

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 782

**An Archaeological Desk Top Assessment on
Suckling House and Stuart Hall (Cinema City), Norwich**

605 N

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Location: Suckling House and Stuart Hall, Norwich (Cinema City)
Grid Ref: TG 2315 0873
SMR No.: 605 N
Date of work: 18th to 22nd November 2002

Summary

This assessment of proposed development at Cinema City points to the likely impact of those proposals upon the known archaeology of the site. This includes probable Late Saxon and early medieval deposits and features and an early route way up to the Norman castle.

The main focus of this Desk Top Assessment is upon the early 16th century merchant's hall-house, known as Suckling House, thought possibly to incorporate an earlier set of service rooms, but which suffered truncation in 1900 by the creation of the present street in front of Cinema City. The area likely to be lowered in the present proposals appear to represent the Little Parlour and Buttery on the east side of the Hall, and the open gardens beyond.

What lay here before the building of the townhouse and occupation, known from medieval deeds is not clear, but the existence of an early east-to-west through route way (between St Andrew's and Princes Street) and also a Late Saxon industrial area (Pottergate) indicates the probability of significant archaeological deposits of this period surviving on this site. Property boundaries within the block in which Suckling House stands also hint at earlier features here, including St Christopher's church.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological desktop assessment was undertaken in accordance with instructions from Paul Cleworth (Project Director) of Walfords of Liverpool (Project Services Division).

Within the development plans, the present 'option 3' involves a lower basement and lowering of the toilet area by about 2m, to c.7.85m OD. The present foyer and cinema floor is site datum 0.00m is c.9.85m OD.

The report presents the results of research undertaken into the archaeological and historical background of the site and its immediate environs. This was done to identify and summarise the archaeological potential of the site, and provide the information for this summary report. It was intended that the work would be based upon existing information.

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990). The results will enable decisions to be made by the Local Planning Authority with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.

No detailed fieldwork has been carried out in connection with this study, nor has reference been made to Listed Buildings information or other present planning constraints. A watching brief however, is to be undertaken during the excavation of test pits to investigate the nature of the deposits below current floor levels.

2.0 Geology and Topography

The site lies on the steep valley slopes of the River Wensum, to the north, with the ground rising steeply to the south, towards Castle Hill. The ground also slopes quite markedly to the west, into the shallow 'valley' of a former tributary of the main river. The site therefore slopes down to the north, as can be seen in St Andrew's Hill, and to the west, as is seen clearly in Pottergate and St Andrew's Street, which define the 'block' (Fig. 1).

Natural subsoil here is solid chalk, with gravel further up the slope. The pavement lies at about 9.20m OD, but naturally slopes upwards to the south and east, except where truncated and levelled for buildings. Close to the river, at Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) site 340N, the natural chalk subsoil was reached at about 0.00m OD, indicating a dramatic fall in the underlying natural slope into the river valley.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The immediate area has seen five main phases of activity:

- 1 Late Saxon occupation along the street frontages of Pottergate, St Andrew's Street and Princes Street.
- 2 Early medieval (possibly Norman) lanes across the block.
- 3 Late medieval building of Suckling House.
- 4 1900. New street laid out.
- 5 1925. Stuart Hall built by Boardman (with change of use to cinema 1978).

The Early Town

The city of Norwich was one of the foremost towns in Late Saxon and Norman England; by the early 10th century it had acquired burghal status, with its own mint, and sets of defences on both sides of the river. With some fifty churches by 1066, it also gained a castle (c.1067), a new market place and church (St Peter Mancroft) and a cathedral by the end of the 11th century. Norwich was an important Anglo-Saxon trading port (a *wic*) and the River Wensum has clearly influenced and, in part, determined the character and course of its growth throughout its long history.

Recent excavations and other research suggest that the Middle Saxon origins of the town lay north of the river. It is likely that the Late Saxon town represents an amalgamation of several pre-existing small settlements originating in the Middle Saxon period (c.650-850), strung out along the river valley.

Although its early origins lay north of the River Wensum, the focus of the Late Anglo-Saxon town probably lay south of the river, around the great market-place at Tombland and the long north-to-south street (what has become King Street and Magdalen Street) that linked the two parts of the town. The Late Saxon town had ramparts, or a defensive bank, on the north side of the river and probably a corresponding set of defences on the south as well. Pottergate and St Andrew's Street were important east-to-west streets that continued to the west, beyond the Late Saxon town defences, and were significant in Late Saxon suburban expansion.

Possible Late Saxon Defences

The course of these defences is not precisely known, but any defensive works enclosing the Late Saxon town probably lay just west of St Andrew's church, some way west of the present site, taking advantage of the local topography and slopes in this area. Cinema City therefore lies within the north-west part of the Late Saxon town on the south bank of the river, a little inside the Late Saxon defences and close to a major east-to-west street (St Andrew's Street).

The church of St Andrew was probably one of the churches mentioned in Domesday Book (although its surviving fabric is medieval). The date of St Christopher's church (now lost) is unknown, it existed in 1200 but it may have had much earlier origins. Its location was to the north-east, almost certainly on Princes Street, not under Suckling House, as depicted by the OS map of 1885 (Fig. 9).

The Modern Street

It should be noted that the present street outside Cinema City is modern, created in 1900 to allow for the passage of trams. Until then, St Andrew's Street continued into Princes Street, as can be seen from maps and 19th century photographs. The maps also show however, that the block was crossed by three property boundaries, two of which represent the lines of ancient lanes, north-south and east-west, the latter of which was followed by the new east-to-west street laid out in 1900 (Fig. 2).

Another lane, *Gropecunte Lane*, existed by 1300 and ran north-to-south across the block and may have been the remnant of some broader route (whose other side is represented by the other north-to-south line).

