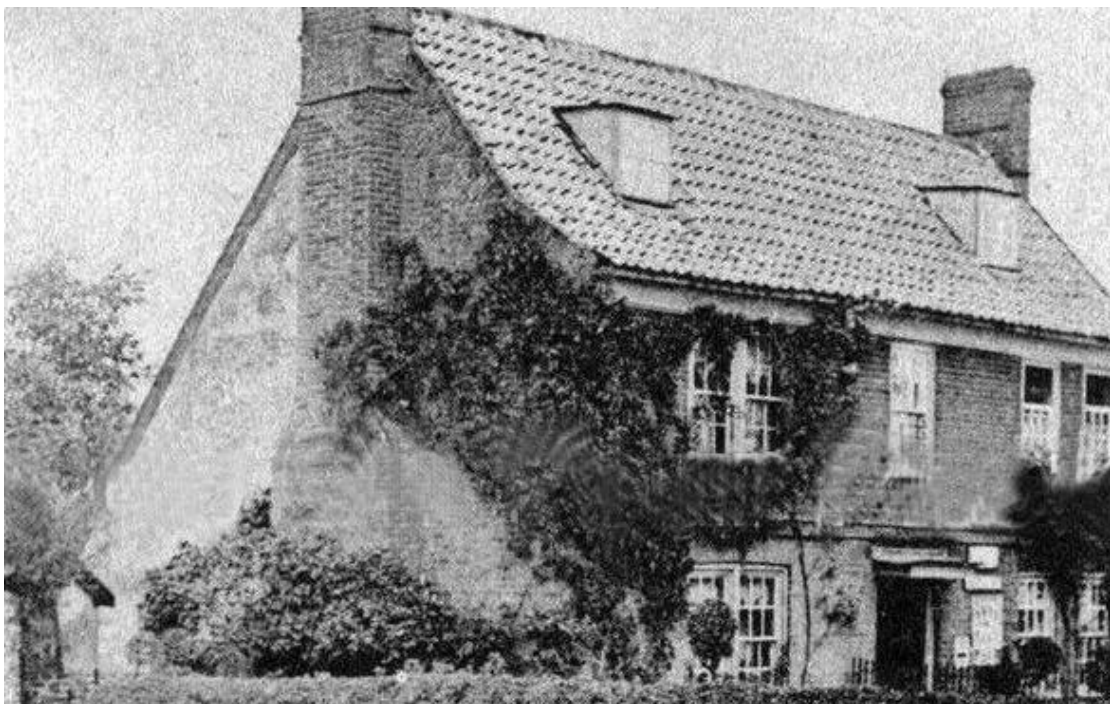


**Figure 8a.** An undated early-20<sup>th</sup> century postcard view showing the blacksmith's shop adjoining Elm Lane to the left of the house. The sign reads 'G Fairweather', but the 1911 census records John Vince Cook as a blacksmith living next to Peter Plumb at the Post Office. George Fairweather was a 'shoeing smith' living in The Street, Copdock. The smaller sign by the rack of tools reads 'For Sale'. Note the double sash windows to the left of the facade, and the separate door to the blacksmith's cottage in the gable. The rendered rear lean-to on the left appears to have replaced the indented corner shown in figure 7 and now consists of late-20<sup>th</sup> century brickwork.





**Figure 8b.** A detail of the facade in figure 8a highlighting the adjoining sash windows to the left with no evidence of disturbance in the brickwork on each side. The first-floor upper sashes were provided with horns in the manner of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and later, although they are absent from those on the ground floor. What appears to be a single-storied shop with signs above its awning is visible to the right.



**Figure 9.** A second early-20<sup>th</sup> century view of the facade from the south showing the flat door hood of the Post Office with iron railings dividing its front garden from that of the blacksmith to the left. A post box is visible to the right of the door but there is no trace of the panelled boards that flank the entrance today.





Figure 10. An early-20<sup>th</sup> century postcard view of the property from the north-east, showing the flat door hood and enamel signs of the Post Office much as in figure 9. The clothing of the assembled villagers suggests a date of *circa* 1905.

