

18 & 19 GEORGE STREET, ST ALBANS

HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS (CONTRACTS) LTD
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18 & 19 GEORGE STREET, ST ALBANS
HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL

NGR: TL 1450 1719

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

In December 2003 Archaeological Solutions (AS) completed an historic building appraisal of 18 & 19 George Street, St Albans (NGR TL 1450 1719). The appraisal was undertaken in order to provide information about surviving architectural features of historic interest prior to proposals to change the upper floors into residential accommodation.

The buildings are believed to be part of the Antelope/Tabard Inn, depicted in a painting by Buckler of 1824. The findings generally concord with an earlier interpretation of the building as a front range of the late 14th-early 15th century with a crown-post roof and a 17th century rear range with a gallery (Smith 1992, 1993). However, the rear range appears to be early rather than mid-17th century, although it may have been altered in the mid-17th century when the link piece was added. Number 19 George Street was also assessed as part of the report and appears to date to the late 16th-early 17th century.

The buildings as a whole have been extensively reworked throughout the centuries and comprise three different construction phases with many later phases of alteration, including the addition of cellars. This makes it extremely difficult to relate the existing buildings with anything depicted by Buckler. From at least the Victorian period, the buildings have been divided into numbers 18 and 19 and used as a public house and shop, and more recently just as shops.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In December 2003 Archaeological Solutions (Contracts) Limited (AS) carried out a rapid historic building appraisal of 18 & 19 George Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire (NGR TL 1450 1719) (Figs.1 & 2). The work was commissioned by Living Space 3 Limited prior to proposals to change the use of the upper floors for residential accommodation.

1.2 The principal objectives of the project comprised the identification of visible features of historic interest within the property, in order that informed decisions regarding their conservation could be made.

2 DESCRIPTION / HISTORY OF THE SITE

2.1 The site lies in an historic setting in the core of the City of St Albans, close to the mediaeval Abbey. The area is to the north of the Roman town of Verulamium and whilst settlement in the region is well attested in the archaeological record, this part of modern St Albans was not extensively utilised in Roman times.

2.2 Offa, the Saxon king of Mercia, founded a Benedictine Abbey on the site of the shrine of St Alban in AD793. The core of the cathedral that now stands was built on the same site in AD1077, reusing building materials from Verulamium's town walls, with many Roman tiles visible in the masonry of the building to this day.

2.3 Towards the end of the 9th century the Abbot Ulsinus, or Wulsin, built churches at the three entrances to the town, on the streets now known as St Peter's Street, St Michael's Street and St Stephen's Hill. In c.940, Ulsinus diverted Watling Street, which linked St Stephen's and St Michael's, in order to bring traffic through the town centre (the Abbey owned the market rights and also charged tolls). This brought traffic up Holywell Hill, which is named after a medieval holy well, and it was along this route that the supplies for the Abbey were transported. The southern route into St Albans was diverted away from Holywell Hill in the 12th century, and traffic could now proceed along the much gentler slope of Sopwell Lane.

2.4 The economy of St Albans was in many respects typical. In the 13th and 14th centuries the town was of regional importance as a centre for cloth making. Other products and industries included wool, tanning, and brewing (81 breweries were recorded). In the 13th century the Abbey provided stabling for 300 horses, and armed men were installed along the road in order to protect the pilgrims and other travellers to St Albans. In 1325-1350 the monks began building screens in the cathedral in order to separate themselves from the increasing crowds of pilgrims. In 1484 a sound barrier was added.

2.5 A large number of inns were established by the end of the 14th century, in order to accommodate the merchants, pilgrims and other travellers. Although the number of travellers probably decreased after the Dissolution (AD 1536-40) of the Abbey, St Albans remained an important centre, gaining a charter, mayor and corporation.