Suckling House

Suckling House is an early 16th century merchant's hall-house, as the front indicates, since there is a screens passage doorway set to the right. The hall has a former bay window to the south (rebuilt in 1925). A little earlier than the hall itself, perhaps, are the service rooms to the west located along St Andrew's Hill; they are vaulted in three bays (formerly more). The extensions to Suckling House to the east (Stuart Hall) were by Boardman 1925. Conversion to a cinema occurred in 1978. Suckling House had been scheduled in 1990 but was taken off the scheduled monument list in 1997.

In two important articles, the antiquarian FR Beecheno described Suckling House as it was in 1916 (Beecheno 1917; 1920) and outlined the history of the building and its owners, among whom was Robert Suckling, 1520-1590, one time mayor of Norwich.

Beecheno noted the red brick front to the west, office of George Harman (wine merchant), with the great hall to the east of this. A floor was put in when the wine vaults were constructed (p.197). Beecheno also recorded that on the south side was a large decorated window, blocked up, whilst at the west end was an arched doorway to another vaulted bay, now gone (also blocked) and partly under the floor of the wine vaults. Another blocked opening existed at this end. On the north side and seen only from outside was a decorated stone doorway (he said this was the original doorway into the Hall) with the remains of a Perpendicular porch of timber. Also visible was a blocked arched window.

The first mention of the site was in 1285, when it was two separate properties. The northern part included the site of the City Arms public house [swept away in 1900]. In 1324-6, it was back in single ownership. In 1414 the north part was sold, with a vault with stone arches below [*i.e.* the City Arms building]. Beecheno also noted that the City Arms and the adjoining house to the east had vaults (p.215-6).

In 1313 a common lane [*Gropecunte Lane*] lay to the east of the south part. By 1338 part of the common lane was enclosed within the curtilage, for which rent was paid to the town. The common lane was still a distinct entity in 1505 and beyond, being the subject of a dispute in 1505 and 1584-5, and 1626.

In 1510 a tenement 'lately devastated and now newly built' lay to the south of Sucklings House.

St Christopher's church once stood on Princes Street, with its churchyard behind, to the south. The church of St Christopher was burnt down in the first half of the 13th century and its parish amalgamated with St Andrew by 1296. The east-to-west lane (mentioned above) was also in existence in the early 1300s, and may represent the southern boundary of the churchyard. Like the other common lane, it was being rented out in the late 1400s; probably the garden to the west was extended and made more private.

Even though the north part of Suckling House, including the City Arms public house, was demolished in 1900, an inventory of 1589 has allowed an interpretative reconstruction by R Smith (1997) (Fig. 3). This shows the hall away from the street, behind service rooms to the north and west. Smith concluded that the hall dates from the 15th century, although the service rooms to the west may be a little earlier, and were altered in the 18th century. The north wall of the hall [now facing the street] contained a blocked window and screens passage door.

The general arrangement of a hall-range behind a vaulted street range and internal courtyard, with a further courtyard beyond, has a local parallel in Strangers Hall, a little further to the west in St Andrew's Street.

Suckling House: Location

Suckling House stands near the centre of the medieval town, overshadowed by the great castle on the hill to the south and in turn, overlooking the slope to the river and the friary (Blackfriars) opposite. To the east lies Tombland, the site of the Saxon market, and the Norman cathedral, built within the Late Saxon town.

As is best seen on the OS map of 1885, Suckling House lies between two important east-to-west streets: St Andrew's Street and Pottergate, at least Late Saxon in origin.

Between St Andrew's and Princes Street was the main east-to-west route across the Late Saxon town, crossing the river at Bishops Bridge (and thought to be of Roman origin: SMR 5244). The number of churches along its length, including St Andrew's church (west), and St Christopher's church (east), attest the importance of this street in the Late Saxon and medieval period, before the centre of the town shifted to the new Norman castle and market.

Pottergate had fewer churches along its length and appears to have been, as its name suggests, an industrial street. Late Saxon kilns have been recorded on this street in the next block to the west (SMR Site 424).

The block is defined to the east by Redwell Street, possibly also of Late Saxon origin, though this must remain uncertain.

As noted above, *Gropecunte Lane* existed by 1300 and may have been in origin a route from the castle bailey northwards via the friary site and Elm Hill to the river (see Priestley 1983, fig. 2). The 'bulge' of London Street represents the line of the bailey ditch and it may represent the line of an approach road from the river, though this must be conjectural. Both *Gropecunte Lane* and the east-to-west lane are known

from medieval documents, being rented out to adjacent property owners by the city. These lanes thus became enclosed within the urban fabric but remained as boundaries, surviving until modern times (Kirkpatrick 1910,58-60).

St Andrew's Hill

In contrast to *Gropecunte Lane*, St Andrew's Hill is not recorded as such until the 1700s (Sandred and Lindstrom 1989, 133); *St Andrew's Steps* are recorded about then (at the top end of the hill) but a formal way appears to have been late. An origin as an access way to the buildings on the hill seems likely. Some buildings on the hill have origins in the 16th century, e.g. London Tavern at the SE corner (SMR Site 695) and the Suckling House frontages on St Andrew's Hill. It is likely that St Andrew's Hill became more necessary and formalised as *Gropecunte Lane* became closed as a passageway.

4.0 Documentary Evidence

Major documentary evidence for the site and its vicinity comes from the Enrolled Deeds for Norwich, especially for the period 1285-1340, by which time St Andrew's parish was well-developed. The Deeds are in effect a land register covering the period from the height of medieval expansion to the Black Death. From the work done on reconstructing the ownership of land and tenancies recorded in the Enrolled Deeds, it is possible to say that this area was well-developed by the middle ages.

The Enrolled Deeds mention the two alleys or routes which help define the block in which Suckling House lies: the road leading to the church of St Andrew, and *Gropecunte Lane*, attested from the early 1300s (Sandred and Lindstrom 1989, 122).