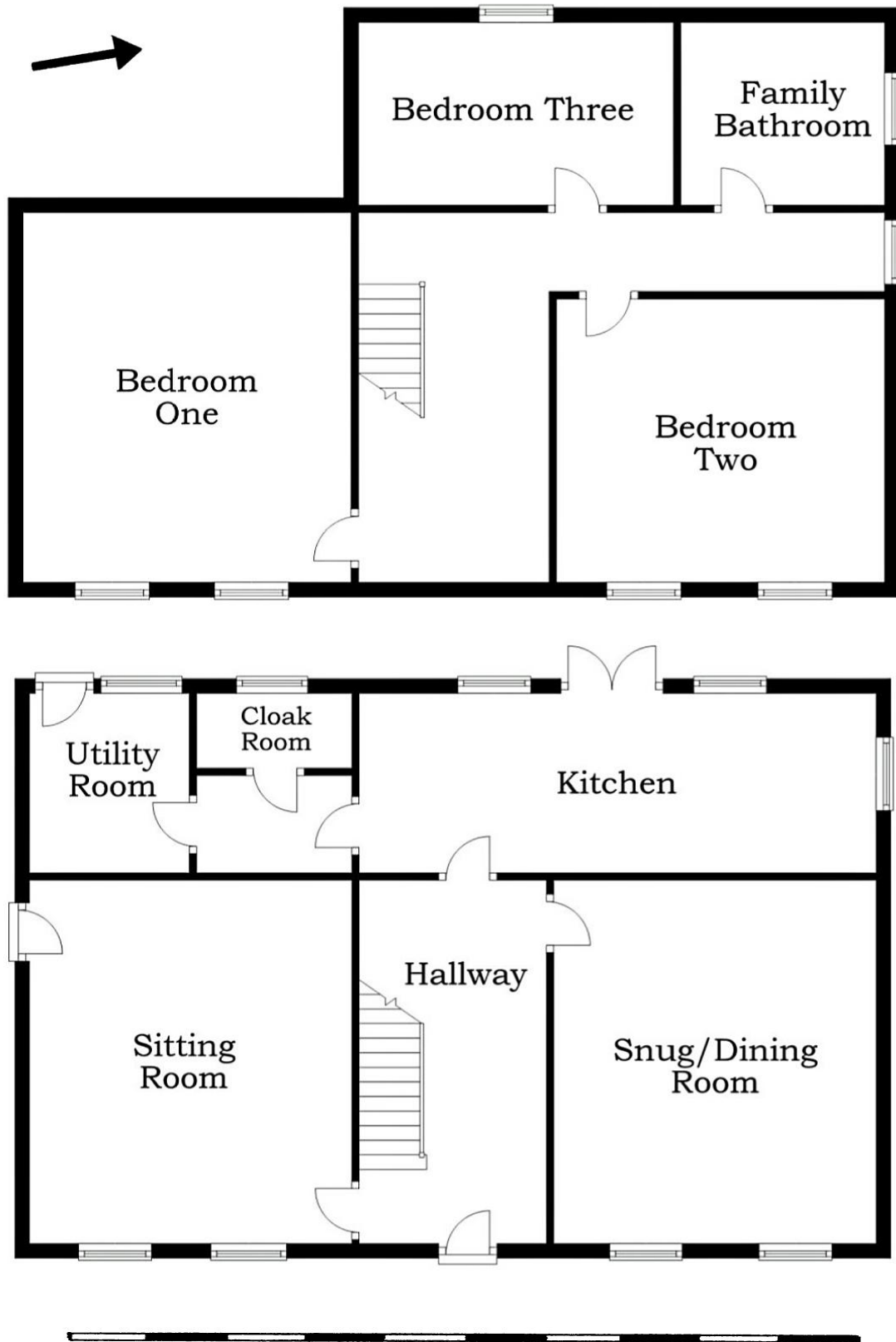




**Figure 11. The facade in 2004, looking much as today with separate sash windows to the left and three enlarged dormer windows.**



## Building Analysis



**Figure 12**  
Ground (bottom) and first-floor plans from recent estate agent's particulars

## Introduction

Belldown is a complete red-brick and pantiled house of the late-18<sup>th</sup> century that was divided into two cottages during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later served as the village Post Office. The following account attempts to reconstruct the building's original appearance and internal layout, and to trace its various alterations. The present rooms are identified by the names in figure 12 and the text is intended to be read in conjunction with the captions to the 26 illustrations which form part of the description.

