



Eavesdropper

The Newsletter of the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group

No. 41 Winter 2010





Stoke-by-Nayland Gild Hall



Eye Gild Hall



Hadleigh Gild Hall



Lavenham Gild Hall



Debenham Gild Hall



Worlingworth Gild Hall



Hawstead Gild Hall



Kelsale Gild Hall

Suffolk Gild Halls.

VISIT LAXFIELD GILD HALL, FRESSINGFIELD GILD HALL and CHESTNUT LODGE, WILBY

SHBG Field trip Saturday 19th September 2009.

We met at the Laxfield Gild Hall, it was a lovely sunny day, the Trustees were holding a Saturday morning market outside, and some of our members availed themselves of cups of tea on the grass verge.

For a discussion on the origin and purpose of Gild Halls see Eavesdropper No 17, Autumn 2000.

Laxfield Gild Hall (fig 1)

Sylvia Coleman produced a pamphlet about the Laxfield Gild Hall building - she suggests that the similarities with the Fressingfield Gildhall built about ten years earlier, next on our trip, are so numerous that they were both carried out by the same carpenters.

It is an early C16th timber framed structure in 6 bays, though originally it may have had an additional bay at the west end, since the west end framing looks like a replacement, and it is possible that this could have housed a kitchen used for preparing Gild feasts. The north elevation facing the church and the east side is jettied with a corner post, and the studs infilled with red brickwork, some in herring bone patterns.

The chimney stacks and the division of the interior into a series of rooms is recent.

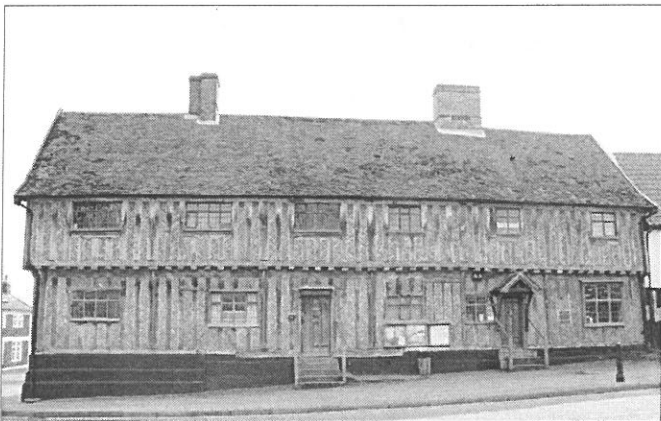


Fig 1: Laxfield Gild Hall

When first built the four eastern bays on the ground floor formed one large room entered at its west end where there were corresponding outer doors in the front and back walls. The room had windows in each bay with a oriel window in the easternmost bay and a window almost the full width of the wall on the east. The rest of the ground floor had two rooms, one of which would have contained the staircase.

On the upper floor was a similar room 5 bays long, with similar windows, open to a queen post roof.

The building now houses a charming bygone museum which provided a further piece of 'value added' to our trip, as well as the church of All Saints across the road which proved extremely interesting. Thanks to the trustees for permission to visit especially Elaine Nason (SHBG member) who was our guide.

Fressingfield Gild Hall (Fox and Goose)(fig 2)

Our next stop was the Fressingfield Gild Hall with its lovely church of St Peter and Paul, which we also visited. It has a magnificent set of nave benches. The carvings include moving emblems of the passion, the cock crowing, the pillar of flagellation, cord, scourges, the crown of thorns, nails, ladders, pincers, the seamless coat and the dice board.

I owe some of these interpretations of the Fox and Goose building to John Walker with whom I made a recent visit.

We are given an indication from references in wills why the Gild Hall at Fressingfield was built.

*'For the more reverens of God and in avoiding etynge and drinking and other abusions of the chirch'.
'for the keypyng of all churchalis, gildis, yardages, burying and other drinking's necessary to the profyte of the seid chirch or parrishe'.*

The building was described as newly built in 1509 so this year is its 500th anniversary. Like Laxfield it presents its main elevation, exposed jettied timber frame with brick nogging (plain and herringbone in alternate panels), to the church. The jetty has plain brackets with a moulded and embattled bressemer.

The back now the front was always rendered. The building would have originally been thatched.

The jetty carries round the east side, and is carried on a dragon beam which can be seen internally. The beam is carried on a dragon post which is decorated on both



Fig 2; Fressingfield Gild Hall.

sides with the carved figure of St Margaret of Antioch, the Gild's patron saint.

