

Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological desk-based and building
assessment of Chesham House, Kettering
Northamptonshire

May 2008



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Report 08/103

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	An archaeological desk-based and building assessment of Chesham House, Lower Street, Kettering	
Short description	A desk-based assessment of Chesham House, Kettering found that the building, thought to date from the late eighteenth century, has undergone significant changes since it was occupied by the Gotch family whose tenure covered almost 150 years. Extensive alterations have previously removed almost all internal fixtures and fittings and it is now difficult to determine how the property functioned as a family home and offices. It is not considered that the proposed alterations will have any impact on historic fabric.	
Project type	Desk-based and building assessment	
Previous work	none	
Future work	unknown	
Monument type and period	Post-medieval building, Grade II listed	
Significant finds	n/a	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address (including postcode)	Chesham House, Lower Street, Kettering, Northamptonshire,	
Easting	48649	
Northing	27888	
Height OD		
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Jenny Timothy, KBC	
Project Design originator		
Director/Supervisor	Joe Prentice/Tim Upson-Smith	
Project Manager	Steve Parry	
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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED AND BUILDING ASSESSMENT OF CHESHAM HOUSE, KETTERING, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Abstract

A desk-based assessment of Chesham House, Kettering found that the building, thought to date from the late eighteenth century, has undergone significant changes since it was occupied by the Gotch family whose tenure covered almost 150 years. Extensive alterations have previously removed almost all internal fixtures and fittings and it is now difficult to determine how the property functioned as a family home and offices. It is not considered that the proposed alterations will have any impact on historic fabric.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Treloar Property and Construction Consultants on behalf of Kettering Borough Council to undertake a desk-based and building assessment of Chesham House, Kettering (Fig 1, NGR SP 8649 7888). The assessment is required as part of a project for the improvement of the property.

The study area comprises a Grade II listed building which was formerly used as offices and before that as an hotel converted from a domestic residence with attached offices.

2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The property lies on basically level land sloping sloping down to the south-west behind the property and is set back from the adjacent road, Lower Street. The plot lies within the historic core of the town of Kettering to the north of the market square and church.

The underlying geology comprises Inferior Oolite overlain by Northampton Sand and Ironstone (www.bgs/geoindex.org).

3 METHODOLOGY

The desk-based assessment considered the application area within the context of the local archaeological resource and the following sources were consulted:

- Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO)
- Northamptonshire Historic Environment Records (HER)

A site visit was made on Wednesday 21 May 2008. This assessment complies with the Institute of Field Archaeologist's (IFA) Standard and Guidance for desk-based and historic building assessments (IFA 2001). The building recording was undertaken to Level I/II as specified in the English Heritage procedural document (English Heritage 2006).

4 HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The history and archaeology of Kettering, from prehistoric to modern periods, was the subject of a comprehensive study as part of Northamptonshire's Extensive Urban Survey. This initiative was funded by English Heritage with the purpose of providing an effective information base and research framework to guide the management of the county's archaeological resource. The following summaries are paraphrased from Foard and Ballinger 2000.

4.1 General history

Prehistoric

There is no clear evidence for prehistoric occupation in Kettering although stray finds of coins dating to the Iron Age have been recovered from various locations.

Roman

The Roman settlement at Kettering appears to have been focused along a road connecting Irchester to the Gartree Road with its core lying *c* 1.7km north north-east of the current study area. Little is known of its exact size and character; existing evidence suggests that its origins lie in the later first-century AD and that it covered an area of 12-16ha. It continued to be occupied well into the fourth-century.

Saxon

An early Saxon cemetery was discovered to the north of the Stamford Road in the late nineteenth-century. Saxon place-names (eg Walcot, Sharlecotes) suggest the presence of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets in the vicinity of the modern town during this period. Kettering is mentioned in several Saxon charters. In 956 the manor was held by King Eadwig who granted '10 Cassatos' at 'Cytringan' to his minister, Aelfsige. In *c*963 Bishop Aethelwold granted Kettering to Medhamstede which later became Peterborough Abbey.