East of *Gropecunte Lane* lay the parish of St Christopher (until amalgamated with St Andrew by 1296. To the north ran St Andrew (Wymer) Street, to the south Pottergate and London Street (the lane around the Castle ditch). The former cemetery of St Christopher lay next to Princes Street, with an east-to-west lane to the south, surviving as property boundaries and then the line of the new street of 1900.

As one might expect of this central area, the Deeds show that it was then intensively occupied with messuages held by various individuals, including William de Rollesby in the late 1200s (whose family held much of this block and parts of that to the west), and John King, rector of St Andrew's church in the mid-1300s.

Photographic Evidence

Early photographs show the City Arms public house and adjoining building to the east, both jettied buildings (although rendered or encased in brick at a later date). The exterior aspect of these two buildings, with their high fronts and later windows, somewhat masks the character of the buildings underneath.

Suckling House as it was before the new street was laid out in 1900 is recorded in several photographs, showing the north front from across the street and the east front from the west, in St Andrew's Street. A photograph of Princes Street from the west shows the west side of the City Arms, which was jettied on two floors and on both sides. There are indications of a cellar beneath, that is, the vault mentioned in early deeds (Beecheno 1917).

5.0 Cartographic Evidence

Norwich is provided with a good series of maps, beginning in the mid-16th century, which illustrate the growth of the town and the character of the occupied area. By Domesday (1086), the Late Saxon town had expanded westwards along St Andrew's Street (with its several churches) and Pottergate (an early industrial street). As noted, there is also some evidence that St Andrew's Street has its origins as a Roman east-to-west route across the river at Bishop's Bridge.

The maps show that the whole block was built over to a large extent by the late middle ages, though with gardens and courtyards behind the frontages.

The maps

- 1558: Cunningham's plan of 1558, copied by Hoefnagle 1581, shows the city within its walls with the river flowing through it, and has no detail for the present site.
- 1696: Thomas Cleer's map of 1696, as reproduced by Kirkpatrick (Fig. 4) is very schematic, but shows the two lanes across the block: 105 *Gropecunte Lane*, which continued into Elm Hill, 106 the east-to-west lane. He also indicates Andrew's Hill No 73 as a thoroughfare or 'street'.
- 1723: Kirkpatrick's map of 1723 (Fig. 5) (an inset in the *North East Prospect of Norwich*) shows the 'kink' in the street frontage clearly, where the east-to-west lane emerges onto St Andrew's Street (best seen on the OS map of 1885).
- 1746: Blomefield's map of 1746 (Fig. 6) was based on Cleer, but shows St Christopher's church as standing (though gone for 500 years) and *Gropecunte Lane* (misplaced).
- 1766: Samuel King's map of 1766 (Fig. 7) is too schematic to be of much use; it shows the entrance to the east-to-west lane.
- 1789: Anthony Hochstetter's map of 1789 (Fig. 8) depicts clearly and in detail the buildings then existing, with open gardens at the centre of the block, and also shows St Andrew's Hill as part of '*Black Friars Street*'.
- The Ordnance Survey 1:1250 survey of 1885 (Fig. 9) shows the situation in the late 19th century as little changed from Hochstetter's time, although just a few years later, in 1900, the block was bisected on the line of the east-to-west lane to allow the passage of trams.
- 1924: Boardman's plan of the basement of Stuart Hall depicts a wide perimeter duct.

6.0 Archaeological Observations

There have been very few archaeological observations within the block, with little opportunity for observations.

- SMR 24: Late Saxon pottery wasters suggest a kiln close by.
- SMR 114: 3-7 Redwell Street. Medieval pottery found in building work.
- SMR 115 (5-7 St Andrew's Hill): salvage excavation of cesspits and well. Deep refuse pit. Medieval pottery and a single sherd of Late Saxon pottery.
- SMR 424: Late Saxon pottery kilns discovered.
- SMR 556 (St Christopher's church): In built between 1190 and 1200, but burnt down between 1216 and 1256. Stood on Princes Street with churchyard to the south, probably. NB: It is unlikely that it stood on the Suckling House site, as marked by the OS map of 1885.
- SMR 603: 59 London Street. 14th century brick vault.
- SMR 605 (Suckling House): Medieval pottery recorded from this location.
- SMR 607 (The Bridewell): Early 15th century merchant's townhouse, over earlier undercroft.
- SMR 695: 1 St Andrew's Hill. 16th century building.

7.0 The Site Today

As noted above, the modern site has seen five main phases of activity:

- i. Late Saxon activity along the former street frontage (between St Andrews and Princes Street) is now mostly 'lost' under the new street of 1900 and existing Princes Street frontages.
- ii. Early medieval routes (north-to-south and east-to-west) were established across the block, possibly to allow access to the castle bailey.
- iii. Suckling House was built, facing north to St Andrews Street, with internal courtyards to south and north of the hall range.
- iv. 1900. A new street was laid out, destroying the north part of the merchant's house and exposing the north wall of the hall to view from the street.
- v. 1925. The Norwich architect Boardman builds Stuart Hall to the east of Suckling House and it is given to the City. The City establishes a cinema inside the complex.

The work by Boardman in the 1920s had a further impact upon the site as can be seen from his drawings, deposited in the Norfolk Record Office (NRO BR/2/71/13; BR 35/2/86; BR 35/3/446/9). In particular, these show the below-ground levels, and include the duct (Fig. 10) which ran around all four sides of the main hall and under the southern end of the platform which is at the east end of the hall ['Walking way 5ft-6ft deep and 3ft wide... DRG No 1, BR 35/2/86/2/23].

Besides that, these drawings also show the boiler room below the foyer or 'crush hall', to the same depth as the duct and the full extent of the foyer (BR

35/2/71/13/23), and the toilets adjacent (BR 35/2/71/13/23). [NB: Fig. 10 is in effect a précis of Boardman 1925 DRG 9124 BR 35/2//86/2].

