

THE HELE ARMS, MARKET STREET, PLYMPTON,  
PLYMOUTH

(NGR SX 53639 56120)

Results of historic building recording

Plymouth City Council planning reference 12-00135-FUL  
(conditions 18 and 19)

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On behalf of:  
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archaeology

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## Summary

*An historic building record of The Hele Arms, Market Street, Plympton St Mary (SX 53639 56120) was prepared by AC archaeology in February 2013. The building is to be demolished and the site redeveloped for housing. The archaeological survey was commissioned by Commercial Concepts Ltd and was required under conditions 18 and 19 of planning consent Plymouth City Council planning reference 12-00135-FUL.*

*The Hele Arms was almost certainly constructed as a purpose-built public house in the 1840s. There is little evidence of its use as a private house and it is known that the building was already operating as an inn by 1850. The curious plan of the building, its siting within the plot and the incorporation of a reused Gothic window bay (which provided two entrance doorways) all seem to be intended to give it a distinction and prominence suitable for this purpose. This window is probably of 15th or early 16th-century date, and may have originated from the nearby Plympton Priory or a large late-medieval house.*

*The building was very short on domestic accommodation for either the innkeeper's family or for guests, though it is possible that these were housed in other, now demolished, parts of the complex. It was provided with many distinct bars and rooms for a wide variety of leisure activities, which may account for its long success as a business. The first-floor suite of rooms is the most important survival, replicating, on a very small scale, the kind of facilities which had been offered for at least a century previously by the Assembly Rooms of large coaching inns and by Subscription Rooms in fashionable resort towns. The rooms included a large function room, with an alcove for musicians and a card or refreshment room adjoining. There was some small attempt at a suitably architectural expression in the domed central bay of the ceiling and the balcony where one might admire the view while cooling off after a dance. These rooms may once, perhaps, have been very significant to the social life of 19th-century Plympton St Mary.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)**

- 1.1** The Hele Arms is a 19th-century public house standing on a triangular plot of land on the western side of Market Street, Plympton St Mary (SX 53639 56120) approximately 0.1 miles southwest of the Parish Church (Fig. 1). The building is not listed, and is shortly to be demolished for a housing development. The archaeological survey was commissioned by Commercial Concepts Ltd and was required under conditions 18 and 19 of planning consent for the demolition of the building (Plymouth City Council planning reference 12-00135-FUL).

### **2. AIM**

- 2.1** The aim of survey was to prepare a record of the standing building before demolition, in part because the structure is believed to incorporate architectural fragments derived from the medieval buildings of nearby Plympton Priory. It is understood that these fragments are to be salvaged and passed to the Plympton Civic Society for preservation.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The archaeological recording was undertaken on the 22nd of February 2013 by Richard Parker, acting for AC archaeology, and was carried out in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2013). The work was carried out to level 2 as set out in English Heritage's 2006 document *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*. It took the form of a rapid photographic record of the buildings in digital format, the production of manuscript notes and of phased sketch plans outlining the probable development of the buildings.

### 4. THE SITE (Appendix 1)

- 4.1 Plympton St Mary parish originally had no village of that name; the principal settlements being at Underwood (to the south of the present site), Ridgeway and Colebrook (to the north). The Hele Arms lies in what must formerly have been a relatively rural situation, on the road between Ridgeway and Underwood, just where the road crossed the Longbrook Stream, and not far from the site of Plympton Priory. The priory was a house of Augustinian Canons founded in 1121 on the site of an earlier monastery and surrendered in 1534 (White 1850, 554). The priory church lay to the north east of the present site, immediately south of the parish churchyard. Some remains of the ancillary buildings, including the Priory Mills, survived into the late 19th- or early 20th centuries, and collections of fragments associated with the buildings remain built into later structures across the parish and beyond. The Longbrook Stream served the Priory Mills as well as providing a water supply to the kitchens and reredorter. It is now partially culverted, but it can still be seen on the opposite side of Market Street, and its course must have crossed the northern part of the present site. The unusual configuration of the buildings in this area is likely to have been influenced by the course of the stream and it is possible that evidence of historic bridges and other waterside structures may remain below the present (adjacent) street level.
- 4.2 Immediately to the south of the site was a group of buildings, probably dwelling houses, which appear on the tithe map of the parish, surveyed in 1841. One of these buildings has since been demolished and its site incorporated into the beer garden of the present pub. Evidence of this building remains in the form of paired chimney breasts visible in the end wall of the adjoining property, while the boundary wall in the south-eastern corner of the site, constructed of flat blocks of rubble, incorporates several phases of blocked openings relating to the façade of the demolished building. Although these houses must pre-date the 1840s, the architectural form of the surviving house and the character of the blocked openings in the boundary wall do not suggest great antiquity, and it is probable that the houses dated from the late 18th or early 19th century, perhaps representing a small speculative development of two houses on the then northern edge of Underwood.
- 4.3 The pub does not appear on the 1841 Tithe map, though the triangular area occupied by the present beer garden to the rear is recognisable (Appendix 1: Map 1). The site of the pub at that time formed part of a much larger plot of land to the west, which was to be developed from 1841 with the large complex of buildings forming the Plympton Union Workhouse. This building was erected in 1841 in 'The Elizabethan Style', and housed 200 inmates (White 1850, 551). The workhouse building appears on the tithe map, and survived into the 1970s when it was demolished as part of the redevelopment of the local hospital. The pub appears to

have been developed on Workhouse land and may have been constructed either at the same time as the workhouse or very shortly afterwards.