The timber framing is plain but substantial. If it had been a house of this period we could expect the joists and beams to be moulded, but this was how public buildings were treated.

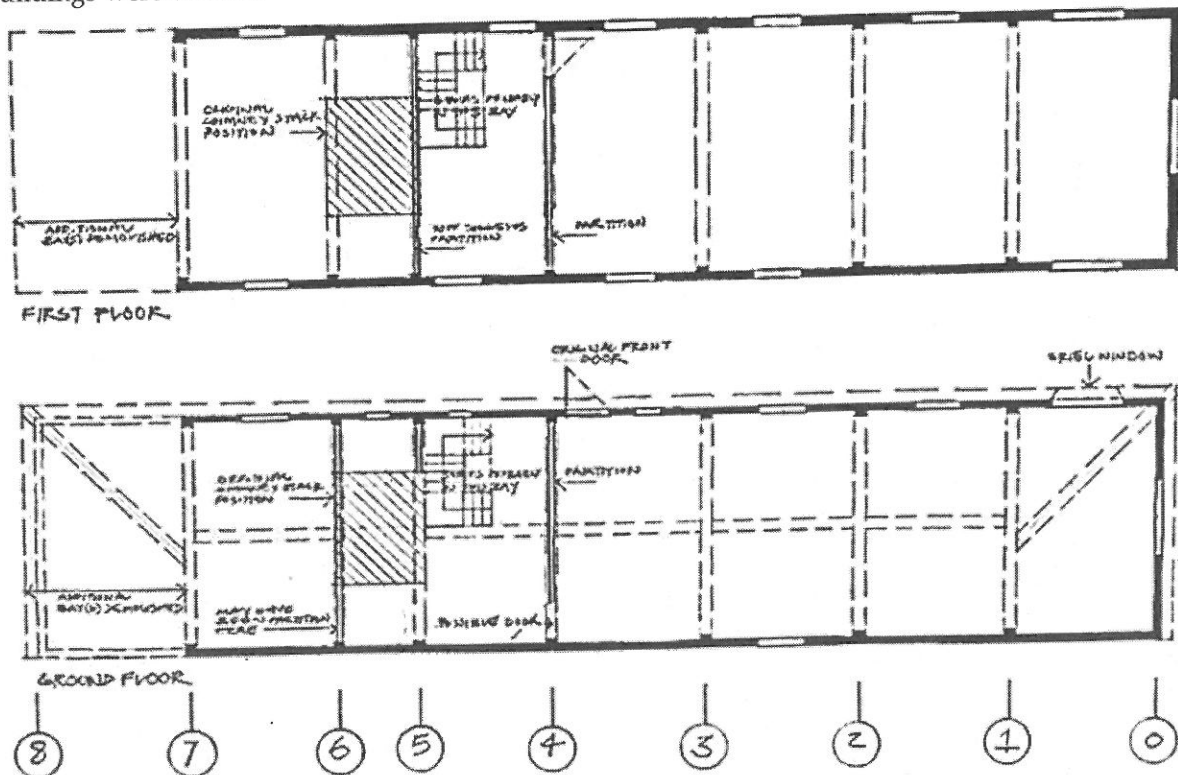


Fig 3: Fressingfield Gild Hall plan c1509.

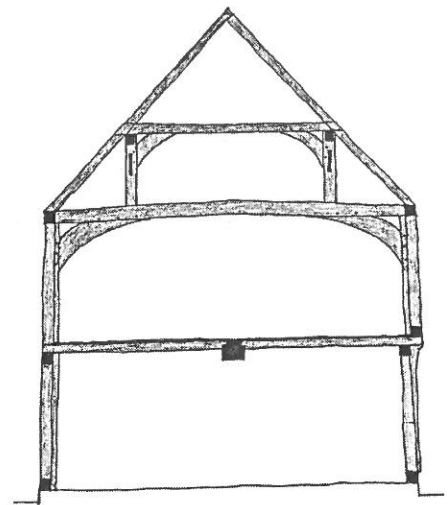


Fig 4: Fressingfield Gild Hall section.

The east corners are braced with concave timbers in the north Suffolk tradition.

The upper floor would have been more beautiful, originally open so that the queen post truss roof could be seen, with heavy braces to the wall posts.

Currently the building has 7 bays, but one or more bays must be missing on the West end, because the current end wall began as an open truss bay. I would think that originally the jetty carried round the west end. All the current chimneys are later additions. We can tell by disturbance to the roof that there was once a chimney in the narrow bay.