## Listing Entry

The property is listed at grade II with the following entry in Historic England's schedule (no. 1194246):

**Copdock, London Road. Belldown, (formerly listed on 22.2.1955 as 'Old Post Office and House adjoining Old Post Office').**

**House, early to mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. Red brick. Flemish bond, black glazed pantile roof. External brick gable end stacks. 2 storeys and attics, symmetrical facade of 5 uneven bays. Brick plinth, 1st floor band, small modillion cornice. Central door of 6 raised panels, plain architrave, soldier arch above. Flush frame horned sashes with glazing bars beneath flat arches. 5 similar first floor windows, their heads at eaves level. 3 inserted 20<sup>th</sup> century casement dormers of 3 and 2 lights. Some original doors and door furniture including HL hinges.**

This entry was last revised in 1988, by which time the two cottages of 1955 had been combined and the property had acquired its current name. The structure contains no visible features to justify the 'early to mid-18th century' date, and the use of pine is more consistent with the very end of the same century (as is the building's absence from the 1783 map). The 'plain architrave' of the entrance door is at odds with the panelled surround in illustration 5, and indicates the latter was inserted more recently, while the flat arches are in fact modern replicas as shown in illustration 6. The reference to original doors with HL hinges in the style of the late-18th and early-19th centuries demonstrates that the inspector gained access, and his omission of other ostensibly historic fixtures and fittings such as the staircase, the exposed ceiling joists in the sitting room and the shelf units in the dining room indicates they too were inserted later. The building is known to have been owned and embellished in the late-20th century by a professional restorer of antique furniture who is likely to have had access to the necessary materials. No applications for Listed Building Consent are recorded on Babergh District Council's online planning portal.

## The Original Building

The current layout of the house clearly reflects its original arrangement, although in its present form it dates only from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when the property was restored to a single dwelling from the two cottages described in the 1837 tithe survey. A central stair passage divides a dining room on one side from a drawing room on the other in the standard manner of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The main structure consists of red-brick laid in Flemish Bond to the eastern facade and gables but English Bond to the rear where visible in the roof-spaces of the single-storied lean-to. This rear wall would have been hidden by a smaller timber-framed storage lean-to from the outset, as indicated by its lack of windows, the later brickwork of its present southern gable in illustration 12 and the indented south-western corner of the building on the 1837 map. The northern end of the lean-to was replaced by a two-storied lean-to kitchen extension of rendered cement block-work in or about the 1970s

and 80s. The main structure extends to 5.3 m in total width by 11.9 m in length on an approximately NNE/SSW axis that is simplified to north/south for the purpose of this report (17.5 ft by 39 ft). The walls are 14 inches or 35 cm thick and at 2.4 m in width the entrance passage is spacious by the standards of the period, but at 4.25 m in length by 4.75 m in width internally the roughly equal principal rooms are modest (14 ft by 15.5 ft). Instead of the perfect symmetry usually encountered in late-Georgian facades, the ground and first-floor rooms to the north were lit by two separate windows while those to the south contained adjoining windows in a single wide frame as shown in early-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs. There is no evidence in these photographs of any disturbance in the brickwork on each side that might indicate an alteration (figure 8b). The projecting flat hood of the central entrance is also likely to have been an original feature. The resulting house would have represented a respectable and fashionable dwelling of the middle rank when newly built in *circa* 1800, and would have been appropriate to an individual such as John Scrivener who qualified as one of only 8 voters in Copdock but whose landholding lay outside the parish. The new building may have been designed for his retirement.