- 4.4** The pub was certainly present by 1850, when The Hele Arms is listed at Underwood in White's 1850 Directory of Devonshire. It was then kept by John Smith (*ibid.*, 557). By 1855 it had changed hands, since a sale notice of 1855 describes it as a 'well-accustomed inn', kept by one Edward White 'who has carried on a lucrative business on the premises for some years'. The building then consisted of a parlour, tap room, bar parlour, a large outer room, brew house, skittle alley, curtilages etc., and a 'lofty and most useful room' on the first floor, measuring 24 ft x 18 ft, with a balcony 'commanding a pleasant prospect' (Guthrig 2004, 27).
- 4.5** White either did not sell the pub in 1855, or remained in place as landlord on behalf of a new owner, since his name is still listed as inn-keeper of the Hele arms in the 1861 census. The buildings were at that time more extensive and occupied a larger plot than at present. The Ordnance Survey (OS) 1st edition map of 1867 shows the pub buildings extending much further west, in the form of a long range of buildings extending along the north side of the existing beer garden parallel with the Longbrook Stream, and a further range extending at right angles from the centre of this long range, separating the unbuilt areas of the site into two sections (Appendix 1: Map 2). These were possibly yards or gardens. The footprint of the existing building can easily be recognised in the eastern part of the site with a projection in the front representing the present porch and balcony over. It is probable that the long ranges to the west contained the skittle alley, brewhouse and perhaps also the large outer room described in 1855. In the triangular area of garden to the rear two small rectangular buildings are shown, whose functions are unknown, and to the front of the pub the stream separates the forecourt from a triangular area shown planted with trees. This appears to have been walled around, and may have formed a private garden. Parts of the walls still survive in the northern part of the present site, forming a triangular recess off an adjacent street, now used for casual car parking. The wall is well constructed of local limestone rubble, with ashlar dressings meeting at an acutely-angled corner where it met the stream. There are clearly several phases of masonry present in this wall but no dating evidence of any kind.
- 4.6** By the date of the OS 2nd edition map in 1913 the site had been much curtailed, apparently in order to enlarge and improve the facilities of the neighbouring work house (Appendix 1: Map 3). Both the long range extending to the west and the range extending at right angles from it had been either wholly or partially demolished and a new western boundary to the pub site had been defined, running from northeast to southwest across the site at a different angle to all the earlier buildings, respecting an earlier wall shown within the site on the 1867 map. This wall, of mixed rubble construction and rising to a considerable height, survives along much of the northwestern border of the site. It is also clearly of many phases, but these could not be interpreted since access to the wall was restricted by adjoining buildings and private gardens. The earlier masonry, as in the boundary walls representing the earlier house to the south, shows a pronounced horizontal emphasis through the use of flat blocks, though there are clearly many areas of larger blocks which might represent either blocking, later phases of walling or possibly the wall was employed as the rear wall of a group of sheds and outbuildings enclosing a narrow yard or court in the western part of the site.
- 4.7** Late 19th- or early-20th-century industrial developments in the area include the establishment of a cattle market and maltings close to the Priory and a gasworks on the site opposite. A school and short terraces of early 20th-century houses (such as

Priory Terrace) were erected nearby and during this period of growth the pub appears to have prospered. There appear to have been few subsequent alterations to the basic layout of the buildings, though individual structures on the site appear to have been re-modelled or rebuilt during the 20th century. As is often the case, continuity of use as a public house seems to have protected it while the character of the area around it changed and, in the later 20th century, declined. Historic buildings, such as the maltings, the workhouse, the cattle market and the adjacent dwelling either fell derelict or were demolished. Gardens and orchards were gradually replaced with industrial buildings, hard standing and modern suburban developments. The pub finally closed in 2010 after over 160 years of trading life.

## 5. BUILDING SURVEY (Fig. 2; Plates 1-15)

### 5.1 Exteriors

The nucleus of the buildings appears to be the two-storey rectangular block which forms the main building of the pub and occupies the eastern part of the site (Plate 1). The rest of the complex consists of low, single-storey ranges of outbuildings, perhaps replacing the skittle alleys and other facilities mentioned in the sale notice of 1855. Part of the façade is concealed by later walling intended to create covered passages to connect the main building with a latrine block, which was erected in the forecourt of the building in the late 19th-century and presumably drained into the adjacent stream. This structure may originally have been freestanding and may have incorporated an open air urinal.

#### *The main building*

The main building has a double-fronted façade, with a central entrance, under a low-pitched slate roof (Plate 5). These are all features typical of 18th or early 19th century domestic architecture rather than of earlier vernacular buildings in the region. The plan of the building is only one room deep, with but a narrow corridor-like space to the rear. This contains the staircase and a low, tunnel-like room within a very narrow lean-to structure extending alongside the northern boundary wall of the beer garden. The walls of the building are rendered and the masonry is not visible externally; however, where it has been stripped internally, through the removal of a dado or fixed bench seating, it shows as random rubble consisting of small, flat stones. Unfortunately this is painted with a black damp-proofing treatment and the mortars and geology were for the most part obscured.

#### *Northeastern elevation*

The double-fronted façade is divided into three bays. The central bay of the façade is emphasised by a low gable over the broad, central first-floor window, and by the projecting porch at ground-floor level. The first-floor opening features a set of early 20th-century French doors allowing access to the balcony, which is railed round with most unworthy modern railings. The original balustrading does not survive and its character is not known.