The proposals (Fig. 10) involve the removal of up to 2m from the present floor level (about 1.3m below the floor of the Hall), therefore cutting into the 'natural' slope by over 2m at the east end of the works. Even with modern make-up above significant archaeological deposits, this new level will probably be within those deposits, however the perimeter duct constructed by Boardman will have compromised comprehensive survival of any archaeological sequence. The proposed new basement level will be equivalent to the base of Boardman's duct and boiler room/toilet area.

It is assumed that vaults lie beneath the City Arms public house and the adjacent house (both lost in 1900) and not beneath the Hall, Little Parlour or Buttery (the last two now the boiler room). The Ordnance Survey places the church of St Christopher below Suckling House. There is no evidence that it stood on Princes Street other than as mapped by the OS, shown close to St Andrew's church (Campbell 1975), but the possibility that the church actually stood where shown cannot be entirely ruled out.

8.0 Conclusions

The archaeological potential of this site lies in possible Late Saxon and early medieval deposits and features to the rear of the contemporary street frontage. Also, in recording traces of early route ways here. Later deposits may relate to horticultural activity at the east end of the site, within the area of the garden to Suckling House and it is possible that constructional details of Suckling House may be recovered. It should be noted however, that the existing basemented area (including toilets) along with the duct around the perimeter of the building will have affected the survival of these deposits, largely restricting them to the central part of the hall. Observations made during the forthcoming watching brief will provide information regarding the quality and character of any archaeological remains and deposits below the current structure.

Acknowledgements

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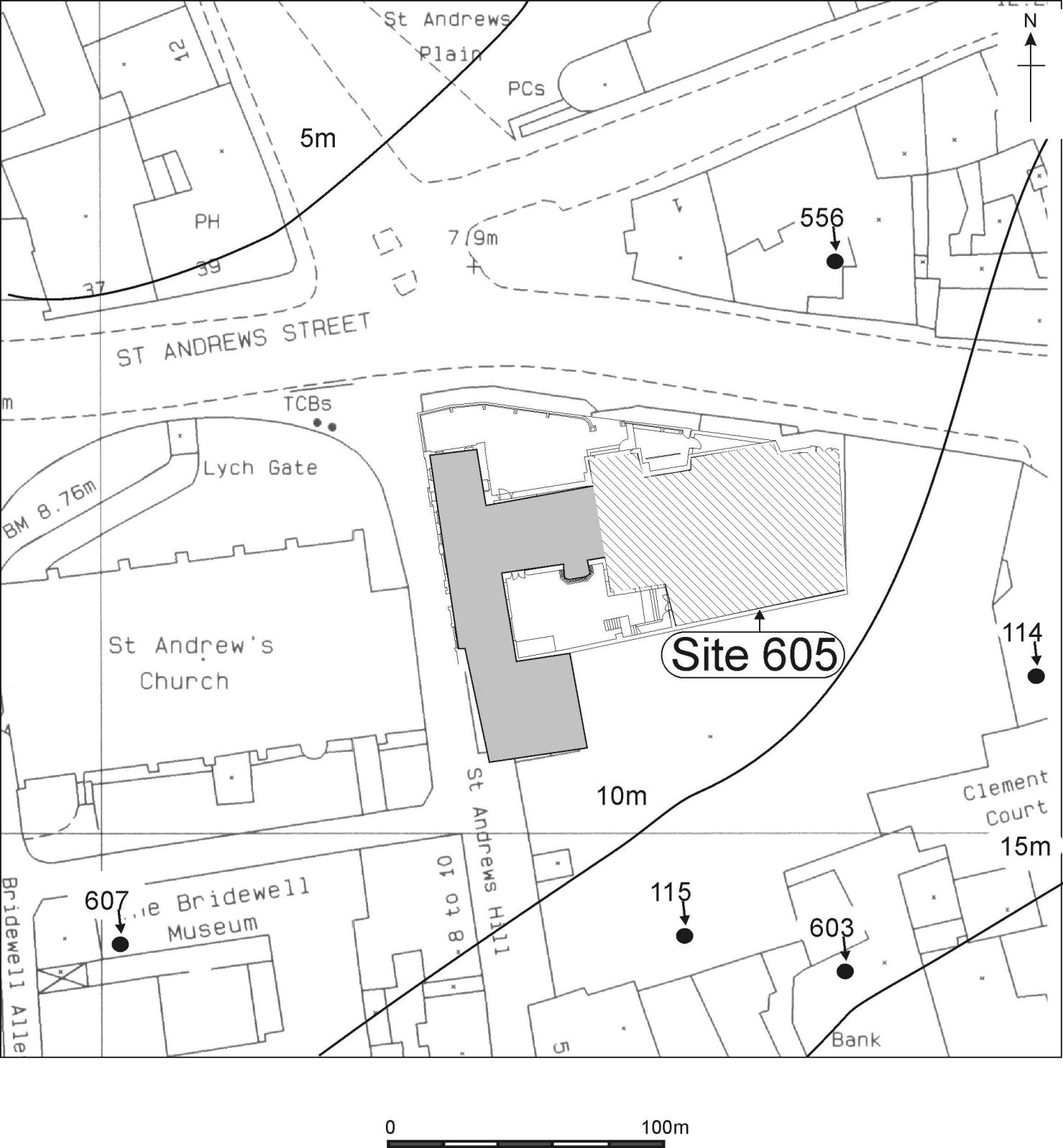


Figure 1. Site Location, showing the present Suckling House and Stuart Hall (the area of the proposed floor reduction hatched). Selected SMR sites marked. Scale 1:500

