

HERITAGE NETWORK



JESSAMINE HOUSE
15 High Street
Ashwell, Hertfordshire

HN851

HISTORIC BUILDING
RECORD &
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

JESSAMINE HOUSE,
15 High Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire.

Project Ref: HN851
LPA Planning ref: 09/01603/1LB

Historic Building Record & Archaeological Monitoring

Prepared on behalf of Mr R Willson

by

Helen Ashworth BA (Hons) AIfA

Report no.621

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Contents

	Summary.....	Page i
Section 1	Introduction.....	Page 1
Section 2	Historic Background	Page 2
Section 3	Historic Building Record.....	Page 4
Section 4	Archaeological Monitoring.....	Page 6
Section 5	Discussion	Page 7
Section 6	Sources Consulted	Page 8
Section 7	Illustrations	following Page 10
Appendix	OASIS summary sheet.....	Page 11

The cover photograph shows the front elevation of Jessamine House, looking S

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Greg Jones and David Hillelson. The report was edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to Peter Smith, builder; Stuart Morris, Morris & Weatherall, architects; Andy Instone, Historic Environment Unit, Hertfordshire County Council; the staff of Hertfordshire Archives; and Keith Matthews, Archaeology Officer, North Hertfordshire District Council, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	15 High Street, Ashwell, Baldock, Hertfordshire, SG7 5NL		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	North Hertfordshire
Village/town:	Ashwell	Parish:	Ashwell
Planning reference:	09/01603/1LB	NGR:	TL 27000 39750
Client name and address:	R. Willson, Hinwick House, Hinwick, Wellingborough, NN29 7JE		
Nature of work:	Refurbishment and conversion to residential use	Previous use:	Offices
Site Status:	Listed building	Reason for investigation:	Direction of LPA (PPG16)
Position in planning process:	After full determination	Project brief originator:	Local Authority
Size of affected area:	88m ²	Size of area investigated:	88m ²
Site code:	HN851	Other reference:	
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Project type, methods etc...	Historic Building Record; Archaeological Monitoring	Archive recipient:	Hertfordshire Archives (Building Record); North Herts Museums (Monitoring Record).
Start of work:	08/02/2010	Finish of work:	17/03/2010
Related HER nos:	n/a	Periods represented:	Post-Medieval
OASIS UID:	heritage1-72227	Significant finds:	None
Monument types:	Listed building		
Physical archive:	n/a		
Previous summaries/reports:	n/a		

Synopsis:

In response to a condition on the planning consent granted for refurbishment of number 15 High Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, the Heritage Network was commissioned by the owner to create a record of the changes made to the ground floor rear of the building, and to monitor the groundworks associated with the project. The present site is a Grade II* listed building of around 1700. An L-shaped wing, which extended to the east, was demolished between 1924 and 1937.

The present works involved remodelling window and door openings at the rear of the building, following the demolition of a modern extension, and on its eastern side; the removal of internal walls; and the excavation of service trenches both inside and outside. These works had been largely completed before Heritage Network's involvement with the project.

No new information concerning the history of the building was obtained in the course of the present project, and no below ground archaeological features, deposits or finds were encountered.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared at the request of *Mr R Willson*, as a part of a programme of archaeological works carried out in association with the refurbishment of a Grade II* listed building at 15 High Street, Ashwell, Baldock, Hertfordshire.

1.2 The investigation was a requirement of the planning consent granted by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) (ref. 09/01603/1LB), under the provisions set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note No.16 (PPG16) on Archaeology and Planning (DoE 1990). The extent of the work was defined in correspondence from the Historic Environment Unit (HEU) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as archaeological advisers to NHDC (ref. AI/009/1603-1).

1.3 The site is located in the historic core of Ashwell, centred on NGR TL 27000 39750. The house, known as Jessamine House, is situated on the southern side of the High Street and is bounded by the Post Office to the west and a residential property called The Gables to the east. To the south of the property is a yard area adjacent to a converted barn. The existing building is dated to the 17th century and is Grade II* listed.