## Conversion into Cottages

The house was converted into cottages at a relatively early date, possibly soon after John Scrivener's burial at Bentley in 1806 (aged 80). The internal partition depicted in figure 7 lies to the south of the building's centre and suggests the blacksmith's extensive family was confined to the present sitting room and bedroom 1 together with the smaller rear lean-to. There is no evidence of sub-division in these rooms, although some form of impermanent wall is likely to have existed if only to separate the sexes and the lodger. In some cases such partitions consisted of fabric or leather. The connecting door to the original stair passage was presumably blocked and a new entrance inserted into the southern gable while a narrow stair was cut into the sitting room ceiling. There is no evidence of this stair, although the present common joists in illustration 14-16 may be replacements and it is also possible that the original main staircase was shared between the tenements. The blacksmith operated the Post Office as well as the smithy from the 1860s, but this later transferred to the northern cottage and an enamel post box is clearly visible to the right of the eastern entrance in figure 9. Cooking evidently occurred in the gable fireplaces, with the northern cottage also possessing a boarded lean-to that may have contained a bread oven against its external chimney. This chimney preserves evidence of external alteration with incised apotropaic (evil-averting) hexafoils alongside of a type often seen in 19<sup>th</sup> century food stores (illustrations 9-10).

## 20th Century Change

The house had ceased to operate as the Post Office by 1955 but still formed two cottages known as the Old Post Office and the house adjoining. At some point before the most recent listing survey in 1988 it was recombined and renamed Belldown. This process involved extensive alteration to the facade and the addition of the two-storied rear extension that contains the present kitchen and bedroom 3 above, although more than one phase may have been involved. The new extension consists of rendered cement block-work and can be dated by its fenestration to the 1970s or 80s. Three enlarged dormer windows were cut into the roof and the original double windows to the left of the entrance were separated to create a new symmetrical facade, with concrete lintels disguised as flat arches above the ground-floor apertures (illustration 6). The probably original door hood was also removed and a new panelled door case that fails to fit the walls installed beneath (illustrations 4-5). It should be possible to improve the resulting defacement by replicating the door arrangement shown in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs, but the original window arches cannot be replaced without major structural work and a simple repair of the painted cement may be necessary. The precise extent of the internal alterations that accompanied these changes to the exterior



remains unclear. The owner at the time is understood to have used his skill as a restorer of antique furniture to import or create a number of fixtures and fittings that may have included the projecting door surround along with the shelf units and fire surround in the dining room (illustrations 17-18). It is even possible that at least part of the main staircase and the common joists of the sitting room were brought in from elsewhere given the joists' rough edges and lack of evidence for plaster (illustration 16).

## **Historic Significance**

Despite extensive alterations in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, Belldown retains a handsome late-18<sup>th</sup> century facade that occupies a conspicuous corner site on the Old London Road and makes a major contribution to the historic character of the area. The building is also of local historic interest given its role as the village Post Office between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The interior has been largely stripped of original fixtures and fittings and many of those that remain appear to have been remodelled or even imported from elsewhere, but its relatively intact exterior ensures the property continues to warrant its grade II listing.

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*Illustrations follow on pages 14-26.*

## Illustrations (pages 14-26)



**Illus. 1.** The property from the road junction to the south, showing its conspicuous corner location facing the Old London Road with the 20<sup>th</sup> century straightened dual carriageway to the right. The site would have been even more conspicuous when the house was built as a major coaching inn occupied the opposite corner to the left.



**Illus. 2.** The eastern facade from the remaining section of the original road between London and Ipswich. The current symmetrical appearance dates only from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when the adjoining sash windows to the left of the central entrance were separated to match those on the right. In their current form the three dormer windows are also 20<sup>th</sup> century additions that replaced the smaller pair in figures 8-10.