The Assessment Site

2.6 Numbers 18 and 19 are currently retail units fronting George Street. They comprise partially brick-clad timber-framed structures, believed to date back to the 15th century. Smith (1992 & 1993) notes that the structures were part of the 15th century Antelope/Tabard Inn, a galleried courtyard-type inn located close to the abbey. They are depicted in a painting by Buckler of 1824 (Fig. 3), showing the rear courtyard and gallery, and from another viewpoint by Cornelius Varley. Both show the inn consisted of several ranges and appears to have been entered by carts and carriages from Spicer Street (Smith 1993). In describing the different elements Smith states:

“...the inn was of several builds, the rear range being the earliest part, the W range being plainer and presumably later, while the E range, which had mullion-and transom-windows, was built or altered in the second half of the 17th century. The front range, of the early 15th century, has what appears to have been a gallery, long wall braces of squarish scantling and a crown-post roof.” (Smith 1993, 154)

In Smith's Hertfordshire Houses (1992) he states:

“On the first floor can be seen a gallery extending along the rear of the street range and continuing down a wing that formerly returned along Spicer Street. It was once part of the courtyard which was drawn by Buckler and appears in a painting by Varley,...but the existing building is difficult to identify with anything depicted by the artists. The George Street range is probably of the late 14th century.” (Smith 1992, 151)

2.7 According to Smith therefore, the front range of 18 George Street dates to the late 14th-early 15th century, the rear range adjoining number 18 was built or altered in the second half of the 17th century and number 19, which may be part of the plainer range described by Smith, was constructed some time in-between.

2.8 From at least the Victorian period, the buildings have been divided into numbers 18 and 19 and used as a public house and shop, respectively. An overview of the Kelly’s Trade Directories shows the buildings listed in 1890 as the Antelope public house (18) and a furniture dealer (19). In 1907 number 18 is still listed as the Antelope and 19 is a hairdressers, but by 1923 number 18 is a furniture dealers and 19 is still a hairdressers. By 1942 numbers 18-20 George Street had been combined as one antique dealers and is also listed as such in 1952. By the 1962 Directory number 18 was an arts and crafts shop and 19-20 an antiques shop and in the 1972 entry 18 had become a ladies fashion shop. More recently, numbers 19 and 20 have once again been separated and numbers 18 and 19 have been opened up and are presently empty.

2.9 Numbers 18-20 George Street are grade II listed. The entry is as follows:

No. 18: Early C16, timber framed house. Two storeys, one window. Overhanging 1st floor faced with mock studding and roughcast. C18 1st floor sash window with glazing bars in flush, box frame. Plaque: “In monastic times this site was occupied by the Guest House of the Abbey”. Anno 1545 The Inn “Le Tabard”. Anno 1610 the Inn, “Antelope”. Ground floor shop front of 1800.

No. 19 and 20: Early C16 timber framed building. 2 storeys and attic, 3 windows. Overhanging, cement rendered 1st floor. High pitched, tiled roof with one square, and one gabled, dormer. C18 1st floor windows with slightly projecting box frames but later glazing. Earlier C19 shop fronts on ground floor.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The site was visited on the 12th December 2003 in order to undertake an appraisal of the structure and identify surviving features of historic interest. The appraisal conformed to a specification by AS (dated 03/12/03) and to the RCHME *Recording Historic Buildings: A descriptive specification 3rd edition*, 1996 and also to the IFA *Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (revised 1999). The level of recording was to a Level 2 as defined in the RCHME document. It also accorded to the document *Analysis and recording for the conservation and control of works to historic buildings* (Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers 1997).

3.2 Existing plans and elevations of the buildings provided by the client were checked and amended and are included (Figs.4-5).

3.3 The photographic recording was conducted using a mixture of medium format (4.5 x 6 cm), 35mm film and digital images. The medium format element used a Zenza Bronica ETRS camera with a 62mm lens and black and white (Ilford HP5, ISO 400) film.

3.4 Finer architectural detail and supplementary colour photography used 35mm film and Olympus Camedia E20 digital imaging. Zoom lenses were used as necessary to capture finer detail. It used Ilford HP5, ISO 400 and Ektachrome colour transparency film. A scale was used wherever possible, and flash was employed where necessary. Selected photographs have been reproduced in colour below to illustrate the text. A photographic location plan is included (Fig. 6).