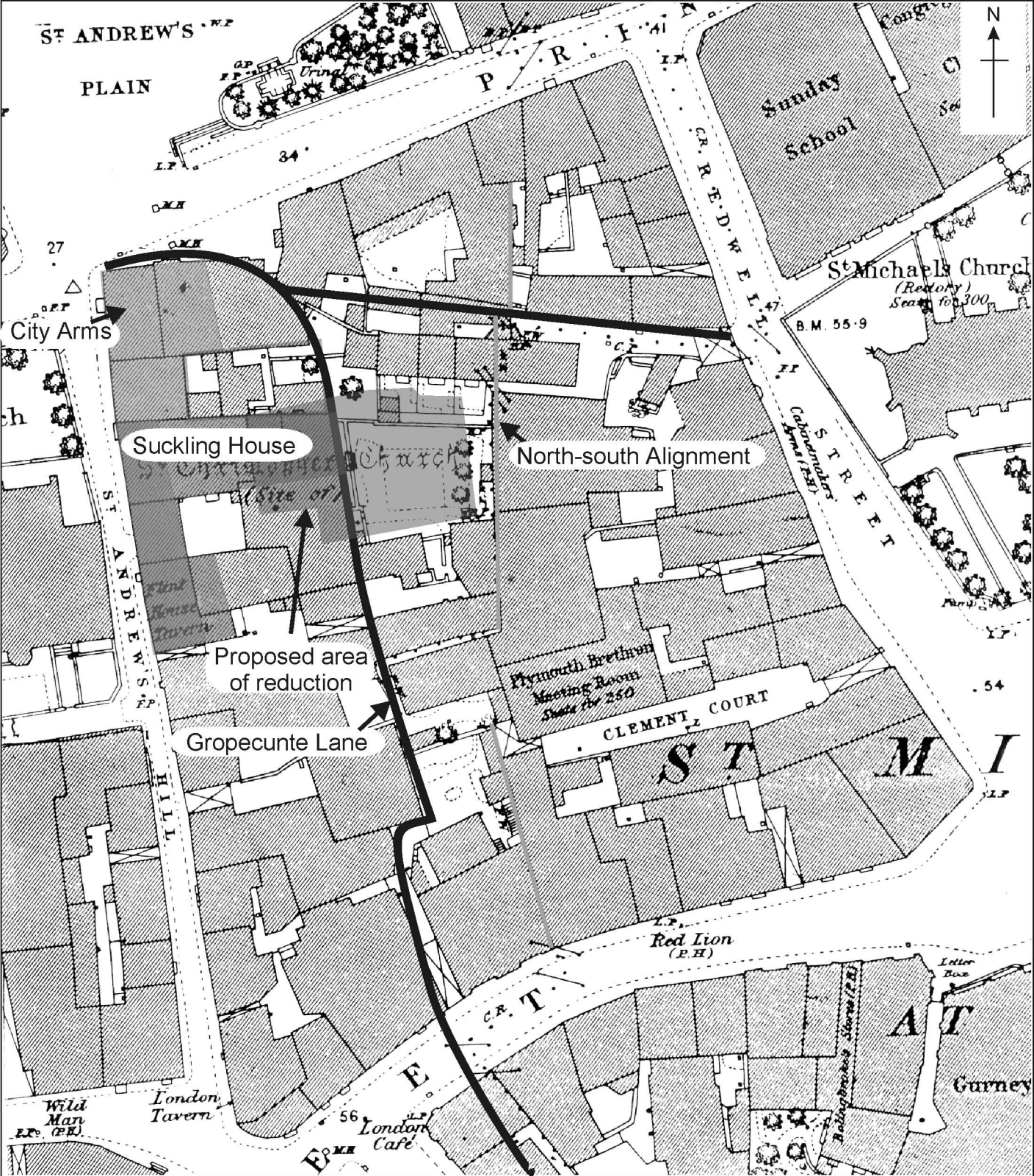
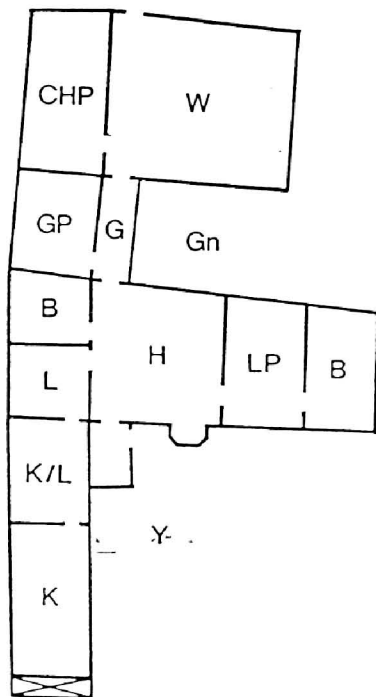


Figure 2. Ordnance Survey 25" Map of 1883, showing the present Suckling House, Gropecunte Lane, an early north to south alignment, and the area of the proposed floor reduction. Not to scale



CHP Counting House Parlour
W Warehouse
GP Great Parlour
G Gallery
Gn Garden
B Buttery
H Hall
LP Little Parlour
L Larder
K Kitchen
Y Yard

