

54 SOUTHSIDE STREET, PLYMOUTH

(NGR SX 48120 54141)

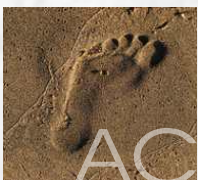
Results of historic building recording

Plymouth City Council reference 21/01461/LBC, Condition 3

Prepared by:
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archaeology

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Client	Private owner
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Approved by	Andrew Passmore

Acknowledgements

The recording was commissioned by the Private owner, and managed on their behalf by Louis Dulling of Devon & Cornwall Planning Consultants Ltd, and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The fieldwork was carried out by Stella Smith. The report, including illustrations, was prepared by Stella Smith.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Summary

An historic building record of the ground-floor fireplace at 54 Southside Street, Plymouth was prepared by AC archaeology, on behalf of the private owner, in November 2021 in advance of alterations to the Grade II Listed Building.

The building is thought to have been constructed in the 17th century and remodelled in the 18th century. Evidence uncovered during recording of the adjacent property indicates its origins pre-date the late-17th century. The fireplace is located within the north wall of the rear room on the ground-floor of the building and has probably been inserted into an earlier internal stone partition. The fireplace has an ornate carved timber lintel with a later plank mantelshelf above supported on vertical wooden brackets. The hearth has been partially infilled to create a smaller opening. The lintel displays two shield emblems with internal carvings of the initials 'E S S' and the date '1680'. In the centre of the lintel is a further carving displaying a Tudor rose and a pair of knapweed seed heads. Along the base of the lintel is a moulded bead that curves up and steps up and over the central carving.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This document sets out the results of historic building recording of a ground-floor fireplace at 54 Southside Street, Plymouth (SX 48120 54141; Fig. 1). The investigations were required by Plymouth City Council under condition 3 of the grant of Listed Building Consent (reference 21/01461/LBC) for 'installation of extraction equipment and internal and external alterations to facilitate restaurant/cafe use'. Guidance on the scope of works is set out in the relevant planning condition. No formal site-specific brief was provided. The recording was carried out on 5 November 2021 by AC archaeology Ltd and commissioned by the private owner through their agents Devon & Cornwall Planning Consultants Ltd.

1.2 The property is located within the Barbican just to the east of the modern city centre on the western side of the historic harbour of Sutton Pool. The area includes the greater part of the historic town of Plymouth as it developed from the late-13th century through to the 18th century. The building is situated at a height of 5m above Ordnance Datum, and is situated on the south side of Southside Street adjacent to its junction with Friars Lane. The underlying geology consists of Devonian limestone of the Plymouth Limestone Formation; no overlying deposits are recorded (British Geological Survey online viewer 2021).

Designations

1.3 54 Southside Street is a Grade II Listed Building (National Heritage List for England entry 1386409). It was designated in 1954 with the following description updated in 1998:

Merchant's house. C17, remodelled in the C18. Rendered brick front with applied mock timber framing; slate roof with low-pitched triangular pediment with modillion cornice and acroteria at the front; central coat of arms and ball finials of acroteria of reused old materials; lateral brick stack on the right and a massive central rendered rubble and brick stack. Fairly deep plan. 4 storeys; 3-window range. Original 12-pane hornless sashes with thick glazing bars. Ground floor has slightly bowed C20 shopfront set back from the front. INTERIOR: not inspected but former list description notes large carved wooden fireplace dated 1680 and small C18 staircase with turned balusters and column newels. (The Buildings of England: Pevsner N: Devon: London: 1989-: 663).

1.4 The building is located within the Barbican Conservation Area.

2. AIM

2.1 The scheme will result in the historic fireplace being covered over to enable it to be preserved *in-situ*. As a result, condition 3 of the grant of Listed Building Consent application states that 'Prior to the commencement of any works, a detailed record of the fireplace (at ground floor level) shall be carried out by an archaeologist or archaeological organisation and submitted to and approved in writing by the LPA.'

2.2 The aim of the investigation was therefore to prepare an historic building record of the fireplace prior to works commencing.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (revised 2020), and the AC archaeology *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*, and with reference to Historic England's *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (revised 2016).

3.2 The recording comprised the following:

- A basic written description of the fireplace;
- A photographic record comprising a colour digital record;
- Annotation of architect's as existing drawings to show the location of the fireplace; and
- Production of an elevation and profile of the fireplace.

3.3 No new historic research has been undertaken, but Richard Parker's (2007) publication on his historic building recording of the adjacent 53-53a Southside Street has been consulted, with relevant information discussed in Section 5 below.