In 1086 the Domesday survey records that the manor at Kettering was held by the Abbott of Peterborough and comprised 10 hides with land for 16 ploughs. In demesne (ie the land farmed by the Abbey) there was 1 plough, 1 female slave and 31 villeins with 10 ploughs. There were 2 mills worth £1 with 107 acres of meadow and 3 acres of woodland.

Medieval and post-medieval

The settlement retained its agrarian village character until 1227 when the Abbot obtained a grant for a Friday market, thus initiating the urban expansion of the town. The town grew throughout the medieval and post-medieval period into a medium sized market town, and towards the beginning of the nineteenth century saw more rapid expansion due to the boot and shoe industry. With this industry came a larger population and substantial increase in building, both domestic and commercial. There are 36 listed buildings within the town of which nine were designed by J A Gotch, an eminent local architect who's family has a long association with Kettering in general, and more specifically in this instance, Chesham House.

4.2 Historic maps

A search of historic maps was made in Northamptonshire Record Office with the following results.

Ralph Treswell's Map of Kettering, 1587 (Not illustrated)

The earliest surviving map of Kettering, though interesting, is thought to be largely schematic (NRO map 4434). Though the area of the town in which the house is located is present, the depiction of individual buildings cannot be relied upon as they are shown in a schematic fashion as was generally the practice at this period. It appears that the area where the house now stands was occupied at this time by buildings along the street frontage.

T Eayre's Map of Kettering, 1721 (Fig 2)

This map shows the town in a high level of detail with individual buildings marked (NRO 1161). There is a building depicted on the plot currently occupied by Chesham House, but which does not correspond with the present structure. It would seem that this is an earlier building demolished to make way for the present house.

Robert Smith's Plan of the town of Kettering, 1826 (Fig 3)

This plan of the town depicts a similar level of detail and by now Chesham House is clearly present, with some additions which have been subsequently removed (NRO map 5596). With the exception of the long range which reaches the street frontage along the southern side of the plot, the remainder of the building appears to be almost entirely as that which exists today. A number of small additions or alterations at the rear of the building have been made, these will have been service facilities and do not affect the main part of the house.

1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1886 (Fig 4)

The map shows an almost identical layout to the 1826 plan, with the addition of a glasshouse (diagonally hatched area) and the inclusion of garden layout details. The long south range is still present but neither of the canted bay windows are shown indicating that they were added after this date.

4.3 A history of the Gotch family

The earliest recorded association with the house is that described in later documents which detail the history of the Gotch family. Thomas Henry Gotch is said to have bought the house in 1793 after previously living on the High Street (Ireson 1992). However, other sources record that T H Gotch was already living in the house in October 1792 when he and some friends met to discuss the Baptist Missionary Society, which was subsequently set up the following evening in the house across the road. Whichever version is correct, it seems that the family were certainly in residence towards the latter part of the eighteenth century. It is not clear if they had the house built, or simply purchased an existing property and had it altered, as clearly a building occupied the site from at least 1721. The house was not only their home, it also served as offices for the family boot and shoe business. Thomas and his wife had thirteen children, only one of whom survived into adulthood, John Cooper Gotch. After Thomas' death in 1806 J C Gotch took over the family business and also formed a bank, originally Keep, Gotch and Cobb later to become Gotch and Sons. John's wife came originally from Chesham (Bucks) and it is apparently for this reason that the house is so named. Things went well until 1857 when the bank collapsed after dubious financial dealings by a local clergyman who was closely involved with the bank. The house was sold to J T Stockburn, a close family friend, and after the subsequent bankruptcy proceedings in which the family were cleared of any wrong doing, the house was bought back by them in 1871.

Kellys Trade Directories list the occupants of the house from 1874. They include:

1874. Thomas Henry Gotch and Sons, Shoe manufacturers

1890. T H Gotch Lower Street

1894. Frederic Davis Gotch, Chesham House, Lower Street

1903. Charles Godfred Bolam, Chesham House, Lower Street (F D Gotch at Bryher House, Headlands)

1910. Henry Gale Gotch, Chesham House, Lower Street

1920. Henry Gale Gotch, Chesham House, Lower Street

1931. Captain Lawrence Mursell Gotch, Chesham House, Lower Street

1936. Chesham Hotel. Proprietress Mrs E J Farr

This shows that the Gotch family appears to have continued to own the house until 1932 when the family moved to Hampstead, with a short spell around the turn of the century when it may have been rented out; the entry for 1903 being the only one without a Gotch family member being listed. The most famous member of the family, J A Gotch the architect, appears not to have lived in the house. It is not known for how long the property continued in use as a hotel or when the present owners took possession.