The porch is of great archaeological interest, since it appears to have been adapted from a late-medieval oriel or bay window (Plate 2). There is no evidence that this is *in situ*, and it is most likely that it was brought from elsewhere and reassembled on this site. The window has canted sides with simple square-headed doorways to east and west. It is uncertain whether or not these doorways replace side lights to the window, or whether it was formerly of shallower projection without side lights. The canted jambs are constructed of ashlar masonry quite different from that of the rest of the building, while the central three-light window has monolithic dressings forming three tall, slightly pointed uncusped lights with indented spandrels and

external chamfers. Above the window is a wave-moulding, perhaps part of a longer string course or drip-moulding over the window. Internally the mullions are unusually square, without rebates for shutters (Plate 3). The massive scale of the mullions may, of course result from the use of an intractable material, such as granite. The window is thickly encrusted with layers of paint, but these layers peel off surprisingly easily. The dating and original form of the window (which may have been altered, for example by the trimming off of cusps to simplify reglazing) could only be established firmly with the removal of all of this paintwork. There seems no reason to doubt that this is indeed the remains of a late-medieval oriel window, reused in this position to give some architectural distinction to the entrance to the pub. It is highly unlikely that this window dates from the 13th century, as has been suggested in the Heritage Statement (Le Page Architects, 2012, Section 2.2) and other authorities (such as Cynthia Gaskill-Brown; *ibid.*) Square-headed mullioned windows with monolithic dressings like this, especially in granite, are characteristic of high quality buildings of the 15th and early 16th centuries in the locality. 'The Prysten House', in central Plymouth, for example, features a similar shallow bay on two storeys over the main doorway, both with side lights and with wave-moulded string- or drip courses over, very like that of the window at Plympton. The most likely origin of this window is a lost, earlier building nearby, either part of the Priory ruins or perhaps a large, late-medieval house in the area.

On either side of the central bay, in the main façade of the pub are simple, square-headed sash windows lighting the ground and first-floor rooms. These openings have no drip-mouldings or dressings to give them an architectural character corresponding with that of the Gothic window of the porch. This again implies that the window is a reclaimed object rather than a 19th-century Gothic-revival feature designed as part of the present building. The windows on the first floor retain sashes of late 18th- or early 19th-century character, each sash with six small panes divided by window bars. These have shaped horns and must be 20th-century replacements, perhaps replicating the original sashes. The ground-floor windows are smaller and simpler with only two panes in each sash. The sash-boxes are exposed: this is, however, no indication of an early date and, as these sashes too have horns, they are probably also replacements of the originals.

#### *Southwestern elevation*

This elevation was formerly closely overshadowed by the neighbouring house to the south. It is extremely plain but contains some enigmatic features (Plate 4). Running all along the base of the wall is a broad, slate-capped feature of uncertain function. This is very probably a French drain constructed to minimise damp problems by isolating the building from the higher ground to the south west. The rear wall of the building is completely blind, except for two small doorways at ground-floor level. The upper part of this elevation is offset to the north at the eastern end, beyond which is a low lean-to roof covering the small, tunnel-like store behind the back wall of the main building. The central and western parts of the offset contain the staircase (lit by a casement window in the return wall of the offset) and a corridor which may have formerly communicated with the ancillary buildings to the west. The upper part, above the corridor is now bathrooms, but had a specific function related to the public house use, which will be discussed below.

#### *Gable ends*

Extending to the east of the main block is a low polygonal building with a flat roof and an angled corner to the street (Plate 5). Although this looks like an extension it appears on early maps of the site and must at least be of mid-19th-century date. The building is lit by two early 20th-century four-paned sash windows. It is probable

that one of these was formerly a doorway, since its jambs run down to floor level internally. This area may have formed one of the bars mentioned in the 1855 sale notice, with its own separate entrance from the street. Above roof level the eastern gable end of the building is blind, though there is evidence, internally, of a large window here with an arched head. There is no chimney stack in the end gable, instead, this is located against the rear wall of the building.

The western gable end is now obscured by other buildings but rises clear of these above first-floor level (Plate 6). It has a large, T-shaped chimney stack, presumably serving three fireplaces: one on the ground floor and another on the first floor of the main building and a third fireplace backing onto these at ground-floor level within the lower buildings to the west. Both chimney stacks have attractive ornamental tops of corbelled brick.

#### *Western wing*

Extending to the west of the main building is a long, low single-storey wing of more-or-less entirely anonymous architectural character. This probably originates as a 19th-century structure, perhaps the very long, narrow range shown on the 1867 map. It has been extensively rebuilt and its rear wall, facing southwest, is now almost entirely featureless, pierced only by modern windows and a doorway; however it is probable that this wall dates from the mid 19th-century and that it retains features relating to the earlier buildings. Immediately to the west of the main block, for example, is a projection in the wall which might be the remains of a projecting feature such as a chimney breast. This may have provided a fireplace superseding that in the western gable, though unfortunately it has not been possible to confirm this conjecture. The presumed French drain runs the entire length of this wall.

The façade of this building facing northeast was more elaborate, despite looking onto the narrow court to the west of the presumed latrine block. This façade has rather elegant neo-Georgian detail, which suggests that it may have been entirely rebuilt in the early 20th century during a phase of improvement and enlargement of the pub facilities, perhaps c. 1930 or a little later (Plate 7). This façade included a large tripartite sash window with many-paned sashes, within a projecting bay now looking onto the covered passage to the ladies' toilets. A second window of paired sashes remains to the west, in a recessed part of the façade looking onto the courtyard. This part of the building was served by its own separate external doorway with a projecting porch containing a six-panelled door and glazed overlight, which may have provided an entrance to one of the bars or function suites. The doors and windows have all since been blocked and the orientation of the building is now away from the courtyard towards the beer garden behind. It is unlikely that much 19th-century fabric now survives in this building.