**Illus. 3. The Flemish Bond brickwork of the facade has been heavily repointed, obscuring the evidence of its original arrangement, but in all probability it was identical to that shown in figure 8-10. The area between and around the four left-hand windows was rebuilt when the unusual adjoining sashes were separated. All but the penultimate first-floor window on the right contain horns and cannot pre-date the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. the sides of their upper sashes project beneath their lower rails to strengthen the joints in a manner not seen before this date).**



**Illus. 4. A detail of the central entrance which is defined by recent brickwork laid in hard grey cement mortar with a crude modern flat arch above. The Post Office entrance may have been widened at some point, and the flat arch replaced a Georgian flat hood.**





**Illus. 5. A further detail of the main entrance showing the extent to which the panelled door surround projects beyond the wall face. Although dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century this panelling is not shown in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century images and does not fit the building. It is likely to have been installed by the previous owner who is understood to have been a professional furniture restorer, and given the building's complex history as a Post Office and a pair of low-status cottages any potentially original fixtures and fittings should be treated with similar caution.**



**Illus. 6. A detail of the apparent flat arch over the right-hand ground-floor window which in fact consists of a concrete lintel covered by a recent layer of cement incised and painted to resemble brickwork. The other three arches are identical.**



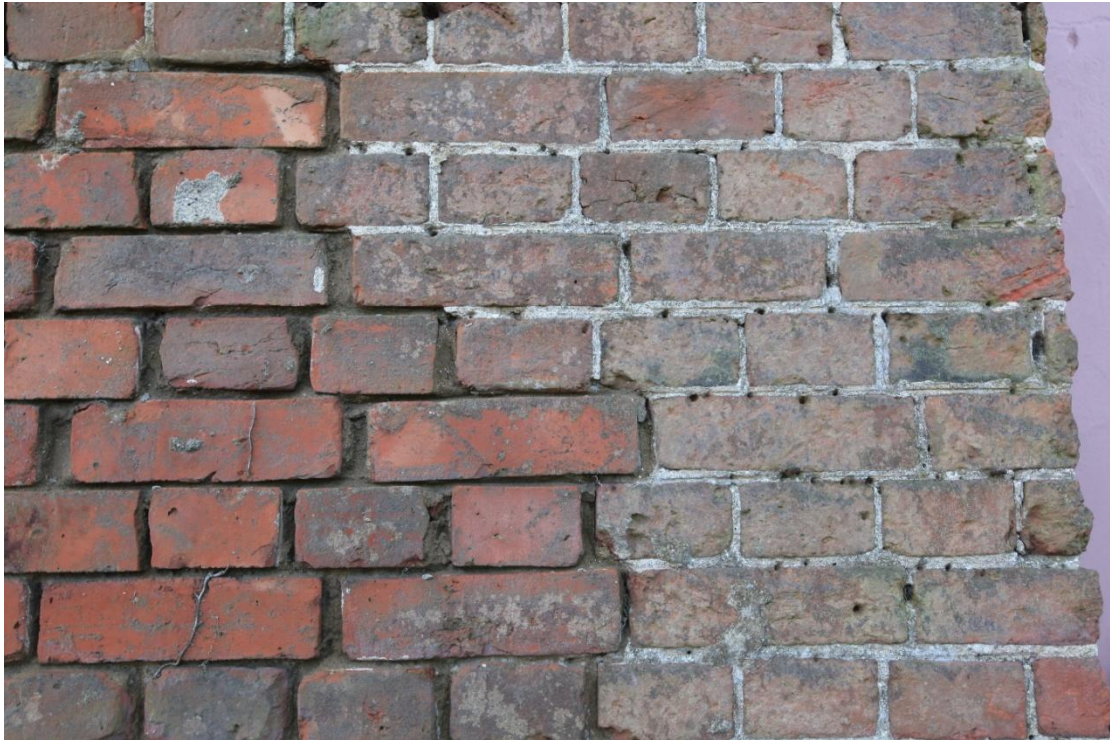


**Illus. 7. The modern glazed door in the southern gable is respected by an ostensibly 19<sup>th</sup> century flat arch and occupies the position of the entrance to the blacksmith's cottage in figures 8-10. The brickwork of the rear lean-to on the left is modern and replaced the render shown in the early photographs.**



**Illus. 8. The northern gable, partly encased in the cement render of the late-20<sup>th</sup> century two-storied rear extension. The chimney was previously adjoined by a boarded lean-to shed that may have contained a bread oven (figure 10), and the brickwork of the chimney itself has been much altered. The curious double shaft relates either to the missing oven or an inserted first-floor fireplace of which there is no internal evidence.**





**Illus. 9.** A detail of the external brick chimney in illustration 7 showing a section of modern rebuilding on the left with an area of original brickwork that has escaped repointing on the right. The finely ruled mortar joints are typical of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and would have extended to the entire building.