5 BUILDING ASSESSMENT

The building was visited on 21 May 2008 and both the exterior and interior examined. Plans and elevations supplied by the client were used and annotated as appropriate. The primary method of recording was by digital photography along with written notes. Room numbers are those given during the site visit rather than those used on the plans supplied by S J Treloar and Associates Ltd. These drawings are gratefully used in this report although copyright remains with S J Treloar Associates Ltd.

5.1 Exterior

The exterior at the time of the survey was covered in scaffolding (Plate 1). The building is a late eighteenth-century stucco fronted house with a Welsh slate roof. It comprises three storeys, and three bays with a stone cornice moulding at eaves level. The windows on the principal elevation are fitted with sash windows beneath gauged heads with keystones. There is a later nineteenth-century canted bay window on the ground floor. The main entrance door comprises a four panel door in a surround with engaged columns, entablatures with swags and urns to frieze with an open pediment above a rectangular traceried fanlight.

The building has been extended to the left (south) of the principal elevation and is also stuccoed with a slate roof. This stucco covering (not original) has not allowed an assessment of the building materials of either phase of the building to be made (ie brick or stone). The addition is also built over three floors and has a less regular principal façade and arrangement of windows. It is possible that this different fenestration reflects different usage, perhaps being used as the Gotch boot and shoe business offices. A slightly forward-projecting range at the southern end appears to be the truncated remains of a now largely demolished range shown on the 1826 and 1886 maps (Figs 3 and 4). On the 1886 map there is a definite distinction between the northern section (the house?) and the southern,

where the two are separated by a planted screen of trees and shrubs. Both sections have access from the road but it appears this screen represents a visual and physical barrier between the two halves. A similar distinction is present at the rear of the property where a wall separates a small yard from what is assumed to be the house and garden.

5.2 Interior

Basement (not illustrated)

The basement was accessed from the rear lobby down a flight of modern concrete steps and comprises a main room with rendered, white painted walls, a brick vaulted ceiling and concrete floor. The basement, which was originally a single room, had been partitioned by a modern stud wall with a standard modern fire door.

Ground floor (Fig 5)

The ground floor, in common with the rest of the building, has been almost entirely stripped of original fittings; no fireplaces, original doors, architraves, picture rails, skirtings, staircase details or decorative plasterwork has survived. The skirting boards and the door surrounds are all matching and modern; the doors are all of the modern fire-resistant variety with plain brushed aluminium handles, automatic closers and in some cases security key pads. The decoration is of a cream colour to the walls, white ceilings, dark brown skirting boards and gloss white door and window frames. The only exception is room G7 where the walls were mint green. All of the floors on the ground floor are concrete. The ceilings in rooms G1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 have been lowered by c250mm, as indicated by the fact that their level was lower than the height of the lintels of the windows (Plate 2). It was not possible to determine the method of construction (suspended or plastered) as no openings had been made, or at what date this alteration was made.

The principal entrance lobby G4 has surviving wood panelling with two monograms carved into two smaller panels. The initials are AJ and THG; it is not certain who AJ was, although THG is almost certainly Thomas Henry Gotch, the founder of the boot and shoe firm (Plates 3 & 4). The door to the lobby is of three panels with the top panel subdivided into nine lights with obscure glass. The windows in rooms G2, G3 and G21 are all probably original late eighteenth-century six pane sash windows, or are later replacements in the same style. The exceptions are the canted bay windows in rooms G21 and G1, which post date 1886, the window in G3 has a splayed opening and painted closed shutter boxes. The bay window in room G21 has an arched timber pelmet painted white (Plate 5). These rooms with G4 and G20 probably formed the original late eighteenth-century part of the house. Rooms G2 and G3 were originally one room but had been subdivided in the late twentieth-century for the insertion of a disabled toilet and creation of a small office.