#### *Northern wing*

The northern wing is now a dilapidated range of sheds and outbuildings, incorporating the beer cellar and stores, extending from the north-western façade of the west wing across the site of the Longbrook Stream. The 19th-century OS maps suggest that this range is a rebuilding, on a different alignment, of a mid 19th-century range of buildings extending as far as the south bank of the stream. There appears to have been a narrow triangular court to the west of this long-demolished range, defined by a wall returning from the bank of the stream to meet the northeastern wall of the original west wing. It is probable that this wall survives in part within the present western boundary wall of the site, and that elements of the earlier north wing may also have been incorporated into the present structures.



There are, certainly, many breaks and discontinuities in the masonry of this range, revealing that it has a complex structural history. The present north wing was in existence by 1913, and must have been rebuilt in the late 19th century when the original pub site was truncated to allow for the expansion of the adjacent workhouse. The buildings were presumably rebuilt to maximise the available space on what had become a relatively congested site. The north wing is shown on the 1913 OS map with a wider northern section. This was later truncated and the buildings re-roofed with a corrugated material. To the southwest a narrow modern porch links the beer cellar to the west wing. The beer cellar seems to retain masonry of at least three different periods. The angled corner of the cellar was perhaps chopped away in the 1930s to increase light and improve access to the rebuilt west wing. North of this are two open-fronted stores, both representing the remains of truncated 19th-century buildings. One incorporates a possible fireplace, abutting against the earlier western wall of the site. The northern building appears to have been built over the course of the Longbrook Stream. There is insufficient evidence to determine the functions of these structures.

## 5.2 Interiors

### *The main building: Ground floor*

The interior of the main building has been gutted to unite the whole of the ground floor into a single open space (Plate 8). This is likely to be a late 20th-century alteration since, until the last decades of the 20th century, it was the custom for public houses to be divided into separate, smaller areas, such as private parlours, 'public' and 'lounge' bars to cater for private drinking as well as for different social groups, classes and (to an extent) sexes. There is little visible evidence of the original layout of this part of the building. However it may have been divided into two bars by a central passage running across the building to meet the rear wall. The line of the passage is perhaps betrayed by beams in the ceiling, but these could well have been installed as part of the 'picturesque' olde-worlde beaméd make-over which the building appears to have suffered in the late 20th-century (as in so many pub interiors), and the beams are not wholly to be trusted. The presumed line of the passage, for example, does not link the front door to the doorway in the rear wall communicating with the staircase and, from this, we may postulate either that the passage turned in a dog-leg to the west or that it ended in a blank wall. The position of the staircase, which would appear to be contemporary with the building, would preclude a blocked doorway in this position. The door communicating with the staircase retains a fragment of a partially glazed screen incorporating a doorway and side-lights fitted with coloured glass panes and panels with exaggerated raised fielding (Plate 9). This feature is probably also of primary date. The door, which probably had margin lights and glory stars reflecting this detail, has been removed.

Both the eastern and western rooms appear to have been heated, though neither retains an original chimneypiece or grate. The fireplace of the western room has been blocked in concrete blocks and the alcoves to either side broken through to communicate with the rooms to the west. One of these openings has an arched head and might have contained an early doorway.

The eastern room was heated by a fireplace in its rear wall, alongside which was a doorway communicating with the narrow tunnel-like store beneath the staircase (Plate 10). Although it is a very narrow space, this might have been used as a cellar for the storage of more valuable victuals such as port, sherry or brandy, and it is thus possible that these rooms were set aside for the more high-spending customers. The room was originally divided by a wall from the polygonal room

beyond this, which had its own entrance from the street. This room may have been a public bar intended to catch the attention and custom of casual drinkers passing on the street. It had a doorway to the gardens at the rear and also a low doorway to the presumed wine store under the stairs. No other historic fixtures are visible.

*The main building: First floor*

The first floor covers only a very small area and does not initially appear to have formed part of the domestic quarters of the pub, but rather to have served as an entertainment suite or function rooms comparable in use (though on a very modest scale) with the much grander buildings of Assembly Rooms. This is borne out by the 1855 sale notice, which mentions the 'lofty and most useful room' on the first floor with a balcony 'commanding a pleasant prospect' (see above).

The room is approached by the staircase at the rear of the house, which rises within a very narrow space enclosed by solid walls but which, nevertheless, was provided with a balustrade featuring turned typically mid 19th-century newels and a moulded handrail, now unfortunately much damaged (Plate 11). At the summit of the staircase, in the rear wall a doorway opened onto a large room, the original dimensions of which match those given in the sale notice. The room has since been divided into separate bedrooms but originally extended through the western two thirds of the first floor and for the full depth of the building. In its south-western wall was a wide alcove, forming part of the room and arranged centrally to it, with a domed ceiling contrived below the eaves (Plate 12). This has been converted into a bathroom, but it is divided from the room only by a thin modern partition, and it must originally have been an open alcove. This was probably provided for musicians to stand or sit in during functions, or perhaps, for the table and dais used at public meetings.

The room was heated by a fireplace in its western wall, now blocked, and was well ventilated by large windows. Part of the ceiling of the room, within the wide window opening onto the balcony, was domed upwards into the roof space. This part of the ceiling has deep coved cornices roughly 0.5m tall, now concealed by a lower suspended ceiling, but decorated with reeded plaster ribs and also, possibly an embossed wallpaper. It was not possible to ascertain whether or not there was a central ceiling rose for the suspension of a chandelier, or any other decorative plasterwork, but it is most likely that this area formed the dance floor and was thus distinguished architecturally from the areas set apart for the musicians and the spectators.