4. THE FIREPLACE (Fig. 1; Plates 1-6)

4.1 The recorded fireplace is located within the rear room on the ground-floor of the building. This space is currently used, and fitted out as, as a kitchen to the shop in the front room. The fireplace is located in the north wall, slightly offset to the west from the centre. To its west is an opening connecting the kitchen with the shop, and to the east a blocked-up doorway, presumably given its low height for a cupboard. Bolt and latch fittings survive attached to the frame

4.2 The fireplace has an ornate carved timber lintel, with a plank mantelshelf above supported on vertical wooden brackets attached to the lintel. The hearth has been partially infilled to create a narrower opening. The blocking has a plastered finish. The open smaller hearth also has plastered sides and the flue has been blocked. It does, however, have a surround formed of plain, black-painted timbers.

4.3 The timber lintel displays two shield emblems set to either side of a central carved design; all detailing is raised from the face of the lintel. The shields are broadly rectangular in design with eared heads and slightly pointed bases. The left shield is

inscribed with the initials 'E S S', with the letter 'E' set above the other letters. The right shield displays the date '1680', with the '16' above the '80'. In the centre of the lintel is a Tudor rose on a straight stalk. To either side, and tied to its stem, are drooping stalks with what appear to be depictions of oversized knapweed seed heads. The feet of these stalks are curled, like the tendrils of a vine. Along the base of the lintel is a moulded bead that extends under the shields, and in the centre both curves and steps up around and above the central carving. The mantleshelf and associated brackets are secondary features, with the former overlying the top of bead moulding over the central decoration. The brackets are simply curved.

5. DISCUSSION

- 5.1** 54 Southside Street is dated within the Listing description as a 17th-century house, with later remodelling. If the building is similar to the adjacent nos 53 and 53a Southside Street, then this is almost certainly a simplification of its development. Observations of the party wall by Richard Parker (2007, 201) identified stonework pre-dating the brickwork of the building, and it was suggested that this represented part of the early building at no. 54, predating a phase of rebuilding using bricks (possibly including raising the height to the current four storeys). It was also clear from the recording at no. 53 that its late 17th-century rear range utilised an existing party/boundary wall with no. 54 (*ibid.*, 223), indicating that the rear rooms of no. 54 (including the ground-floor kitchen in which recorded fireplace is located) pre-date the late 17th-century. These observations have implications for the date of the fireplace, whose lintel includes the inscription '1680'. The fireplace is therefore interpreted as having been inserted into an existing internal wall within the building. The context is unknown, but given the inclusion of initials (E S S) it may relate to a change of ownership, or a major phase of rebuilding. The decoration is stylistically late 17th-century, consistent with the carved date.

6. PROJECT ARCHIVE

- 6.1** An OASIS entry has been created using the unique identified 503452, and includes a digital copy of this report.
- 6.2** This report and the associated OASIS entry represent the archive for the project.