Room G5 has a 'Hobbs, Hart', safe built into the chimney breast (Plate 6). This room and room G6 has six light casement windows; the top three lights have a leaded pattern (Plate 7). These two rooms may have originally been one, as there is a stud wall dividing the two. Room G7 is a narrow room and may have been originally an entrance hall with a door where there is now a window. G8 appears to be unaltered.

Rooms G9 and G10 seem to have originally formed a connecting corridor to the extension and perhaps into the stair well which currently has no access from the ground floor as it has been used as a fire exit for the first floor and now only opens to the outside rear. Rooms G16 and G17 are later lobby areas and form the hallway for the stairs to the first floor. The stairs have no balusters, their place being taken by a single thickness ply panel; the newel post is plain with a square section (Plate 8). Room G11, which is currently being used as a toilet, has two safes built into the wall, the top one a Phillips and Son, Birmingham and the bottom a Chubb, London (Plate 9).

Rooms G12-G15 are currently divided by partitions into toilets and storage in what is now the flat roofed part at the rear of the building, although this part of the building is shown on Robert Smith's map of 1826 and may originally have had a pitched roof (Fig 3). Room G19 is used as toilets with modern partitions.

First floor (Fig 6)

All of the rooms on the first floor and the second floor have replacement modern tongue and groove floor boards c140mm wide. The ceilings on this floor appear to be all lath and plaster.

On the first floor rooms F11, 12 and 13 retained their twelve pane (six over six), un-horned sash windows with those in rooms F11 and 12 retaining their shutter boxes (Plate 10). The only room to retain evidence of a fireplace was F13 where there was a scar on the chimney breast, suggesting that the opening for the fireplace was c1.4m wide. There were no hearth slabs in any of the rooms, these presumably had been removed when the new flooring was introduced.

Room F10 is a passageway created out of a larger room, the remainder of which is F11. Room F12 appears to remain unaltered. Rooms F8 and F9 have also been created by the division of a single room with a lobby and fire door added to create a fire break as well as access to F5. Room F5 and F7 have been made out of a former single room. Room F5 has a semi built in cupboard (Plate 11).

Second floor (Fig 7)

Room S3 retains nine pane sash windows in the front elevation and has a modern window inserted in the rear wall. Room S1 has exposed rafters and purlins with half lapped, bolted collars (Plate 12). The two doorways in this room were situated in lobbies added as fire breaks. Room S10 has modern windows inserted into the rear elevation. Room S5 has been subdivided from room S3, rooms S11 and S9 have been subdivided out of room S10. It is likely that these rooms were originally subdivided to form the living quarters of the house staff.

6 DISCUSSION

It is understood that the proposals for Chesham House include the removal of some internal partition walls and the creation of new ones. None of the partitions to be removed, on any of the floors, are original to either part of the building. Though it is not clear when they were inserted it is likely that it will have been after 1932 when the property became a hotel and more rooms were required. It is possible that there were even more partitions during the hotel phase and that these have been removed, since some larger rooms were required for use as offices. None of the additional bathrooms or catering facilities necessary for a hotel remain which indicates that subsequent alteration must have taken place when they were removed.

It is likely that the existing fire-break lobbies were installed to comply with the Building and Fire Regulations required for an office building and their style indicates a recent date for their installation.

The staircases also appear to have been modified, probably at the same date, and almost certainly again to comply with Fire Regulations. A staircase on the second floor is to be boarded out and used as a cupboard, however, the structure is to be left *in situ*. Whilst this means that for the present, and for some time in the future, this staircase will not be accessible, it does mean that, if desired, this staircase can be uncovered and returned to use.

During these two stages of alterations, all post-dating 1932, almost all original fixtures and fittings have been removed thus making interpretation of original functions and circulation routes almost impossible. It is not clear when the exterior of the building was stuccoed, perhaps when converted to a hotel to make the disparate parts seem more cohesive visually. This covering of the exterior surfaces has further impeded interpretation, since it has not been possible to examine adjoining wall surfaces and therefore make comment on relative

phasing by noting the juxtaposition of different materials and butt or bonded joints impossible.