1.4 The site lies within Area of Archaeological Significance no. 142 as identified on the District Local Plan, close to the springs of the River Rhee. The Historic Environment Record (HER) notes that the village of Ashwell is recorded in the Domesday Book. It is known to have been a substantial medieval settlement and borough. In addition, Saxon finds have been uncovered nearby. This is particularly significant as finds from this period are rare in Hertfordshire. Extensive Roman activity is known in the vicinity, and a number of cropmarks have been identified close to the village.

1.5 The present study area comprises a single building with an open yard to the rear, the former site of a modern extension. The development proposed alterations to the ground floor rear interior of the building, including the replacement of doors and windows. In addition there were various associated excavations for services.

1.6 Work had already been undertaken prior to the Heritage Network's involvement with the project. These included the excavation of drainage trenches, both inside and outside the building, the removal of interior partitions and the remodelling of the window and door openings. A rear extension had already been removed as part of a separate Listed Building Consent.

1.7 The aim of the historic building monitoring has been to make a record of alterations and additions to the fabric of the standing structure, and to undertake additional research, as necessary, to place the building in its local and regional archaeological and historical context. It was considered that such recording had the potential to contribute to an understanding of the history of the building and of settlement in Ashwell in the post-medieval period.

1.8 The aim of the archaeological monitoring has been to investigate the presence of any archaeological remains that might be threatened by the development, to ensure the preservation in situ of such remains where practically possible, their preservation by record where not, and to provide a local and regional, archaeological and historical context for them, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Brown and Glazebrook 2000). It was considered that such recording had the potential to contribute to an understanding of the origins and development of settlement in Ashwell village.

2. Historic Background

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The site lies on a north facing slope at approximately 55m AOD on the southern side of High Street. It is located in the core of the medieval village of Ashwell and close to the springs of the River Rhee.

2.2 Locally the soils belong to the Upton 1 Association (342a), described as *Shallow, well drained calcareous silty soils over chalk. Mainly on moderately steep, sometimes very steep land. Deeper fine silty calcareous soils in coombes and dry valleys.* (SSEW 1983).

2.3 The underlying geology is chalk.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.4 The present site lies in the centre of Ashwell, which was recorded as a borough in the Domesday Survey of 1086. The Domesday Book entry indicates a wealthy and thriving settlement which had been established by the late Saxon period (Morris 1976). It has been suggested that the borough was probably founded in the late 10th or early 11th century AD by the owner of the Saxon manorial estate to encourage trade (Thompson 2002, 6). The study area is located within the suggested boundaries of the Saxon estate (ibid, Figure 6).

2.5 The planned town was established along High Street, with large tofts fronting the street. These are larger than the usual narrow burghage plots found in other medieval towns and may reflect the status of the settlement as a borough (Thompson 2002, 7). Those on the south side of High Street tended to have small paddocks stretching back to Ashwell Street (ibid).

2.6 The springs of the River Rhee, which lie approximately 300m to the north-east, have been a focus of activity since at least the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age (HER 6979). A large number of flints of this date were collected from the garden of a house close to the springhead (Went & Colley 1990). Aerial photographs have also revealed a number of cropmarks of probable prehistoric date on the higher ground to the south of the village (Thompson 2002, Figure 1).

2.7 Evidence for Iron Age and Roman activity has also been identified in the immediate vicinity of the study area. A hillfort, known as Arbury Banks, lies to the south-west of the village. The monument may have been constructed in the late Bronze Age, but was certainly in use in the early – middle Iron Age (Thompson 2002, 3). Late Iron Age pottery has been found in the vicinity of the springs (HER 6979). Roman coins and pottery sherds have also been recovered from the vicinity of the springs (HER 6979; HER 4848) and a possible enclosure ditch was encountered during archaeological fieldwork to the rear of Moules Yard and 48 Ashwell Street (HER 13707). Ashwell Street is thought to date to at least the Roman period.