The eastern room, which was separated from the function room by a primary partition, has a wide doorway, which retains a very broad, flat, moulded architrave (Plate 13). This doorway has been narrowed, probably when the internal partitions were inserted within the function room, but the architrave remains in place. The door has been removed. The room was heated by a fireplace in its southern wall and lit by windows to north and east. This room seems likely to have functioned as a card room or refreshment room for those exhausted by the festivities in the adjacent room.

*The main building: roof*

The roof of the building could not be accessed for detailed inspection, but a small inspection hatch allowed it to be photographed remotely. The raised, coved ceiling of the central part of the building prevented a clear view to the east, but the lower ceiling of the western part of the room allowed views of the roof structure over this part of the building (Plate 14).

The roof is supported by tie-beam or 'A'-frame trusses with very low collars, the lower parts of the principal rafters being concealed by modern insulation material. The principal rafters are halved and crossed at the apex to cradle the ridge tree. A short timber nailed to the apex provided additional bearing for the ridge tree, which does not survive. The purlins appear to have been disturbed, since they bear the marks of the rafters on their undersides, but these timbers originally appear to have been trenched into and staggered over the backs of the principals in each bay. The coved ceiling of the central bay is supported on short, curved timbers (Plate 15) apparently resting on the tie beam of the second truss from the west, suggesting that there may be as many as five bays in total. The roof has been rebuilt in the 20th century and, as far as can be ascertained, new common rafters have replaced the originals, resting on reused purlins derived from the original structure.

#### *Western wing and northern wing*

There is no evidence of the function or internal divisions of the original west wing, though some traces of partitions and blocked openings might survive in its southwestern wall. The interior has been entirely gutted in the 20th century to form a very long function room with doorways opening onto the beer garden. Scars in the flooring, however, reveal that the west wing, as rebuilt in the early 20th century, was divided into three separate rooms. One of these was a long and narrow room lit by the blocked tripartite window in the projecting bay of the north front. This room had a side entrance from the forecourt and may have been heated by a fireplace in its southwestern wall. The second room also had a separate entrance from the western court, and was lit by a pair of sash windows. This room may have had an elaborate feature fireplace, the outline of which is still visible in the floor. There seems to have been a passage adjoining the south side of the fireplace, which communicated with the third room beyond. The function of this room is uncertain. It must have been lit by a window in the rear wall, since the wall towards the court was abutted against by the north wing.

The interior of the north wing shows few surviving historic features. The only hint as to its use is the hard floor of yellow brick pavements in the northern building, which might suggest a stable, in which case, the adjoining room with the fireplace may have served as a tack room or workshop. Unfortunately, in the absence of any other evidence, these must remain speculations.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

**6.1** The Hele Arms was almost certainly constructed as a purpose-built public house in the 1840s. There is little evidence of its use as a private house and it is known that the building was already operating as an inn by 1850. It cannot have been built long before this. The curious plan of the building, its siting within the plot and the incorporation of the reused Gothic window bay (which provided two entrance doorways) all seem to be intended to give it a distinction and prominence suitable for this purpose.

**6.2** The building was very short on domestic accommodation for either the innkeeper's family or for guests, though it is possible that these were housed in other parts of the complex, now demolished or altered beyond recognition. It was certainly provided with many distinct bars and rooms for a wide variety of leisure activities, which may account for its long success as a business. The first-floor suite of rooms is the most important survival, replicating, on a very small scale, the kind of facilities which had been offered for at least a century previously by the Assembly Rooms of

large coaching inns and by Subscription Rooms in fashionable resort towns. The rooms included a large function room, with an alcove for musicians and a card or refreshment room adjoining. There was some small attempt at a suitably architectural expression in the domed central bay of the ceiling and the balcony where one might admire the view while cooling off after a dance. The locations of the other facilities mentioned in the 1855 sale notice, such as the skittle alley and 'large outer room', are not known, though it seems likely that these were housed in the west and north wings. The forecourt of the pub may have allowed outside seating close to the Longbrook Stream and, in the 19th century, would have had a rural aspect entirely absent today. The two curious square structures shown in the garden behind the pub on the 1867 map remain enigmatic. Although it is perfectly possible that these were mere sheds or privies, there is a strong possibility that these were small summer houses, booths or arbours for private *al fresco* drinking and dining on warm nights. Similar small square structures are shown in inn gardens on 19th-century maps of other towns, sometimes accompanied by oddly-shaped structures of uncertain function which are likely to be associated with games or music. For example, four such booths or arbours and a curious open-fronted, curved building, possibly a bandstand, are shown in the gardens of the Eagle Tavern in Howell Road, Exeter, on the 1876 OS 1:500 map sheet 80.6.7 (Parker 2005, 63; Fig. 6). Such structures may once have been relatively common, but they have now, almost without exception, entirely perished.

Although the architectural significance of the Hele Arms is now understood to rest only in the inclusion of the remains of a Gothic bay window, perhaps from the Priory buildings, the first-floor entertainment suite is an interesting survival of a leisure facility designed for a low social class, on the model of a far grander building type usually associated with Georgian and Regency high society. These rooms may once, perhaps, have been very significant to the social life of 19th-century Plympton St Mary.