4 THE BUILDING (Figs. 4 & 5)

4.1 The building consists of two adjoining shops facing south onto George Street, with a further shop adjoining to the east (20) and a red brick built drop-in centre abutting to the west. Number 18 consists of a ground floor shop front, thought to be early 19th century, with a jettied first floor rising to a red tile roof (Colour Plate 1). The shop front has a central doorway recessed within a small porch and contains a door with a lower flush bead moulded panel and four upper lights, with a plain overlight above. 3 x 5 pane wooden framed windows extend either side of the porch with wooden panels below and a brown tile floor. A further overlight with 'Chinese' fret design is located above the front of the porch, flush with the shop windows and is flanked by a simple wooden frame with chamfered cornice. The shop windows have lower moulded wooden panels and 4 x 4 pane thin wooden framed windows. A plain frieze extends above the shop windows with console brackets to the jettied first floor. To the west of the shop windows is a brick pier with an upper cogged band.

4.2 The first floor is faced with seven mock studs with pebbledash between. Above the centre stud is a 3 x 4 pane double-hung sash window. The roof is covered in red tiles.

4.3 The east elevation adjoins number 19 and the west elevation is abutted by a red brick building with the rendered gable end visible above. The north elevation is adjoined by the rear range.

4.4 Number 19 consists of a ground floor shop front, thought to be early-mid 19th century, with a jettied first floor rising to a red tile roof (Colour Plate 1). The shop front has a partly blocked doorway to the east containing a small 20th century door with a large central glass pane. A 4 x 2 pane shop window with moulded and shoulder headed glazing bars extends across the elevation with a lower moulded wooden panel. The shop front is flanked by two slightly projecting posts, each with an upper pyramidal cabochon. A plain frieze extends above the shop front with a moulded cornice to the jettied first floor.

4.5 The first floor is rendered and contains a central 2 x 2 pane double-hung sash window with horns. The roof is covered in red tiles with a dormer casement window.

4.6 The east and west elevations adjoin the adjacent buildings. The north elevation faces onto a small yard (Plate 1). The ground floor consists of a 20th century Fletton brick wall with a central modern boarded door. The red tile roof of the building extends to the top of the ground floor and contains a two light dormer casement window at first floor level.

4.7 The rear range extends north from the back of number 18 (Plate 1). The east elevation is a mixture of red brick, render and weatherboarding rising to a red tile roof. From south to north, the ground floor is abutted by a small red brick water closet with render above and whitewashed red brickwork adjacent. A 20th century top hung casement window has been inserted in the wall. There is a vertical break in the brickwork beyond which the lower section is rendered and the upper section consists of a vertical wooden post flanked by rough brickwork. The north-most section of the elevation consists of a small garage extension constructed of modern painted brickwork with a 20th century plain door. The foundations of the building were partly revealed and are of flint, red brick rubble and plaster construction. The first floor is rendered and weatherboarded and contains two small top hung casement windows.

4.8 The north elevation consists of a ground floor blocked and plastered garage doorway. The first floor is weatherboarded with a three light casement window. The west elevation is abutted by the white glazed wall of the adjacent structure.

Interior

4.9 The ground floor interior essentially consists of two shops, opened to create one shop space. Number 18 is at a lower level than 19 and appears to circa 1400 in date, consistent with Smiths observations (1992, 1993). A large post of this date with heavy arched brace extends to a middle rail on the east of the shop. It has a VI carpenters assembly mark and evidence of early red paint (Colour Plate 2). The middle rail contains a groove that appears to have been for a window, which indicates that the area to the east was vacant prior to the construction of number 19. A possible floor joist was observed above the shop and later oak waney edged studs have been inserted towards the front of the east elevation. A middle rail, three storey posts and studs are located on the west.

4.10 The ground floor of number 19 contains two binding joists and a middle rail. The chamfered joist to the south has lambs tongue stops, suggesting a late 16th-early 17th century date (Plate 2). The one to the north is a reused timber with redundant mortices and a side lap joint. It rests on a post on the west consisting of two timbers joined with a long splayed scarf with under-squinted butts, which in this usage as a vertical compression joint is not necessarily mediaeval. A large propping post has been inserted below to support the post when the cellar was dug. A chimney stack is located on the east wall with a tile hearth and appears to date to the 19th century.