Cartographic

2.8 The Tithe map of 1841 (HALS DSA4/6/2) shows the present site as Plot 255, which comprised a farmhouse fronting High Street and farm buildings to the rear (Figure 2). The property extended south to Ashwell Street. The farmhouse was in two blocks, a square block on the western side and an adjoining L-shaped block to the east. The northern range of the farm buildings adjoined the rear of the western block of the farmhouse.

2.9 The 2nd edition OS map of 1898 shows little change to the layout of the study area (Figure 3). The site is named as Jessamine Farm.

2.10 The L-shaped wing to the east was removed between 1924 and 1937 (www.old-maps.co.uk).

3. Historic Building Record

3.1 The building is listed Grade II* (LBS no. 162157), described as:

House. Circa 1700. Interior with some reused C16 timber framing. Chequered red brick front. Plain tile gable end roof. 2 storeys and attics. 5 wood casements with flat gauged brick lintels. Central door with 4 fielded and 2 glazed panels and semi-circular hood with moulded cornice. Heavy moulded wood modillioned eaves cornice. 3 casement dormers with pediment gables. Moulded floor band, carried over doorcase. Rear elevation has plastered gabled stair tower and a large external red brick stack. C20 1½-storey extension. E gable end is plastered. Formerly a lower timber frame extension on this side. Interior has arched central passage and C18 dog-leg staircase with barley twist balusters. Original fielded panelling to front right ground floor room.

Exterior

South elevation

3.2 The rear (south) elevation has been stripped of its render below the first floor level following removal of a modern extension (Plate 1). Two previously blocked openings or blind windows have been re-opened and a modern sash inserted on the left side. The opening on the right is boarded and intended for a French window.

3.3 The two windows on the upper floors of the rear elevation of the rear range are also modern and due to be replaced. At first floor level, the existing window is a three light casement, each light of 8 panes, with the centre light fixed. The topmost window is a casement of two lights, with one light opening, the other with an opening quarter light.

3.4 The brickwork is original and is in Flemish bond with lime mortar. The bricks measure 8¾" x 4" x 2½" (22 x 10 x 6.5cm).

3.5 On the right hand side, beyond the second opening, is a lean-to outshut built of Cambridge white bricks, also laid in Flemish bond with lime mortar. The bricks measure 9" by 4½" by 2½" (23 x 11.5 x 6.5cm).

East elevation

3.6 The east elevation of the outshut has been extensively remodelled in a variety of different brick types (Plate 2). Its original form is unclear.

3.7 The side elevation to the front block is rendered from the ground to the gable apex. There is a modern window at ground floor level, with an eaves drip above.

3.8 A chimney stack and stair tower rise between the original rear of the building and the rear range (see Plate 2). A modern metal framed window, with a horizontal centre pivot, is located in the side elevation of the stair tower. This will be replaced.

North elevation

3.9 The front (north) elevation is as described in the listing and will not be altered by the present works (Plate 3). It is in chequered brick with a central door surmounted by a semi-circular hood. A moulded floor band in brick runs across the front and above the doorway.

3.10 There are two windows either side of the doorway on the ground floor and five windows at first floor level. Three dormer windows are set into the roof, which is tiled.

Interior

3.11 The interior recording was focussed on those rooms that were to be altered during the present project, which comprised the rear office and adjacent lobby (Figure 4). Works, including the removal of internal partitions and the blocking or insertion of openings, had already been undertaken prior to the Heritage Network's involvement.

Rear Room

3.12 The ground floor plan shows that the layout consisted of two rooms on the front, separated by a central hall, with a large open area to the rear (Figure 4). The staircase came down into this area. A partition which ran east from the western wall, creating a smaller space at the southern end, has now been removed, as has the north internal wall to the lobby on the east and the west wall to the external recess between the lobby and the eastern front office (Figure 4; Plates 4 & 5).

South elevation

3.13 The wall is plastered. A modern sash window, with a concrete lintel, has been inserted into a former blocked opening on the west side (Plate 6). A large opening for a French window has been created on the east side, also on the site of a former blocked opening.