Figure 3. Interpretative Plan of Suckling House (Smith 1997).
Not to scale

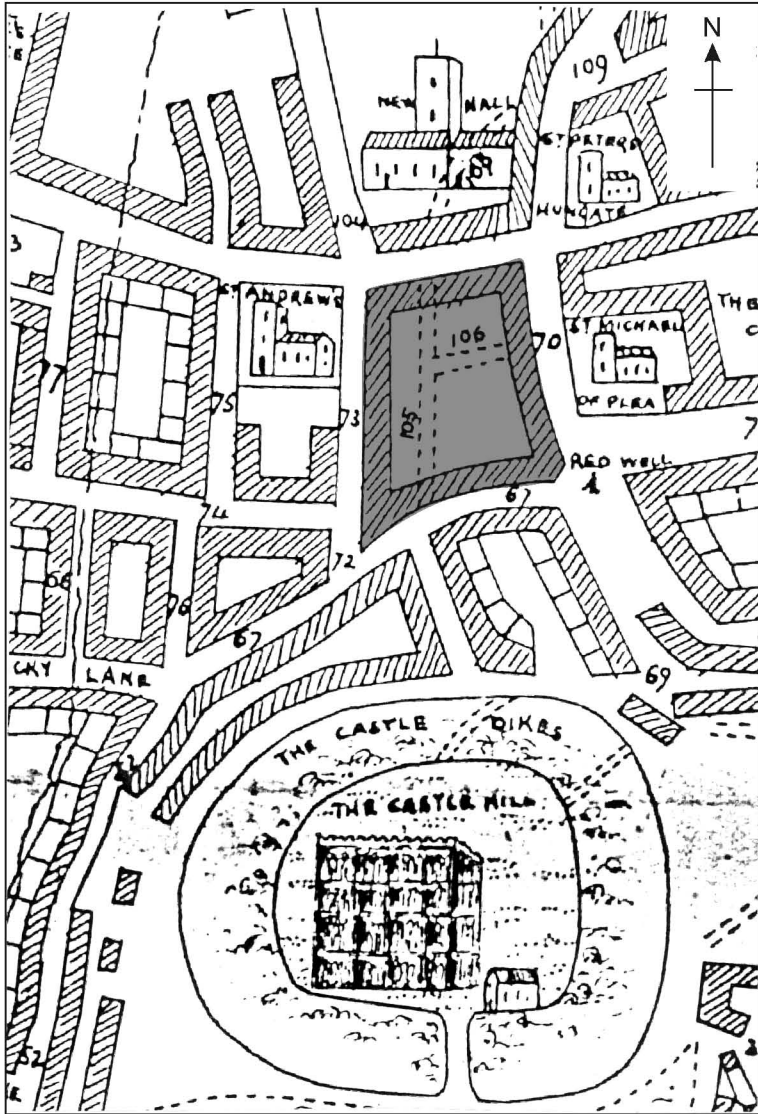


Figure 4. Cleer's Map of 1696 (Kirkpatrick's reproduction), showing the Pottergate/St Andrew's Street block and lanes.
Not to Scale



Figure 5. Kirkpatrick's Map of 1723. Not to scale

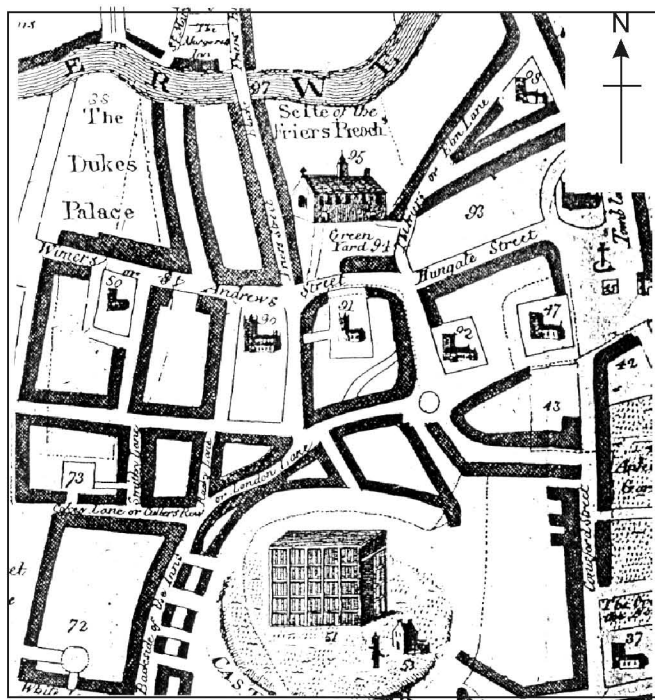


Figure 6. F Blomefield's Map of 1746, showing St Christopher's church. Not to scale

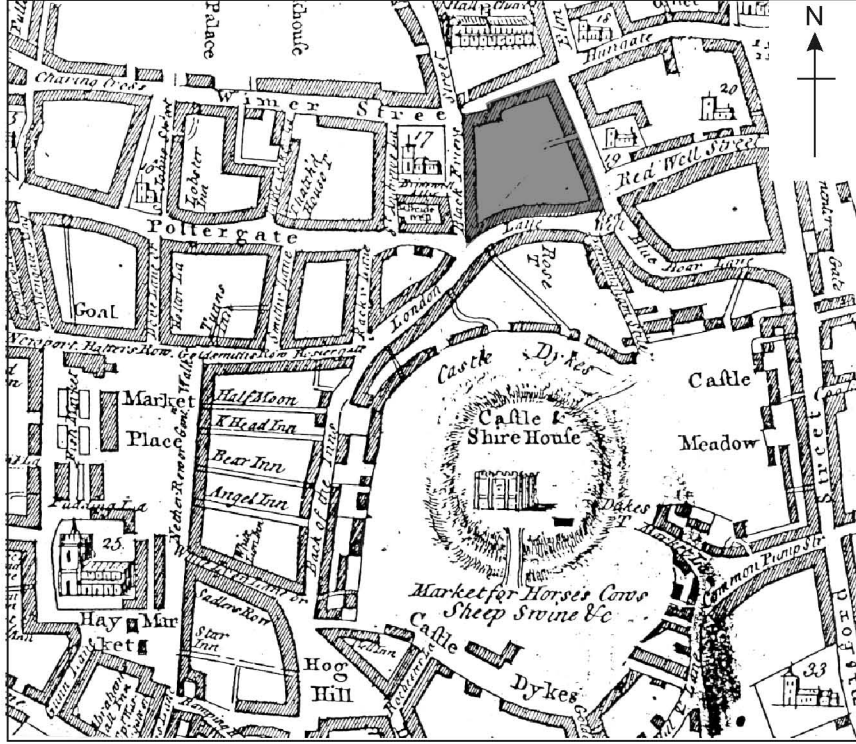


Figure 7. S King's Map of 1766 (detail), showing Pottergate/St Andrew's Street block. Not to scale