4.11 The ground floor of the rear unit contains a substantial jowled joist, thought to date to the early 18th century, resting on a post on the east. A stair is located on the west of later 19th century date, but reusing early 18th century balusters from an open

string stair by shortening their bases. These may be from an earlier stair on the site or reused from elsewhere. A red brick wall containing a timber bearer is located on the east and a blocked window is situated on the north.

4.12 Cellars extend below numbers 18 and 19. The cellar below 18 is reached from a stair below a trap in the floor. It has been reworked with modern Fletton brick walls and contains a binding joist with a diminished haunch tenon and simple common joists, appearing to be late 17th century. A brick recessed support for a fireplace above is located on the east wall and appears to be 18th century in date. A doorway has been inserted adjacent to provide access to the adjoining cellar.

4.13 The cellar below number 19 was added after the one below 18 as the roughness of the mortar and brickwork on the west wall indicate that it was pushed through from the other side. A large round flint nodule with a central round hole has been inserted towards the base of the north wall. The joists are of poor quality pine and appear to be late 18th-19th century. A reused binding member and post were observed.

4.14 The first floor of number 18 is reached from the stair in the rear range (Plate 3). Large scantling closely set floor joists were observed below the boards. The east wall has two storey posts and studs, also showing evidence of early red paint. Two large arched braces extend up to the roof truss, one on either side of the east wall. A roughly central post on the north marks the end of 18 and has an attached shaped wooden bracket of late 16th-early 17th century date extending from the top of the post to a low ceiling (Plate 4). A plain 18th-19th century plaster ceiling extends above the room.

4.15 The first floor of number 19 comprises a stair void, front room, and three small back rooms reached from a small corridor. One of the braces described in number 18 is seen on the west wall of the stair and is surrounded by inserted studs. The stair itself is of simple construction and appears to be early 20th century, as are a number of thin boarded and ledged doors leading into the adjacent rooms. The front room has large oak floorboards with a break to the east, possibly the site of an earlier stair trap, and a blocked door to number 20 on the east wall. The back rooms consist of a water closet, kitchenette, and cupboard containing a casement dormer window.

4.16 The rear range contains a tie beam and wall plate with peg holes for braces and/or posts. The construction appears to be of an earlier 17th century date, suggesting the 18th century work seen below is secondary. The roof continues west beyond the tie beam for a gallery. Two jowled posts are located either end of the north elevation. A link piece joins the range to the mediaeval street range of number 18 (Plate 4). The wall between the two buildings has been removed and the rafters of the rear unit caught on an inserted rail carried on a post and propping piece. A stud partition extends along the east. The work appears to date to the later 17th century.

4.17 The roof of number 18 consists of two crown posts, one at the east end and another offset towards the west (Plate 5). Passing braces are located at the east end of the roof and the gable ends are plastered. Sooting on the timbers and plaster indicate that the roof was once open and a fire used in a first floor hall below.

4.18 The roof of number 19 is reached from the stair and is an attic room with two tie beams and raking struts, with a purlin in each pitch (Plate 6). The rest of the roof is plastered and a blocked door is located on the east.

4.19 The roof of the rear range consists of two posts with an arched brace extending west from each.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 As already stated, numbers 18 and 19 are believed to be part of the 15th century Antelope/Tabard Inn, depicted in a painting by Buckler of 1824. The findings generally concord with Smith's interpretation of the building as a front range of the late 14th-early 15th century, all construction being of heavy square section members. The date could in fact be even earlier; back to circa 1350, allowing the passing braces in the east end roof trusses to still be in fashion. The finding of an upper first floor open hall with sooted roof is rare, but made especially credible by the very heavily built jettied first floor, able to carry a heavy hearth. Smith suggests the galleried rear range is mid-17th century. However, it appears to be early rather than mid-17th century, although it may have been altered in the mid-17th century when the link piece was added. Number 19 George Street was also assessed as part of the report and appears to date to the late 16th-early 17th century.

5.2 The buildings as a whole have been extensively reworked throughout the centuries and comprise three different construction phases with many later phases of alteration, including the addition of cellars. This makes it extremely difficult to relate the existing buildings with anything depicted by Buckler. However, Buckler did occasionally make mistakes (see Smith 1992, 9, Fig.16) and may have even misnamed the building. From at least the Victorian period, the buildings have been divided into numbers 18 and 19 and used as a public house and shop, and more recently just as shops.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Solutions (Contracts) Ltd (AS) would like to thank Living Space 3 Limited for commissioning the appraisal.