7 CONCLUSION

The property, Chesham House, almost certainly dates in part to the late eighteenth century and may have been built for, or by, the Gotch family who are known to have lived there from the early 1790s. The site was probably inhabited since the sixteenth century and certainly occupied by a building from at least 1721 as shown by Eayres map, though it is not thought that any of the building shown at that dates survives in the present structure. Apart from a short break in ownership between *c*1857 and 1871 the Gotch family owned the house from the late eighteenth century until 1932 when it was sold to become an hotel.

The house and adjoining section (now part of the same building) have been substantially altered and retain very few fixtures or fittings which date to the period of Gotch ownership. The only elements which remain are the carved panels in the front hall, the pelmet and window shutters, although these date from the nineteenth, rather than eighteenth, century. Rooms have been sub-divided or enlarged and all fireplaces removed and blocked. No doors, with the possible exception of the front door, are pre-modern (it probably dates to the late nineteenth century) and many of the windows appear to be replacements albeit in the original style.

All of the staircases appear to be recent replacements, probably introduced to comply with modern fire regulations, though they do appear to occupy historic locations. Nothing meaningful can be said about the function of the different parts of the property although it is probable that the three bay, northern part was the Gotch family house and the adjoining section the offices. However, nothing internal remains with which to substantiate this theory.

The Grade II listing designation appears to have been made largely on the association with the Gotch family, who played an important part in the industrial and social history of the town, rather on the architectural merit of the building.

It is the opinion of the author of this report that the proposed internal alterations are unlikely to have any impact on the structure which has already lost any meaningful historic interior components. None of the proposed removals are of historic fabric and in some cases will restore previously divided rooms to dimensions which appear to be closer to former sizes.

The closing-off of a staircase on the second floor is considered to be an acceptable option, for though it will for an unknown length of time slightly alter the circulation routes at this level, it is a reversible adjustment and therefore preferable to removal.

The association with the Gotch family will not be diminished by the proposed works and the house will remain externally unaltered.