## **7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY**

- 7.1 The site archive is currently held at AC archaeology's offices 4 Halthaies workshops, Bradninch, Exeter EX5 4LQ, and will be deposited under the accession number 2013.7 at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth within one year of completion of the entire project.
- 7.2 An entry onto the OASIS (Online Access to the Index of Archaeological investigationS) database has been created using the identifier 145135.

## **8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 8.1 This report was commissioned by Commercial Concepts Ltd, and was managed for them by Colin Matten. The project was managed for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The recording was carried out on behalf of AC archaeology by Richard Parker, who also prepared the report. The report illustrations were prepared by Sarnia Blackmore. We are grateful to Colin Matten and Steve Tremain, of Commercial Concepts Ltd. for assistance on site during the building recording.

## **9. SOURCES CONSULTED**

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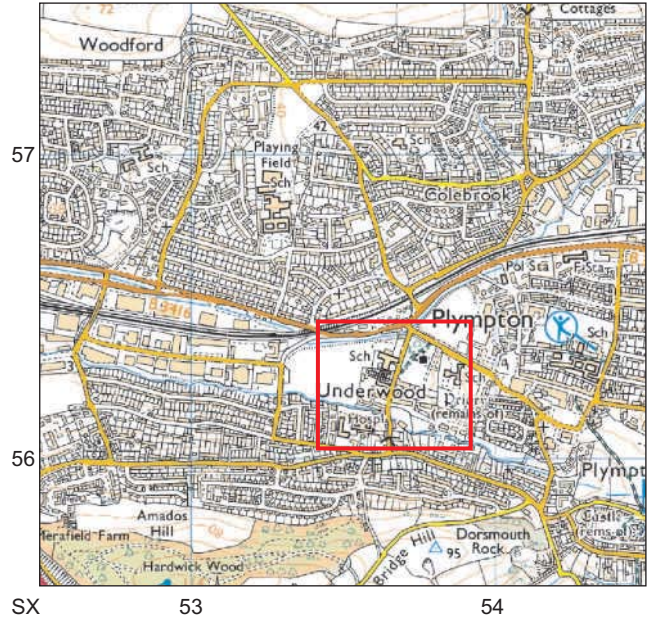
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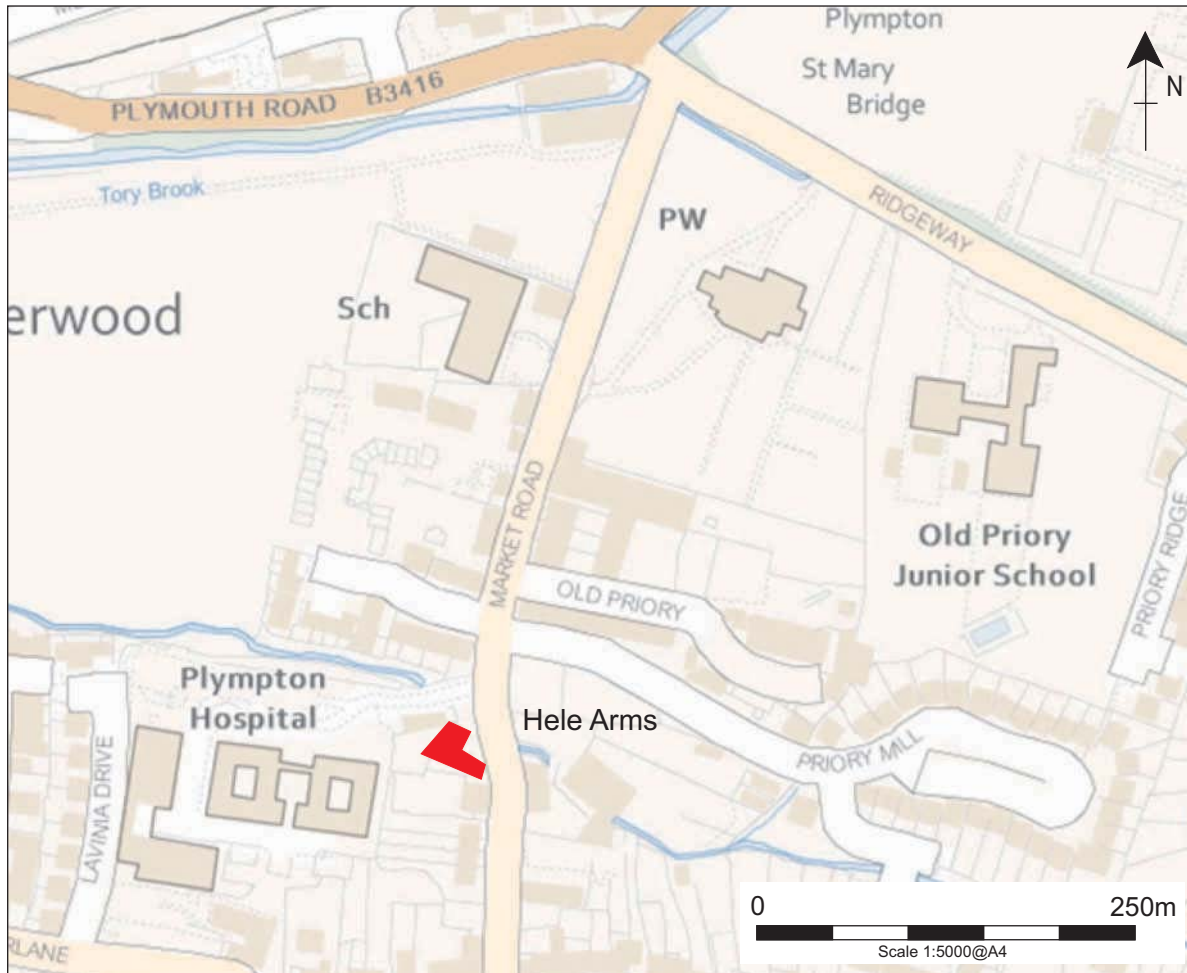
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 Location of site