AS is also pleased to acknowledge the advice of XXX.

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APPENDIX 2 COLOUR PLATES



Plate 1 Front/south elevation taken from the S (DP 2)



Plate 2 Red paint on brace to east of no.18 taken from the SW (DP 3)

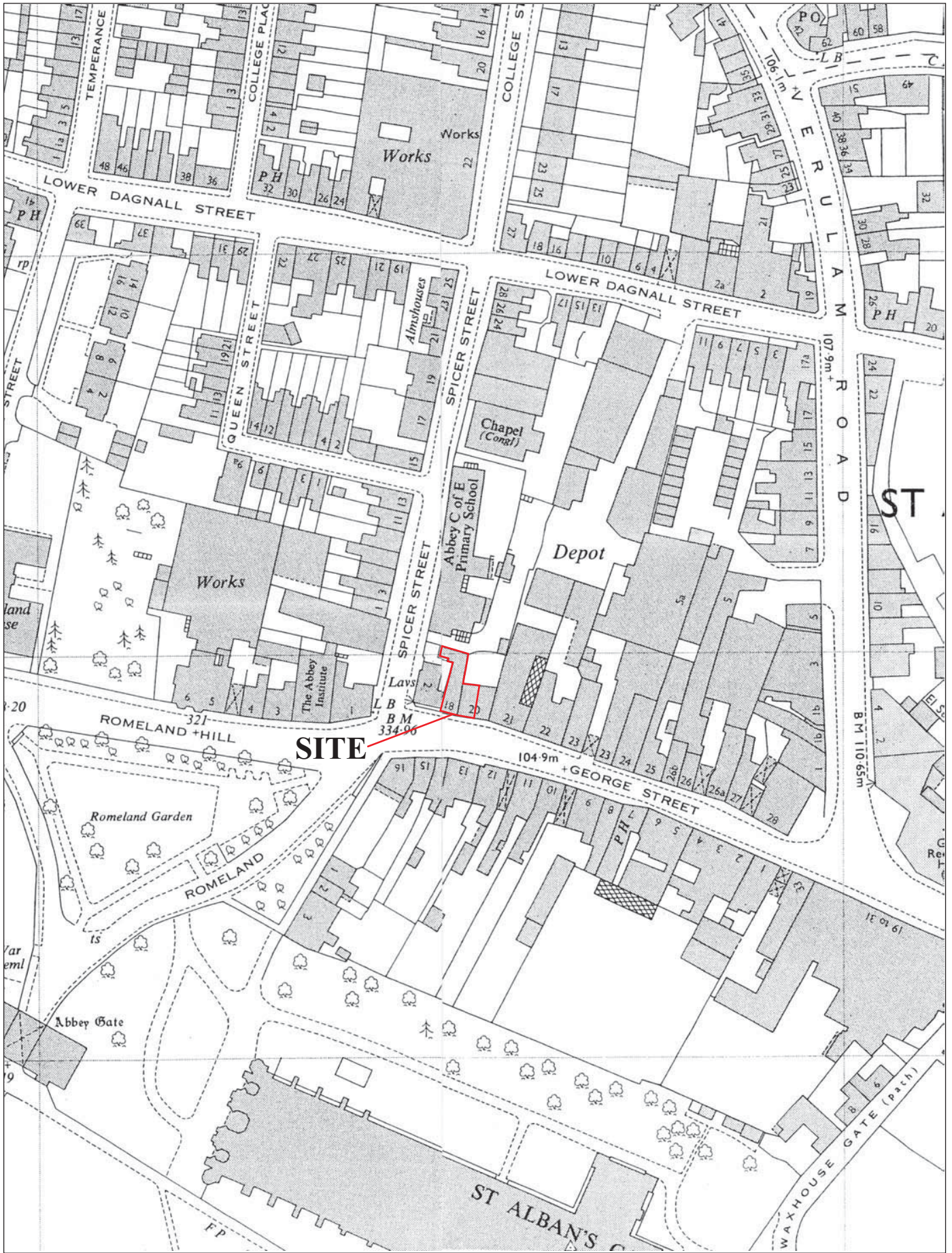


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Fig. 1 Site Location