**Illus. 10.** A second detail of the northern gable in illustration 8 showing the repointed area to the left of the chimney which nonetheless preserves three incised apotropaic circles with evidence of internal 'petals'. These 24 cm diameter hexafoils or daisywheels were used to ward off evil spirits and probably lay within a lean-to shed when first executed.





**Illus. 11.** The house from its rear garden with the late-20<sup>th</sup> century two-storied extension on the left. This consists of cement blocks and must date from the 1970s or 80s. The single-storied structure contains matching windows but probably reflects the height of the original rear lean-to on the historic maps. However, it must represent a replacement as both rear corners were indented on the maps (indicating the previous structure shopped short of the gables).



**Illus. 12.** The internal southern roof gable of the single-storied lean-to in illustration 11, with the original rear wall of the house on the left. The gable consists of re-used brick laid in cement mortar and dates only from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The original rear wall lacks windows and evidently adjoined a similar timber-framed lean-to from the outset.



**Illus. 13.** The central entrance passage, which at 2.4 m or 8 ft is unusually wide for a house of otherwise modest proportions. The panelled entrance door is secured by early-19<sup>th</sup> century HL hinges and the staircase with gun-barrel turned newel posts is typical of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but there is evidence of extensive repair and it is unclear whether these features survived the conversion of the house or were installed by the previous owner. No such staircase is mentioned in the 1988 listing entry.



**Illus. 14.** The sitting room's southern gable showing the modern glazed door in the entrance to the blacksmith's cottage. The brickwork of the fireplace is consistent with the early-19<sup>th</sup> century but the lamb's tongue chamfer stops of its lintel are more typical of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it may have been imported – although it fits the brickwork.





**Illus. 15. The 20<sup>th</sup> century windows in the front wall of the sitting room with an ostensibly late-19<sup>th</sup> or early-20<sup>th</sup> century door in the presumed wall between the two cottages on the left.**



**Illus. 16. A detail of the neatly chamfered binding joist between the windows of the sitting room in illustration 15 with later boards concealing the joints of the common joists above. The pine timber appears authentic and may have been boxed at some point. The roughly hewn pine common joists are also convincing, and match the rafters in illustration 26, but there is no evidence of the plaster that might have been expected in a house of this period and quality.**