West elevation

3.14 The wall is covered in plaster, with timber studs and rails visible (Plate 7). Two small modern windows have been inserted on either of an upright stud. A small 4-light casement has been inserted in an earlier opening in the timber framing to the north.

Former lobby and recess

East elevation

3.15 The wall is in painted brick. A former French window, with adjoining side window, has been blocked and remodelled to create a new window opening (Plate 8).

4. Archaeological observation

4.1 Service trenches inside and outside the house had already been excavated and the drains inserted prior to Heritage Network's involvement with the project.

4.2 One trench ran south-east from a point close to the junction of the eastern front office and the former recess to a recently installed square brick manhole (Figure 5). The trench measured 14.30m in length and 0.45m in width (Plate 9). The pipe was already in place and the trench largely filled in at the time of recording. The exposed sections revealed a layer of overburden, comprising crushed tarmac, concrete and mortar, below a layer of sand (Plate 10).

4.3 Internal service trenches had been excavated across the rear room and the pipes laid within them (Figure 5). The trenches measured 0.25m in width and the sections revealed a layer of concrete above a former brick floor in the central part of the rear room (Plate 11). The floor was brick in the area of the former lobby (Plate 12).

4.4 No significant archaeological features were observed during the inspection of the service trenches.

5. Discussion

5.1 The present site is a Grade II* listed building of around 1700. An L-shaped wing, which extended to the east, was demolished between 1924 and 1937.

5.2 The present works involved remodelling window and door openings at the rear and on the eastern side; the removal of internal walls; and the insertion of service trenches both inside and outside. These works were limited in nature and had been largely completed before Heritage Network's inspection visits.

5.3 No new information concerning the history of the building was obtained during the present project. No archaeological features, deposits or finds were encountered.

Confidence Rating

5.4 During the course of the fieldwork, the potential for the identification of historic architectural features was restricted both by the limited nature of the works carried out and the fact that the works were undertaken before the involvement of the Heritage Network.

5.5 The conditions for the identification of potential below ground features and deposits, and for their investigation, were restricted by weathering and by the presence of service pipes that had already been laid, but they were generally shallow and seemed to be largely cut through modern surfacing materials.

5.6 These circumstances have contributed to the limited conclusions that can be drawn from the present project.

6. Sources Consulted

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS)

HALS reference	Date	Details
DSA/4/6/2	1841	Ashwell Tithe Map
2 nd edition OS map	1898	Hertfordshire Sheet IV.9, 25" scale

Brown, N. & Glazebrook, J. (eds) 2000 *Research and Archaeology: a Framework for the Eastern Counties*, 2. Research agenda and strategy. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper No.8

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Medlycott, M. & Brown, N. 2008 *Revision of the Regional Archaeological Framework for the Eastern Region*. ALGAO East of England

Morris, J. (ed) 1976 *Domesday Book, Hertfordshire*. Chichester: Phillimore

Soil Survey of England & Wales (SSEW) 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales. Sheet 4: Eastern England*. Harpenden: Soil Survey of England and Wales

Thompson, I. 2002 *Ashwell Extensive Urban Survey Project Assessment Report*. Hertfordshire County Council.

Went, D. & Colley, C. 1990 *A Catalogue of the Archaeological Finds from the Garden of 'The Steppes', Springhead, Ashwell, Hertfordshire*. North Hertfordshire District Council Museums Field Archaeology Section