Scale: 1:25000



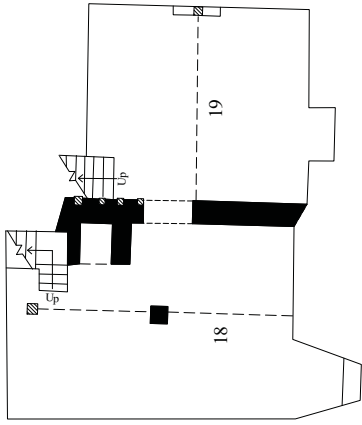
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Fig. 2 Detailed Site Location Plan
 Scale: 1:1250

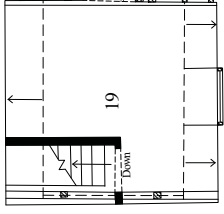


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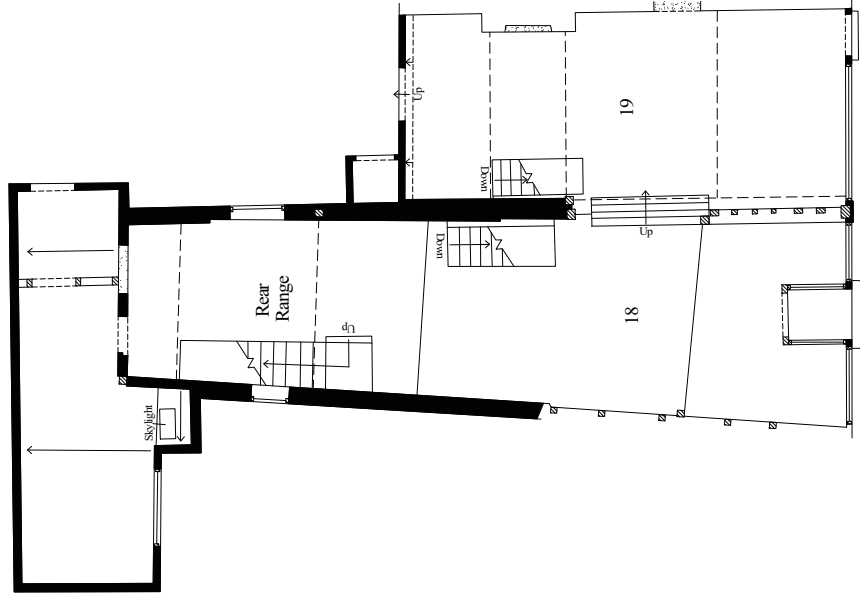
Fig. 3 The Antelope (originally the Tabard Inn),
St Albans, 1824 (Buckler)