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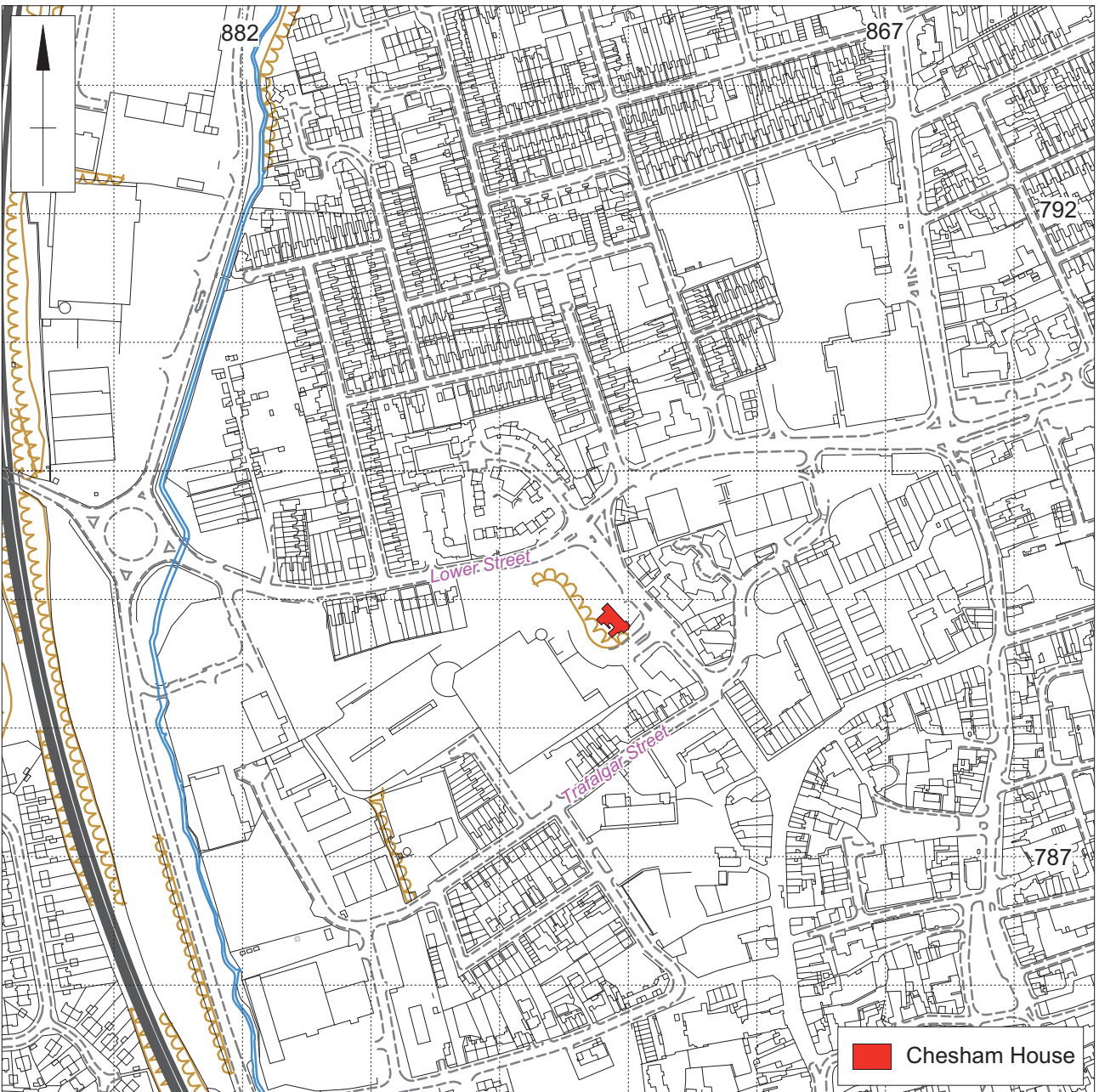
Acknowledgements