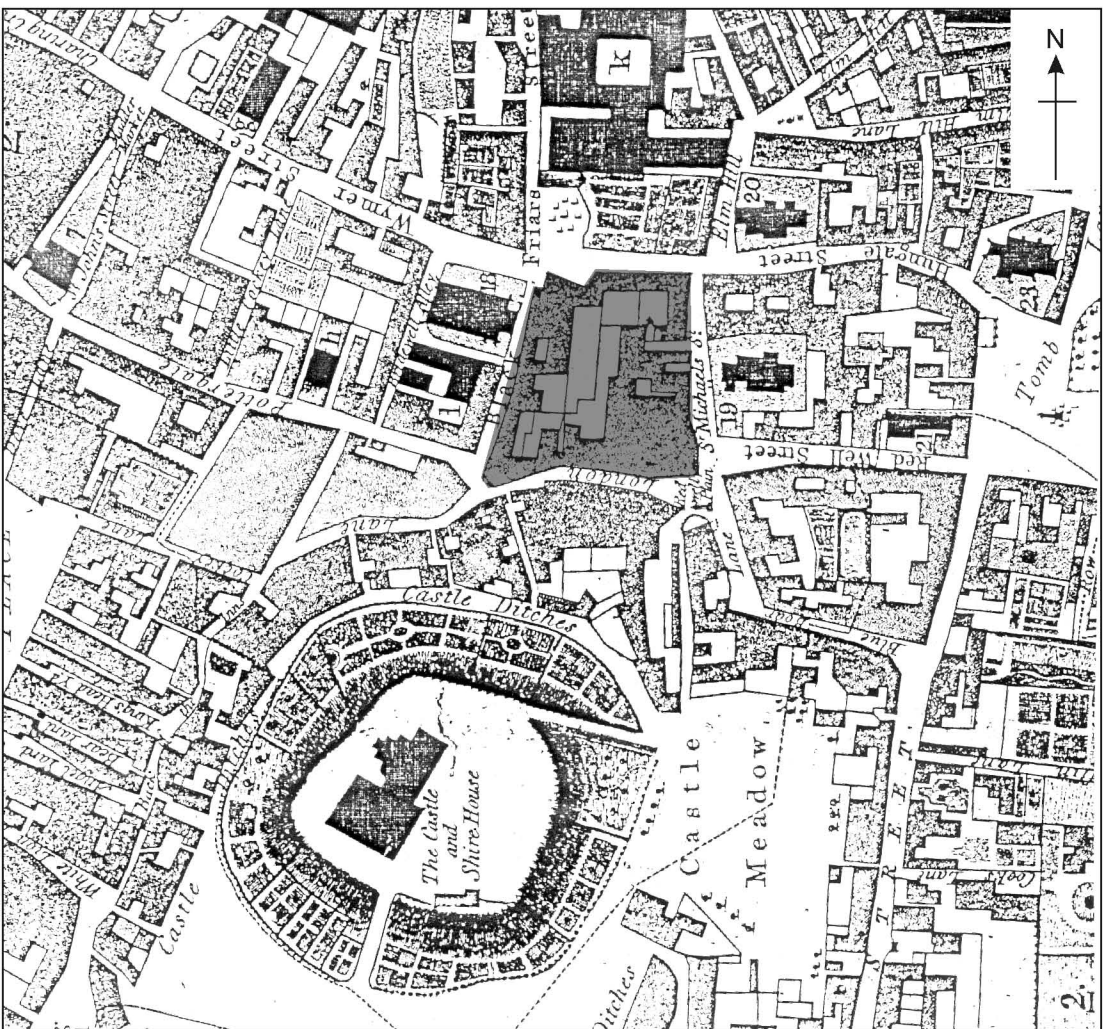


Figure 8. Hochstetter's Map of 1789 (detail), showing Pottergate/St Andrew's Street block. Not to scale

