

TYNE & WEAR

Newcastle: The Close, Doves Warehouse

NZ 250 638

A three sided courtyard of warehouses of several builds, rebuilds and different constructional materials sited on the river front. The earliest sections would appear to be the southern half-timbered range and its eastern return and features in these ranges would suggest a late 16th or 17th century date. The southern half of the eastern range has been cased in brick in the 19th century but retains much of its original structure while the northern half has been almost entirely rebuilt. However, the former extent of this half-timbered range is indicated by the rubble section of the lower wall. The 3½ storey masonry western range though incorporating archaic, perhaps medieval stone details, has a 19th century roof and internal structure and would appear to post-date the half-timbered range.

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This complex of warehouses is situated upstream of the former Tyne bridge and hence must have been built to cater for river-borne rather than sea-borne trade. The earlier ranges are built some 7 metres back from the present river quay while the masonry range projects southwards to the river but with loading doors giving direct access to the water. The presence of a door and passage through the southern range suggests that it may have always been fronted by a quay. The two storey southern range now measures some 18 metres by 6 metres and this may indeed have been its original extent (see below). Originally it was half-timbered with a rubble built ground-floor but the studs and tension braces have been greatly disrupted by the insertion of windows except in the eastern gable where it survives unaltered. Narrow gauge brick nogging (6½ - 7 x 3½ x 1⁵/₈ inches with buff to pink fabric) appears to be original and peg-hole evidence indicates that there were few original openings at the upper level. There are now 5 king-post trusses with longitudinal braces to a ridge purlin and braced cambered tie-beams. However, both the trenched purlins and

the wall plates extend westwards of the westernmost truss indicating at least one more bay. The presence of a section of single-storey rubble wall exactly two bay widths beyond this last truss suggests that the range extended to this wall and perhaps finished in a gable similar to that which survived at the east end. The two bays at the west end of this range have been rebuilt with walls of a different thickness to the rest of the range and with a higher roof line. The rebuild incorporates the section of rubble wall mentioned above in the east wall of the western range and as this latter wall is built on top of and to either side of the single storey section it indicates that the western range post-dates this section. If the section belongs to the southern range, as suggested, the western range is later than the half-timbered southern range.

The roof form, the wall plate scarfs and a single mutilated moulding stop in the ground floor room of the southern range would all, in a domestic context, suggest a 16th century date but the lightness of the timber and the storehouse use of the building could perhaps allow a somewhat later date.

The adjoining section of the eastern range, though a metre narrower and a metre lower is contemporary with the southern range. It has a similar roof construction for four bays and the wall plate scarfs though different, are also of 16th century type. The eastern wall of this section of the range has been cased in brick above the rubble ground-floor possibly in the 18th century while the western wall has been rebuilt in brick in the 19th century. The remainder of this eastern range has been almost entirely rebuilt in the 19th century to provide heated offices and only the ground-floor rubble wall to the east survives to indicate the original extent of the range.

The southern range may indeed have incorporated some office facility originally as, to the west of the through passage, there is a room which could have overseen movement of goods through the passage from a river quay to the courtyard. This room has roll-moulded cornice beams, and the aforementioned moulded bressummer, with the double hollow chamfer and stepped stop of 16th century form has been mutilated by the insertion of a later window. The passage itself has no early detail but its position, providing the only direct access between the courtyard and the river, is clearly significant. The

other quasi-domestic features such as the three chimney stacks and the venetian window are all later insertions and may be evidence of a residential phase in the 18th century which has been largely obscured by later office conversion. By the time of investigation much of the evidence of the office phase had been lost and the upper floor was a stripped-out clear space. Architects' surveys of 1976 however show the arrangement of offices.

The masonry 3½ storey warehouse to the west is a long narrow irregular range measuring some 53 metres by 6.5 metres overall and its interpretation is somewhat problematical. Its eastern wall contains stonework details such as door-heads which appear to be not only early but of different date from each other. There is also quite a variation in the masonry itself while odd pieces of worked stone such as half a doorhead are incorporated in the general fabric. As it would appear that the present configuration of this range is later than the southern range (see above) the archaic appearance of the stonework of the east wall may be due to the re-use of stone, perhaps quarried from a later medieval structure nearby. Alternatively the northern part of the east wall may be a fragment of an early building that did not extend as far south as the southern range. The west wall of the range is built of a different stone and while it too is patchy it does not seem to incorporate any particularly early features.

The internal structure and the roof are fairly homogeneous and of 19th century date. The roof trusses of which there are 21, are softwood A frames with two ranks of staggered butt-purlins and a ridge purlin. They are numbered from the south in the following sequence:

I, II, I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, I, III, II, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, I.

The implications of the sequence are not quite certain but the discrepancies occur at significant points. The first two trusses coincide with the projecting bays to the south while the disruption of the sequence after IX occurs around the cross-wall below and the hoist openings. However, the second tier of hoist openings causes no such disruption between XII and XIII and the occurrence of a truss

marked I reappearing again at north and does not seem to correspond with any obvious structural feature.

The present stairs are beside the central hoist opening and may be an enlarged version of an original arrangement as the lowest flight is trimmed into the joists and there is evidence of a trap opening at the stair head on the top floor. Latterly at least there were four working levels each with direct loading access to the river and with access to the courtyard. Apart from the cross-wall on the lower floors there is no partitioning of the range and as the cross-wall has wide door-ways through it would appear that the range operated as a single unit. There are no openings other than windows in the west wall and the windows, though haphazardly arranged, are barred and all above ground-floor level providing a secure boundary to the courtyard.

In summary, therefore, it would seem that the shell of this range may date from the 17th century with earlier masonry incorporated and it may have been altered on more than one occasion before a major remodelling in the early 19th century.

The site seems to have operated as a secure courtyard of storehouses from at least the 17th century with general access through gates to the north and river access via a quay. Latterly at least land access was controlled by offices at the north end of the east range but whether this 19th century rebuild retained an earlier arrangement is uncertain. Access from the river was originally controlled by an office in the southern range and in the 18th century this would seem to have been expanded to provide domestic accommodation with the insertion of several chimneys. By the 20th century this accommodation had been converted to offices the arrangement of which is shown on architects' surveys of 1976. At the time of investigation most of this partitioning had been stripped out and the upper floor of the south range had reverted to a clear space.