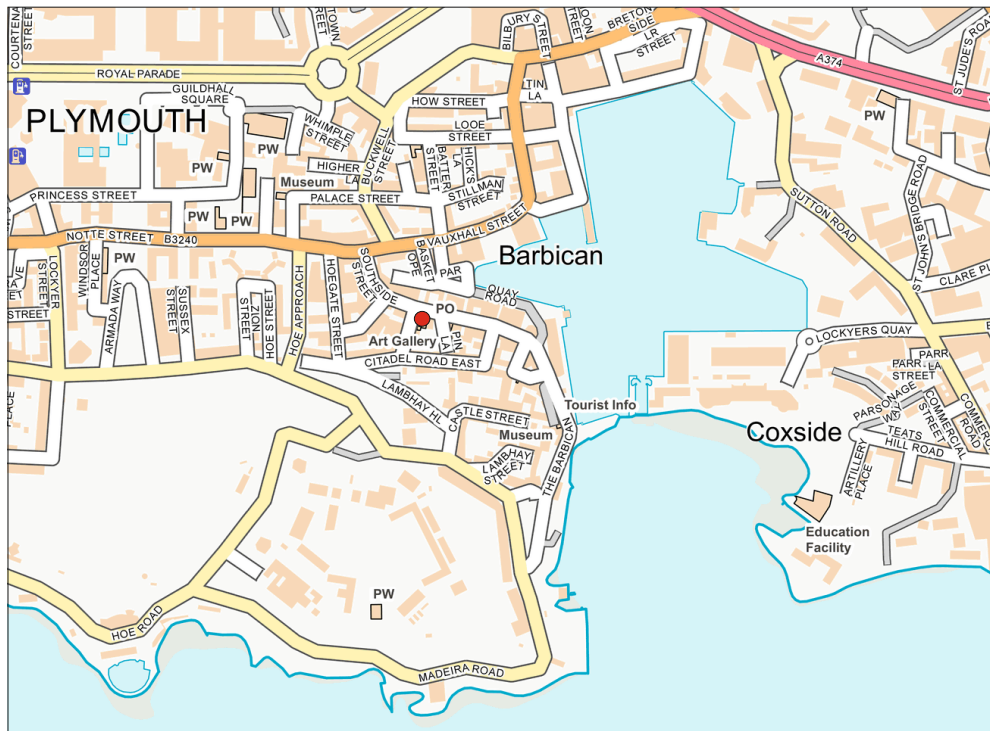
7. SOURCES CONSULTED

British Geological Survey online viewer, www.bgs.ac.uk

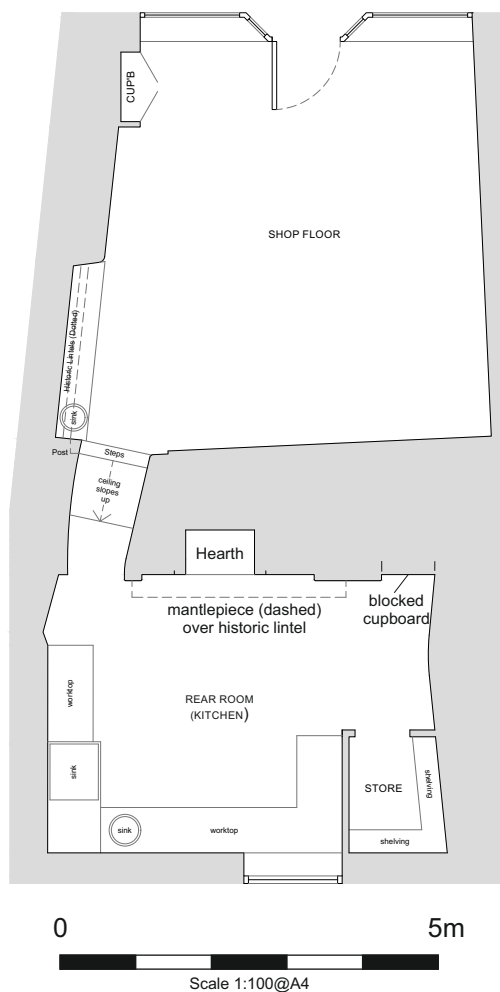
National Heritage List for England, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

Parker. R., 2007. 'Nos 53-53a Southside Street: A Merchant's House in Plymouth', *Proc. Devon. Archaeol. Soc.* **65**, 183-229.