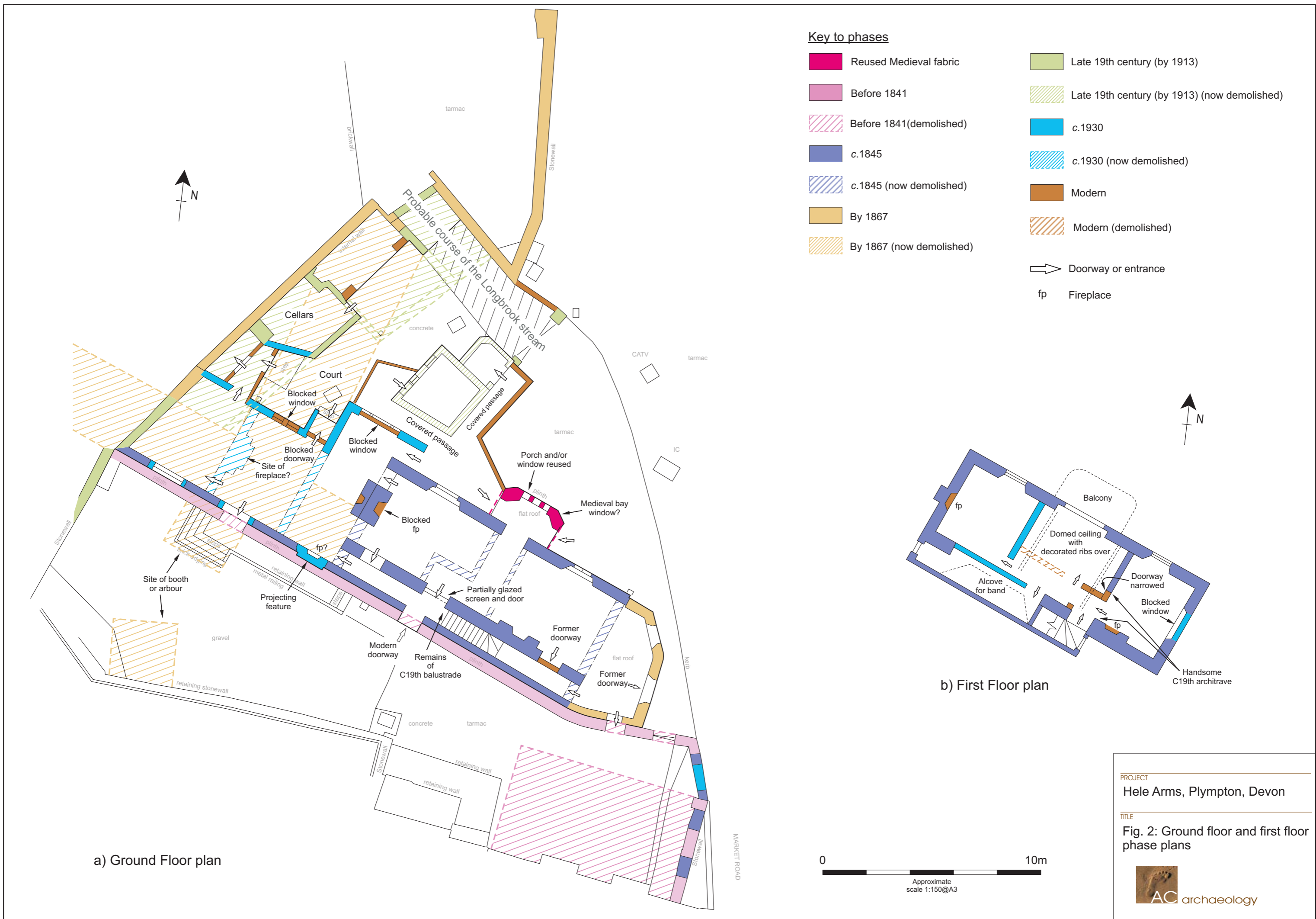
PROJECT

Hele Arms, Plympton

TITLE

Fig.1: Location of site





**Key to phases**

- Reused Medieval fabric
- Before 1841
- Before 1841(demolished)
- c.1845
- c.1845 (now demolished)
- By 1867
- By 1867 (now demolished)
- Late 19th century (by 1913)
- Late 19th century (by 1913) (now demolished)
- c.1930
- c.1930 (now demolished)
- Modern
- Modern (demolished)
- Doorway or entrance
- fp Fireplace

a) Ground Floor plan

b) First Floor plan

PROJECT  
**Hele Arms, Plympton, Devon**

TITLE  
**Fig. 2: Ground floor and first floor phase plans**






Plate 1: General view of the façade from Market Street, looking south. 2m scale



Plate 2: Detail of the reused late-medieval bay window built into the porch. 2m scale



Plate 3: Detail of the window from the interior showing the thick, square mullions and the absence of rebates for shutters. 2m scale



Plate 4: View of the rear elevation showing the presumed French drain running along the base of the wall. 2m scale





Plate 5: View of the eastern gable, with the low bar room projecting from it. 2m scale



Plate 7: Detail of the 20th-century façade of the west wing, as rebuilt c.1930. 2m scale



Plate 6: View of the western gable and the rear elevation of the west wing. 2m scale