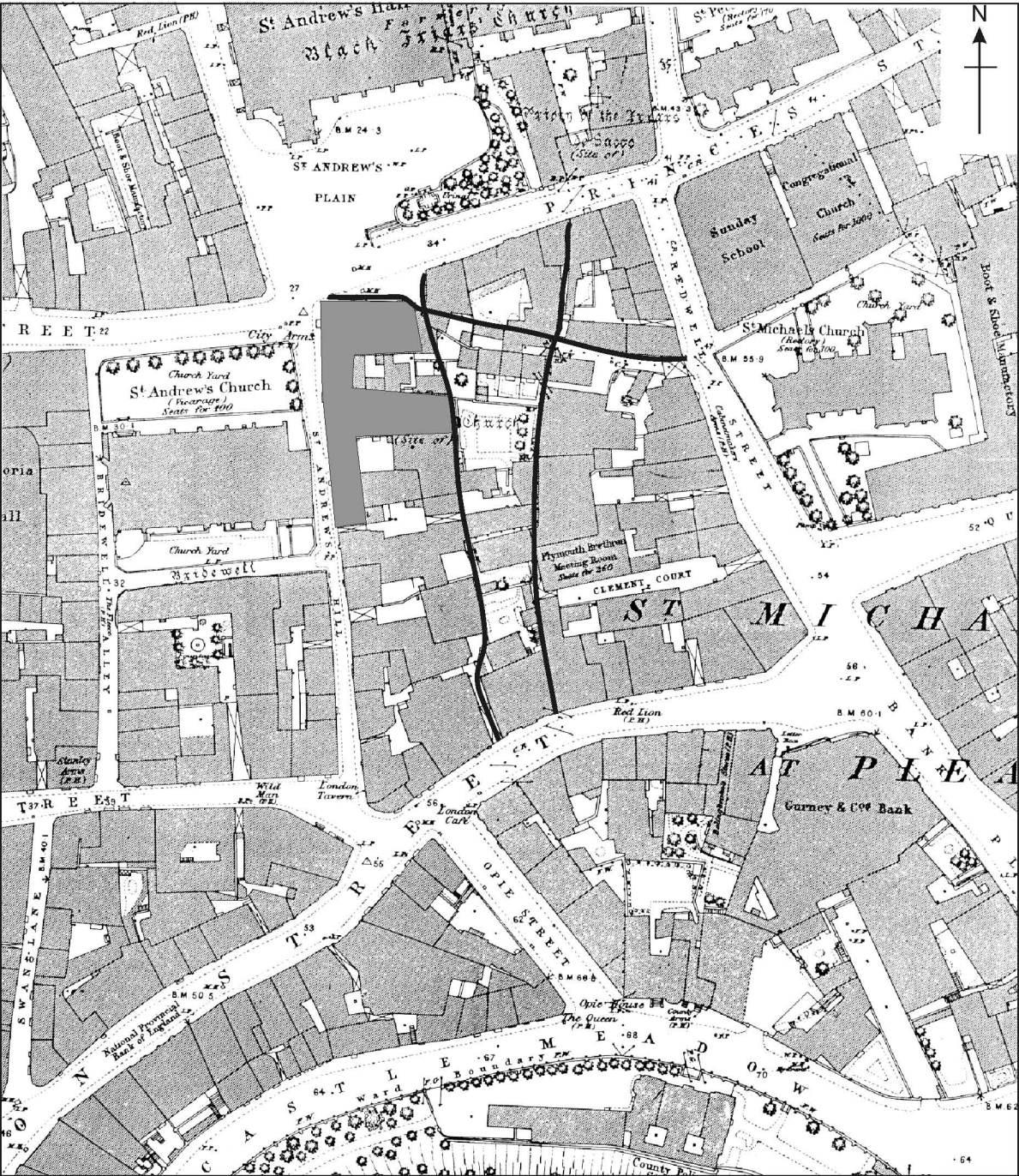
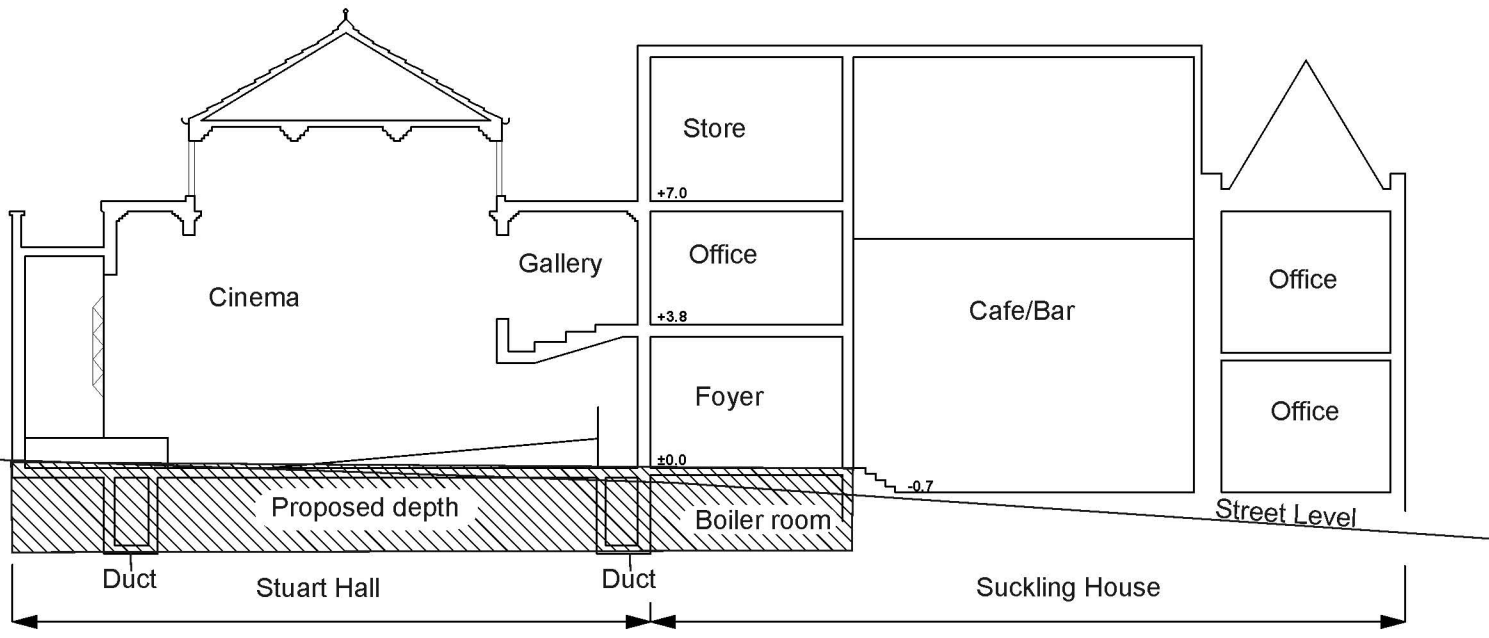


Figure 9. Ordnance Survey 25" Map of 1885, showing Suckling House and possible early lanes. Not to scale

E

W



Section AA

South Facing Section



Figure 10. East-to-West Section, showing the 'natural' slope and the likely impact upon existing deposits. Scale 1:200