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Site Location Fig 1



Site of the forerunner to the current Chesham House





Chesham House



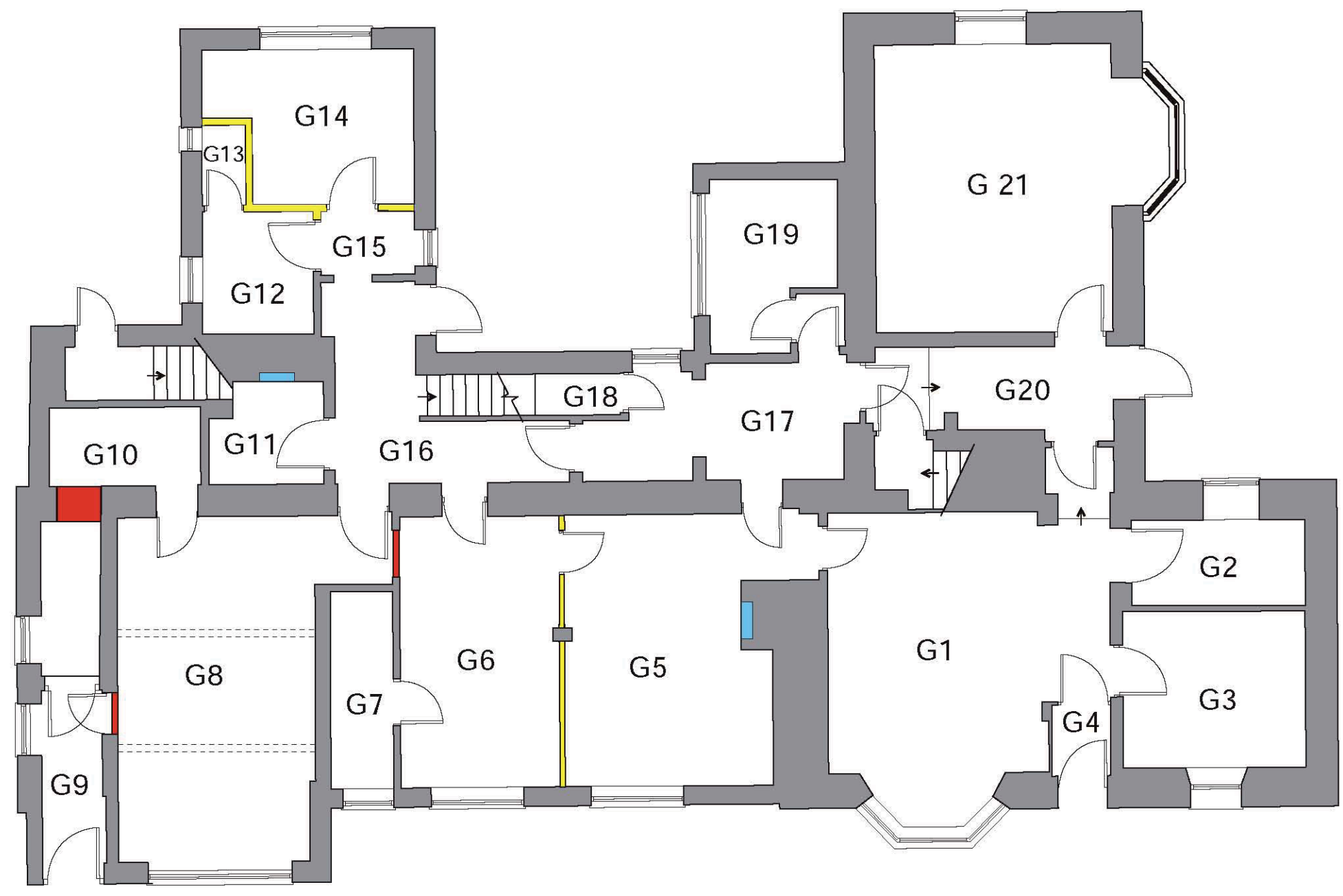
Robert Smith, 1826 Fig 3



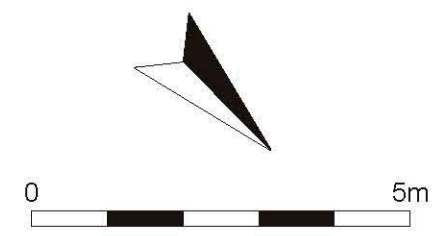
Chesham House



- Wall to be removed
- To be blocked
- Wall Safe



EXISTING GROUND FLOOR



- Blocked Fireplace
- Walls to be removed
- Walls to be removed and replaced
- Built in Cupboard



EXISTING FIRST FLOOR

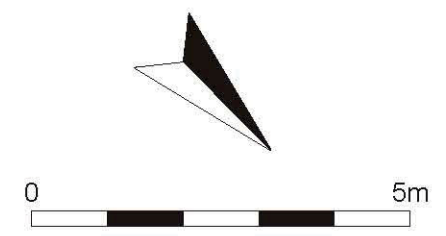


Fig 6

■ Walls to be removed
■ To be blocked



EXISTING SECOND FLOOR

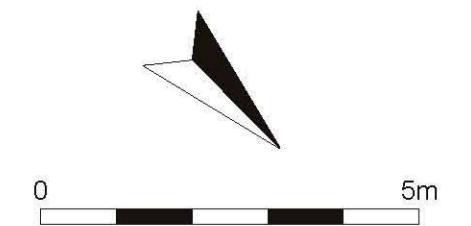


Fig 7



Plate 1: The principal facade



Plate 2: Lowered Ceiling Room G5



Plate 3: Carved initials AJ in Room G4



Plate 4: Carved initials THG in Room G4



Plate 5: The arched timber pelmet in Room G21



Plate 6: The “Hobbs, Hart” safe in Room G5



Plate 7: Detail of the leaded lights in Room G5-6



Plate 8: The modern stair in Room G16



Plate 9: The safes in Room G11



Plate 10: The sash windows and shutter boxes in Room F11



Plate 11: The cupboard in Room F5



Plate 12: The exposed rafters and purlins in Room S1