Plate 8: View of the interior of the main bar, looking east



Plate 9: The remains of a glazed screen separating the corridor and staircase from the main bar. 2m scale



Plate 10: The curious, tunnel-like room in the rear lean-to, looking east



Plate 11: View of the corridor and staircase to the upstairs function rooms. 2m scale



Plate 12: The alcove off the main function room, looking east, showing the domed ceiling and arched opening to the room, infilled by a modern partition. 2m scale

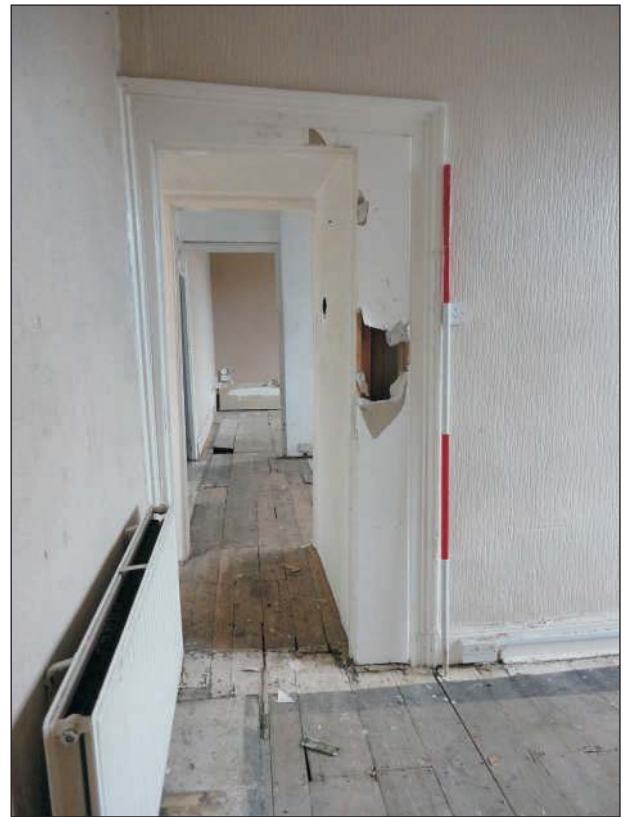


Plate 13: View of the partially blocked doorway to the card or refreshment room, looking west, showing the primary architrave and the subdivided function room beyond. 2m scale



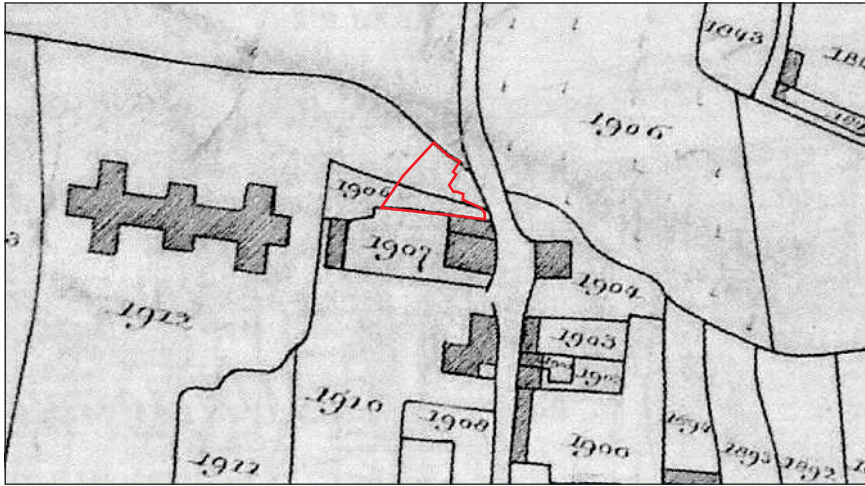
Plate 14: View within the roof, looking west, showing one of the primary trusses



Plate 15: View within the roof, looking east, showing the domed structure over the central bay rising within the roof space

# Appendix 1

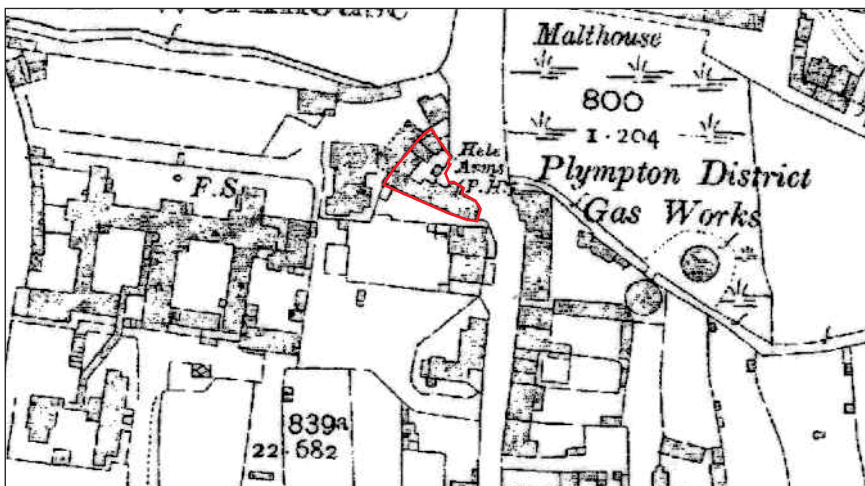
Historic map extracts




Map 1: Extract from Plympton St Mary tithe map, 1841



Map 2: Extract from the Ordnance Survey map, 1867



Map 3: Extract from the Ordnance Survey map, 1913

 Approximate location of site

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