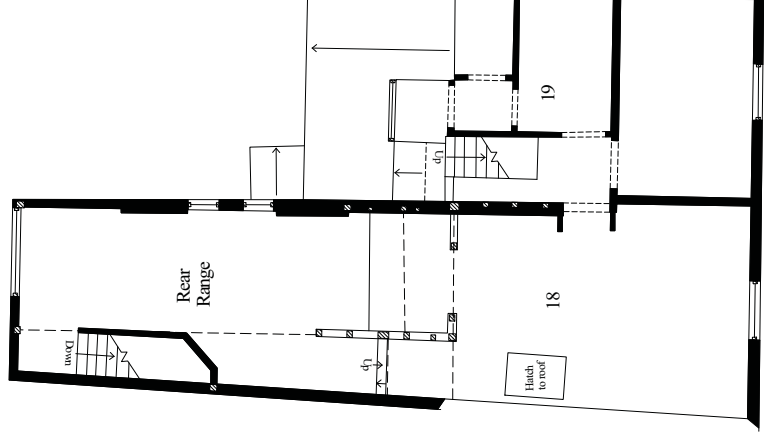
Cellar Plan



Second Floor Plan



Ground Floor Plan



First Floor Plan



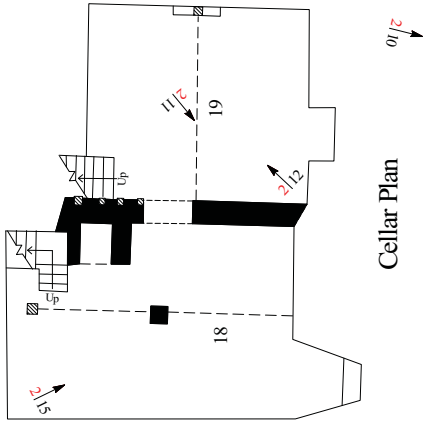


Front (South) Elevation

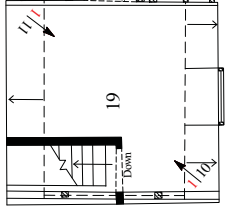


Rear (North) Elevation

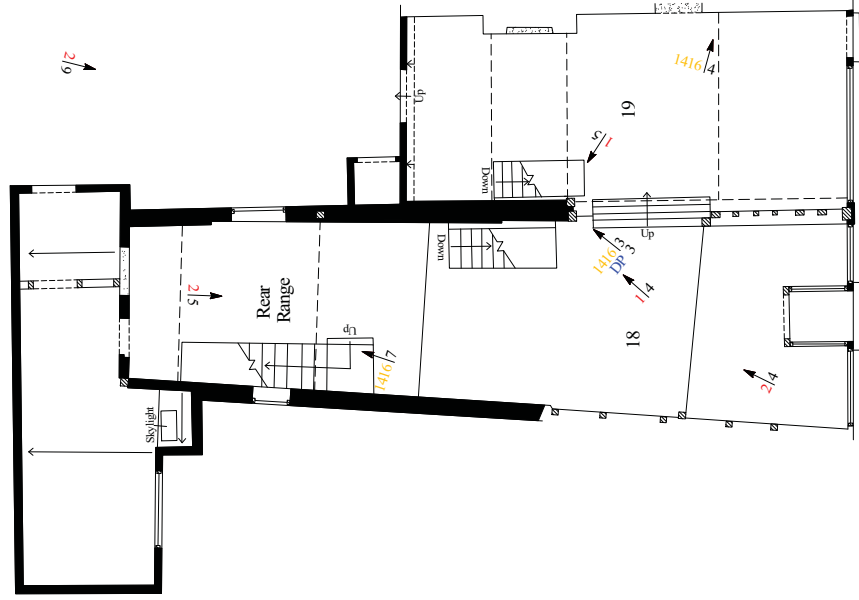




Cellar Plan

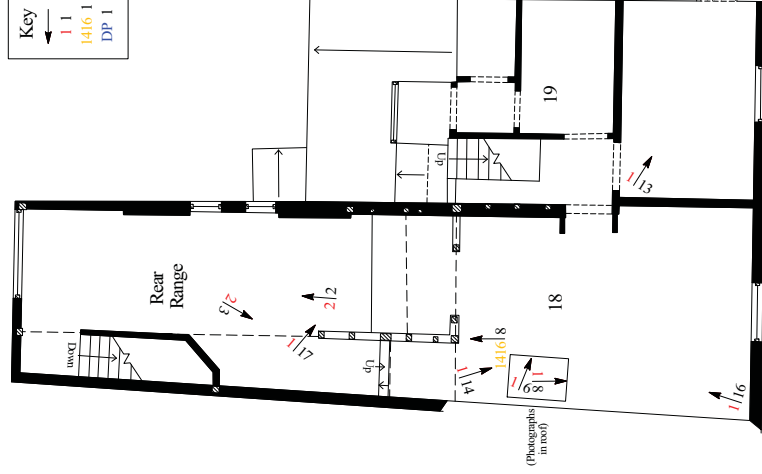


Second Floor Plan



Ground Floor Plan

Key
 Direction of shot
 120mm B&W photograph, film / frame number
 35mm B&W photograph, film / frame number
 Digital photograph / frame number



First Floor Plan



Archaeological Solutions (Contracts) Ltd
Fig. 6 Photographic Location Plans
 Scale: 1:100 at A3