a) Location of site



b) Location of fireplace



PROJECT

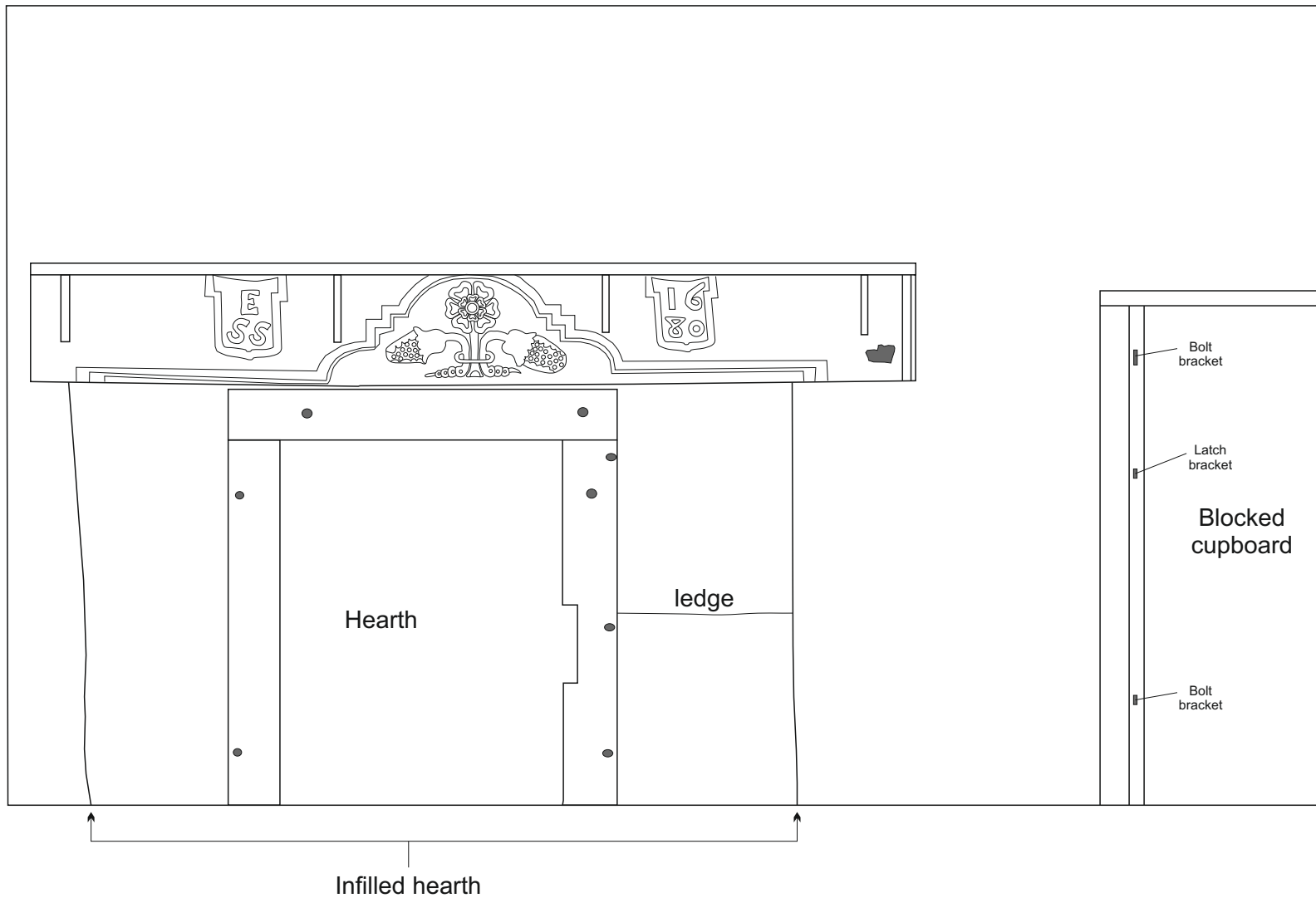
54 Southside Street, Plymouth

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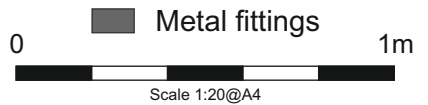
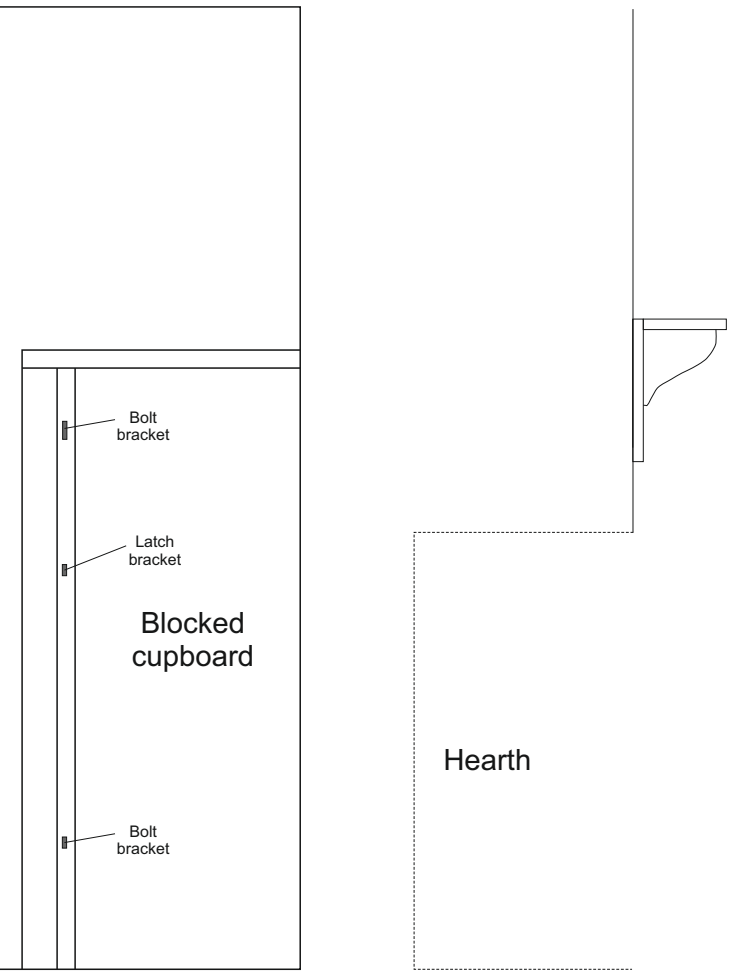
Fig. 1: Location of site and fireplace



a) Elevation of fireplace



b) Profile of fireplace



PROJECT

54 Southside Street, Plymouth

TITLE

Fig. 2: Elevation and profile of fireplace





Plate 1: View of the fireplace, looking north-northeast (1m scale)



Plate 2: View of the fireplace within the room, looking north-northwest (1m scale)



Plate 3: Detail of the carving on the fireplace, looking north-northeast



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