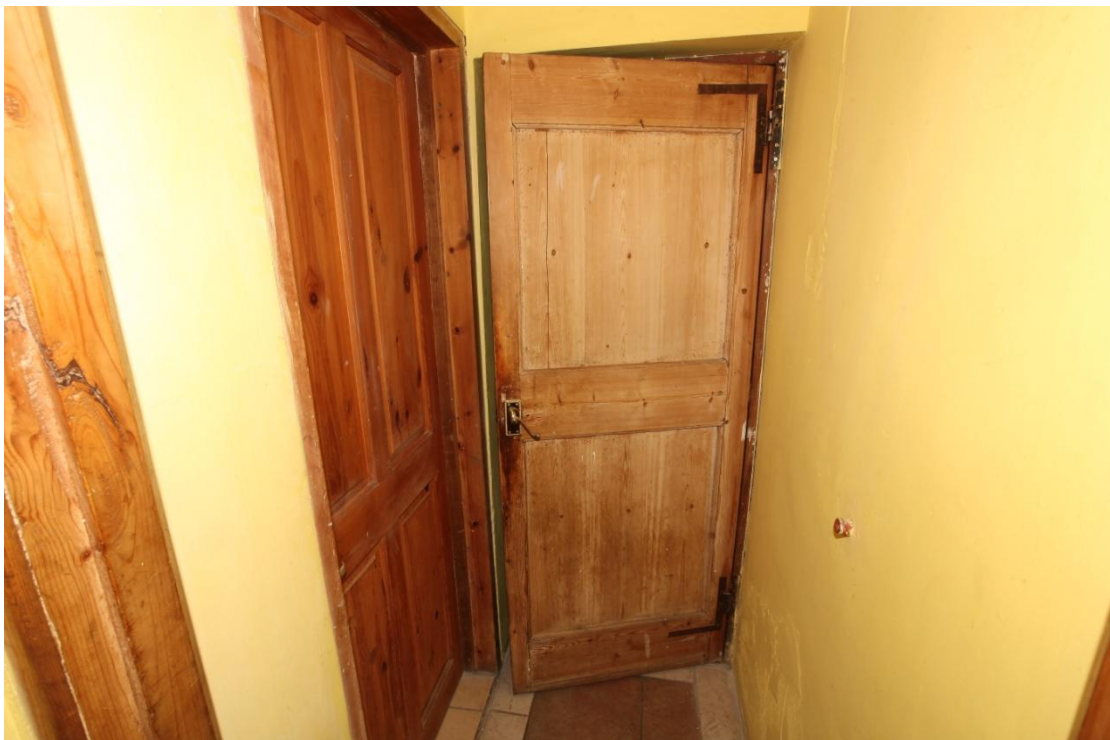
**Illus. 17. The rear wall of the dining room showing the arched shelves of stripped pine that were probably installed by the previous owner. The timber is a mixture of old and new, and contains anomalies such as fittings for door hinges. The left-hand unit penetrates the brick wall and may have formed a doorway previously.**



**Illus. 18. The early-19<sup>th</sup> century-style fire surround in the northern gable of the dining room. Like the shelf units this consists of at least two types of timber and is likely to have been installed by the previous owner who worked as a furniture restorer.**



**Illus. 19.** A detail of the binding joist in the dining room (illustration 18), which is hidden by chamfered pine boards. These timbers are of some age, with chamfers that respect the width of the building, and may be original to the structure.



**Illus. 20.** The lean-to behind the sitting room contains a number of ostensibly early-19<sup>th</sup> century pine doors with HL hinges that may be contemporary with the house, although, as elsewhere, some features are clearly later and it is unclear to what extent material has been imported. The kitchen in the two-storied extension is entirely modern.





**Illus. 21.** The stair landing from the east, with the attic stair on the right. As elsewhere in the building, the few exposed structural timbers consist of pine in a manner that only became the norm at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The staircase has been much altered but may retain some old elements and is in keeping with the character of the facade.



**Illus. 22.** The 20<sup>th</sup> century windows in the front wall of bedroom 1. As in the sitting room beneath, there is no obvious evidence of the partition that might have been expected given the crowded nature of the blacksmith's cottage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.





**Illus. 23.** A detail of the pine binding joist of bedroom 1, which contains vertical pegs and scored lines for the concealed common joists above. The unusually plain nature of this timber suggests it was concealed by moulded planks like those which survive elsewhere in the house.



**Illus. 24.** The front wall of bedroom 2, which is divided from the rear corridor by a late-20<sup>th</sup> century partition. The binding joist on the left retains what may be its original moulded pine boards.



**Illus. 25.** The modern stained pine stair balustrade on the attic landing, with a built-in ‘Old Charm’ mid-20<sup>th</sup> century cupboard door on the left. The structure is largely hidden at this level by the plasterboard of a late-20<sup>th</sup> century refurbishment, but the original rafters are visible above the ceiling (illustration 26). The horizontal timber beneath the window may represent an original butt-purlin.



**Illus. 26.** The apex of the roof structure showing its pine rafters nailed to an ostensibly original ridge-board interrupted by a principal truss in the centre. The larger principal rafters are secured by a peg. The use of pine and a ridge board in this way is unlikely to pre-date the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is more typical of the early-19<sup>th</sup> century.