7. Illustrations

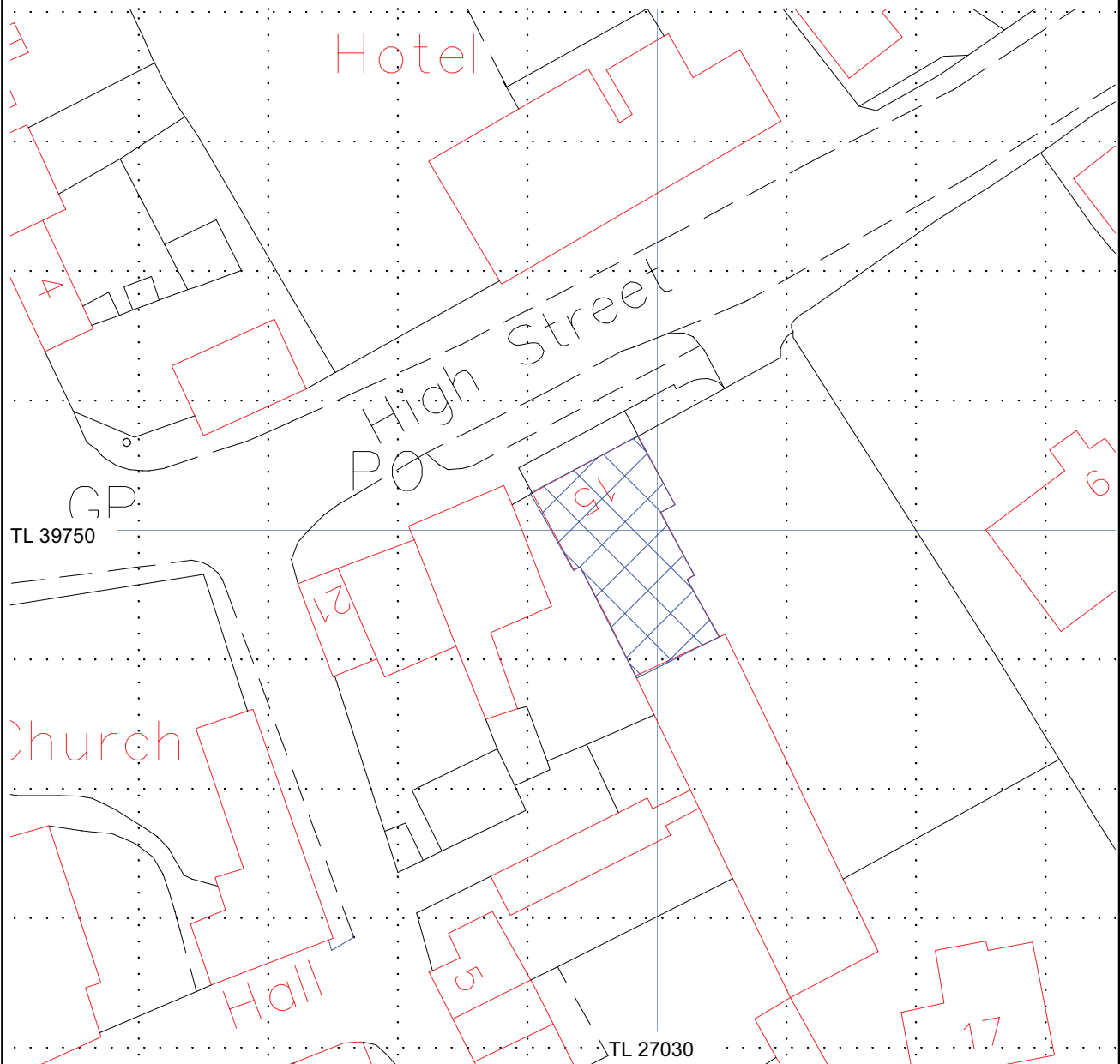
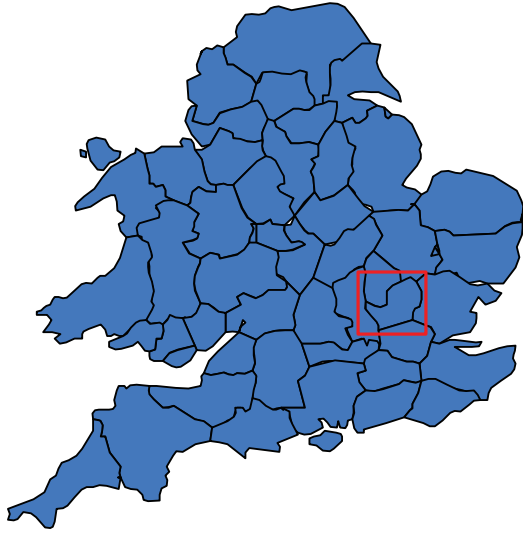
Figure 1	Site Location
Figure 2	Extract from Ashwell Tithe Map, 1841
Figure 3	OS map, 2 nd edition, 1898
Figure 4	Ground floor plan
Figure 5	Service trenches inspected
Plate 1	South & east exterior elevations
Plate 2	East exterior elevation
Plate 3	North exterior elevation
Plate 4	Interior shot, showing location of removed walls
Plate 5	Interior shot, showing location of removed walls
Plate 6	Rear room, south interior elevation
Plate 7	Rear room, west interior elevation
Plate 8	Former lobby & recess, east interior elevation
Plate 9	Exterior drainage trench, looking NE
Plate 10	Detail of exterior drainage trench
Plate 11	Interior service trench, central area
Plate 12	Interior service trench, former lobby & recess

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Jessamine House,
15 High Street, Ashwell

HN851



Site Location

Scale 1:500

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Figure 1



Figure 2: Extract from the Ashwell Tithe map, 1841 (HALS DSA/4/6/2)

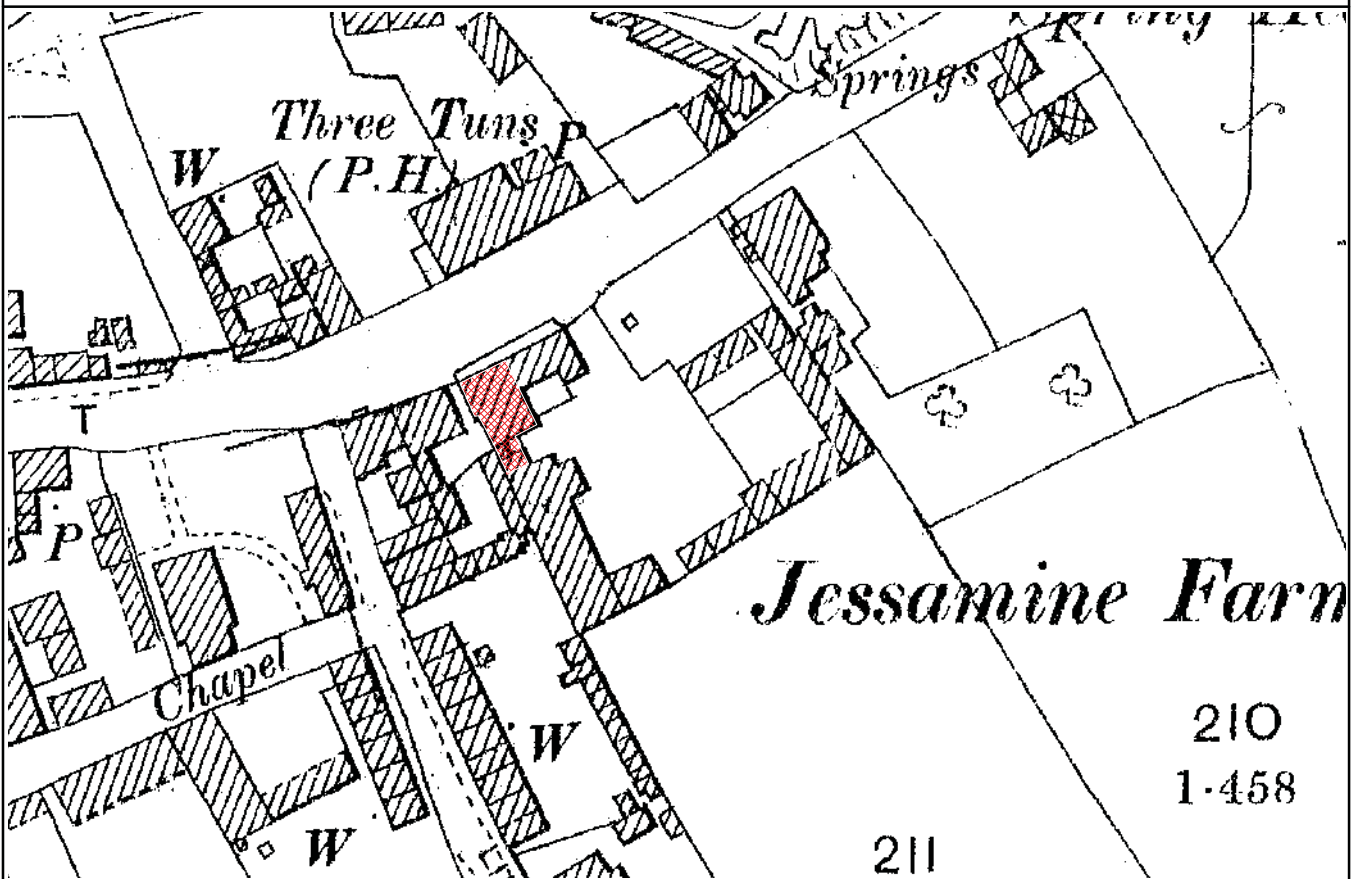
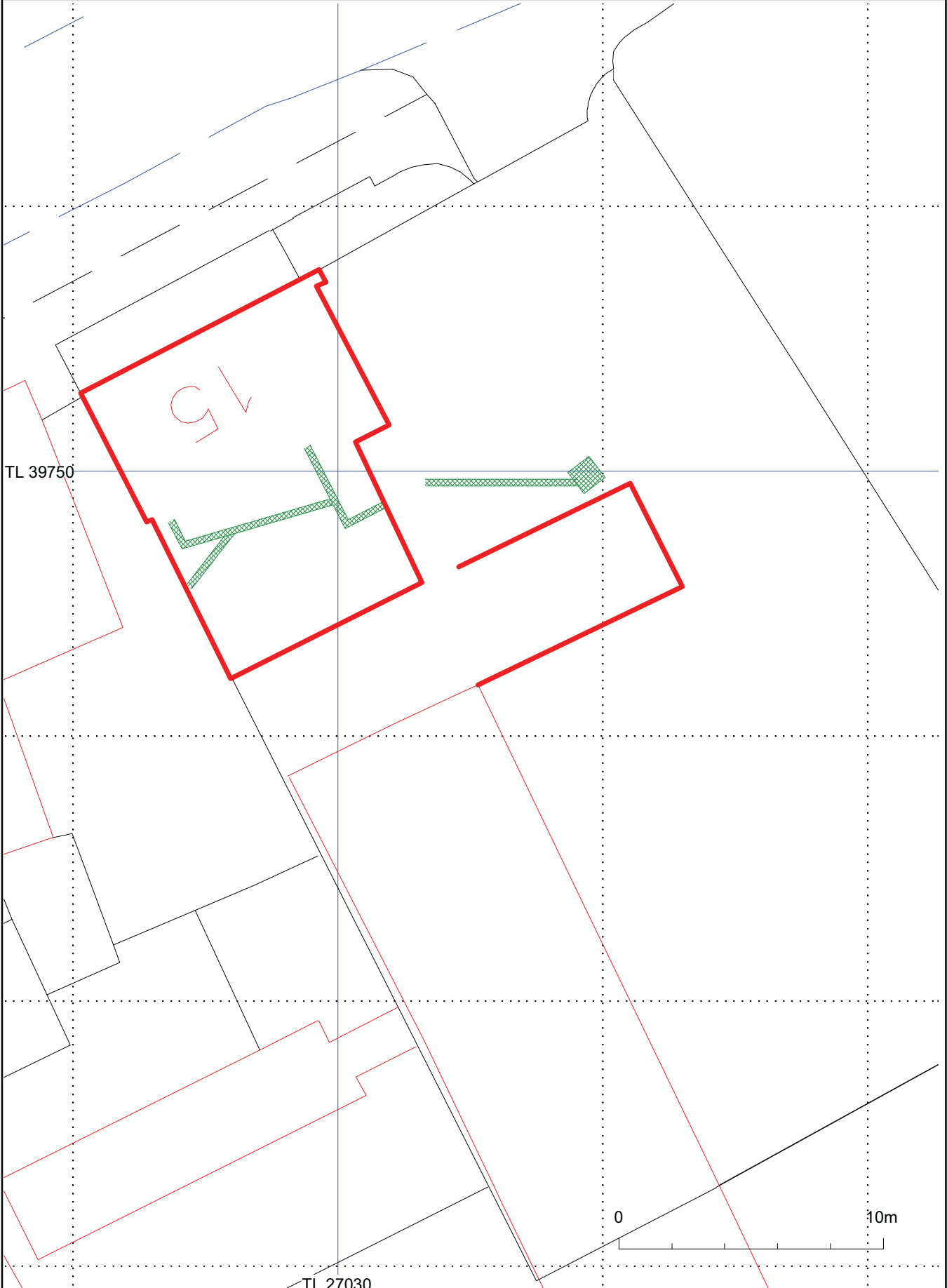


Figure 3: 2nd edition OS map, 1898



Service trenches inspected

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Scale 1:200

Figure 5



Plate 1: South and east exterior elevations



Plate 2: East exterior elevation



Plate 3: North exterior elevation



Plate 4: Interior shot, looking N showing location of walls removed



Plate 5: Interior shot, looking west, showing location of removed walls



Plate 6: South interior elevation, looking south



Plate 7: West interior elevation, looking west



Plate 8: Former lobby & recess, east interior elevation, looking SE



Plate 9: Exterior drainage trench, looking NE



Plate 10: Detail of exterior drainage trench



Plate 11: Interior service trenches, central area, showing concrete floor above brick floor



Plate 12: Interior service trenches, former lobby and recess, showing brick floor

Appendix

Oasis Data Entry Form

OASIS ID: heritage1-72227	
Project details	
Project name	Ashwell, Jessamine House, 15 High Street
Short description of the project	<p>In response to a condition on the planning consent granted for refurbishment of number 15 High Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, the Heritage Network was commissioned to create a record of the changes made to the ground floor rear of the building, and to monitor the groundworks associated with the project. The present site is a Grade II* listed building of around 1700. An L-shaped wing, which extended to the east, was demolished between 1924 and 1937.</p> <p>The present works involved remodelling window and door openings at the rear of the building, following the demolition of a modern extension, and on its eastern side; the removal of internal walls; and the excavation of service trenches both inside and outside. These works had been largely completed before Heritage Network's involvement with the project.</p> <p>No new information concerning the history of the building was obtained in the course of the present project, and no below ground archaeological features, deposits or finds were encountered.</p>
Project dates	Start: 08-02-2009 End: 17-03-2010
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	HN851 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Building Recording
Site status	Listed Building
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	BUILDING Post Medieval
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	'Annotated Sketch','Photographic Survey'
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE ASHWELL Jessamine House, 15 High Street, Ashwell
Postcode	SG7 5NL
Study area	88.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 27030 39750 52.0411409336 -0.147658437535 52 02 28 N 000 08 51 W Point
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	Heritage Network
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Heritage Network

Project director/manager	David Hillelson
Project supervisor	David Hillelson
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Project archives	
Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	North Herts Museums Service
Digital Contents	'none'
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography'
Paper Archive recipient	North Herts Museum Services
Paper Contents	'none'
Paper Media available	'Diary', 'Drawing', 'Photograph', 'Report'
Project bibliography 1	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Jessamine House, 15 High Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire: Historic Building Record and Archaeological Monitoring
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Ashworth, H.
Other bibliographic details	Report no.621
Date	2010
Issuer or publisher	Heritage Network
Place of issue or publication	Letchworth, Herts.
Description	A4 booklet, comb bound, green cover, 12 pages, 5 figures, 12 photographic plates