

37 COMMERCIAL ROAD, EXETER

(NGR SX 91957 92091)

Results of historic building recording

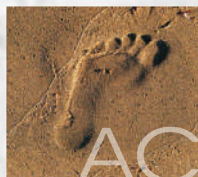
Exeter City Council planning reference 13/3019/03, condition
12

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On behalf of:
Colin Ritchie Architects Ltd

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archaeology

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(NGR SX 91957 92091)

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Exeter City Council planning reference 13/3019/03,
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CONTENTS

| | | |
|----|-------------------|---|
| | <i>Summary</i> | 1 |
| 1. | Introduction | 1 |
| 2. | The site | 2 |
| 3. | Building Survey | 2 |
| 4. | Comments | 3 |
| 5. | Acknowledgements | 3 |
| 6. | Sources consulted | 3 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1: Location of site

Fig. 2: Phased ground floor plan

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: The north and east elevations showing openings and architectural detail, viewed from the north.

Plate 2: The south elevation showing the inserted ground-floor openings, viewed from the south.

Plate 3: The internal face of the south elevation showing painted masonry, viewed from the west.

Plate 4: The internal face of the south elevation showing painted masonry with replacement columns in the foreground, viewed from the north.

Plate 5: The southern half of the warehouse showing the open-plan layout and original columns in the foreground, viewed from the southwest.

Plate 6: The southern half of the warehouse showing the original and replacement columns, with bridging beams above and later rolled steel joist replacement, viewed from the southwest.

Plate 7: A first-floor window the north elevation showing security bars, viewed from the east.

Plate 8: The roof structure, viewed from the south.

Summary

Historic building recording was carried out by AC archaeology in January 2014 at 37 Commercial Road, Exeter (NGR SX 91957 92091) during the conversion of the former nightclub into a bar and flats. No. 37 Commercial Road was constructed in 1878 and is one of a group of 19th-century bonded stores situated along The Quay and Commercial Road.

The stripping and re-ordering of the interior has not revealed any original fixtures and fittings. The shell of the building is primary, albeit with many later openings. Internally, there are no original partitions present, with primary surviving internal elements comprising the roof timbers, the first floor and the majority of the metal posts supporting the first floor.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig.1)

- 1.1 This report presents the results of historic building recording at 37 Commercial Road, Exeter (SX 91957 92091; Fig. 1), carried out by AC archaeology on 10 January 2014. The recording was commissioned by Colin Ritchie Architects Ltd on behalf of St Austell Brewery and Quay Construction (SW) Ltd, and was required under condition 12 of the grant of Planning Permission (Exeter City Council reference 13/3019/03) for "Change of use from nightclub to bar/restaurant and 6 flats". Guidance on the scope of the investigations was provided by the Exeter City Council Archaeology Officer.

2. THE SITE

- 2.1 Commercial Road is located on Shillhay, an industrial area to the west of the quay, which historically contained a number of water mills. Leats and remains of these mills, notably Cricklepit Mill, survive north of Commercial Road. Early post-medieval maps depict the land south of Commercial Road, including the site, as open ground containing tenter hooks for drying cloth (Collings *et. al.* 1996, figs 4 and 5). From the middle of the 18th century through to the middle of the 19th century the area was described as a "coal quay"; a map of 1744 shows mounds (presumably of stockpiled coal) and a building, although the latter is not depicted on later maps (*ibid.*, fig. 6-9). During the 19th century the land between the river and Commercial Road was gradually developed, and by 1876 several buildings had been erected on the site fronting the river and the road (*ibid.*, fig. 10).
- 2.2 No. 37 Commercial Road was in 1878 constructed for Samuel Jones, a local wine merchant, and is one of a group of 19th-century bonded stores situated along the Quay and Commercial Road. The building is L-shaped, with a longer elevation facing the river and a shorter elevation fronting Commercial Road. This elevation retains some architectural significance and forms a key part of the character of the Riverside Conservation Area. In the mid 20th century it was extended to the east but this addition has subsequently been removed. The two-storey bonded store contained 18,000 square feet of storage, and cost £2,000 to build.

3. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1** The stripping out and re-ordering of the interior had the potential to reveal and remove evidence of the building's original function and layout that may have survived previous conversions. The work also had the potential to reveal and affect elements of the building's historic significance. The aim of the work was therefore to monitor and record stripping out and other building works that may affect or expose historic fabric.
- 3.2** The investigations were carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Archaeological work for historic building recording prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2013). A brief written description of the building was prepared, together with a photographic record in colour digital format. A detailed record of modern elements was not made.

4. BUILDING SURVEY (Fig. 2; Plates 1-8)

4.1 Description of the exterior (Plates 1-2)

The building is two storied, under a gabled slate roof. The walls are constructed of square and rectangular blocks of Brixham limestone laid in courses bonded in a soft, light brown sandy lime mortar with frequent inclusions. The eaves level has been finished with brickwork. The northwest corners of the building have been chamfered and on the ground floor contain wide areas of brickwork. These terminate at a stringcourse of ovolo-moulded grey limestone blocks; elsewhere on the north and east elevations the stringcourse is constructed from red bricks. Above the stringcourse the chamfering tapers to straight corners using yellow bricks. These two corners, along with the southeast corner, have been strengthened, each with the addition of two iron ties.

The original openings have lintels formed of rubbed bricks with protruding dressed limestone keystones. There are circular openings with the same brickwork and prominent 'keystones' in the upper part of the gable end walls.

There are many inserted early 20th-century openings particularly in the elevation to the south fronting the river. These openings have brick surrounds with a hard, light grey cement mortar. They have either wooden or concrete lintels and wooden shutters. There is a modern brick and glass extension at the southeast corner, and a modern external fire escape on the east elevation, created by enlarging an original window opening.

4.2 Description of the interior (Plates 3-8)

Ground Floor

At the time of the survey there was a limited amount of historic fabric visible due to the presence of modern wall coverings. Early, possibly original, white paint survives on the unrendered west and south elevations (Plates 3-4). These walls contain many nails some of which may date to its original construction or its early history, perhaps being used to attached panelling or shelving. There are no original internal divisions, and no evidence was noted for the presence of any early partitions.

The joists at first-floor level are supported on seven rows of bridging beams. These are formed from pairs of rectangular timbers bolted together. Any fitch plates between the timbers were not visible. In the wider, southern part of the building, the four rows of beams are supported on and bolted to cast-iron columns (Plates 4-6).

Some of the beams are more slender and have narrower brackets than the others and must represent (?early 20th-century) replacements. Where necessary, joins in the beams have been positioned over the columns. The beams are painted white, with a later covering of brown paint. Nails that supported, now-removed, lath and plaster are visible on the base of the floor joists. Some of the columns and beams have been replaced with steel posts and rolled steel joists respectively.

First Floor

On the first floor, no historic fabric was visible with the primary external wall covered in cement render and various paint finishes. There are no original internal partitions, and all the current internal walls relate to the later 20th-century use of the building as a nightclub. In the south elevation the glazing has been removed from the western window although it still retains its external iron security bars (Plate 7).

Most of the original ceiling joists survive and display evidence of removed lathe and plaster. The tie beams of the roof were originally supported on thick cast-iron columns, of which only one was visible. Other columns have been boxed in and/or replaced with brick piers. The roof structure was not fully exposed, and elements appear to have been altered and removed. The tie beams support pairs of widely-spaced queen posts from which diagonal struts rise (Plate 8). The former are fixed to the tie beams using u-shaped iron brackets. The apexes of the roofs were not visible.

5. COMMENTS

- 5.1** The stripping and re-ordering of the interior has not revealed any original fixtures and fittings. There are no original internal divisions present, and no evidence of any historic partitions (e.g. for offices or secure stores) was visible. The shell of the building is however largely original, although many of the window and door openings are later features. Internally, it is clear that most if not all of both floors were originally open plan, and many of the primary structural elements such as the first floor, supporting columns and roof timbers remain in use.

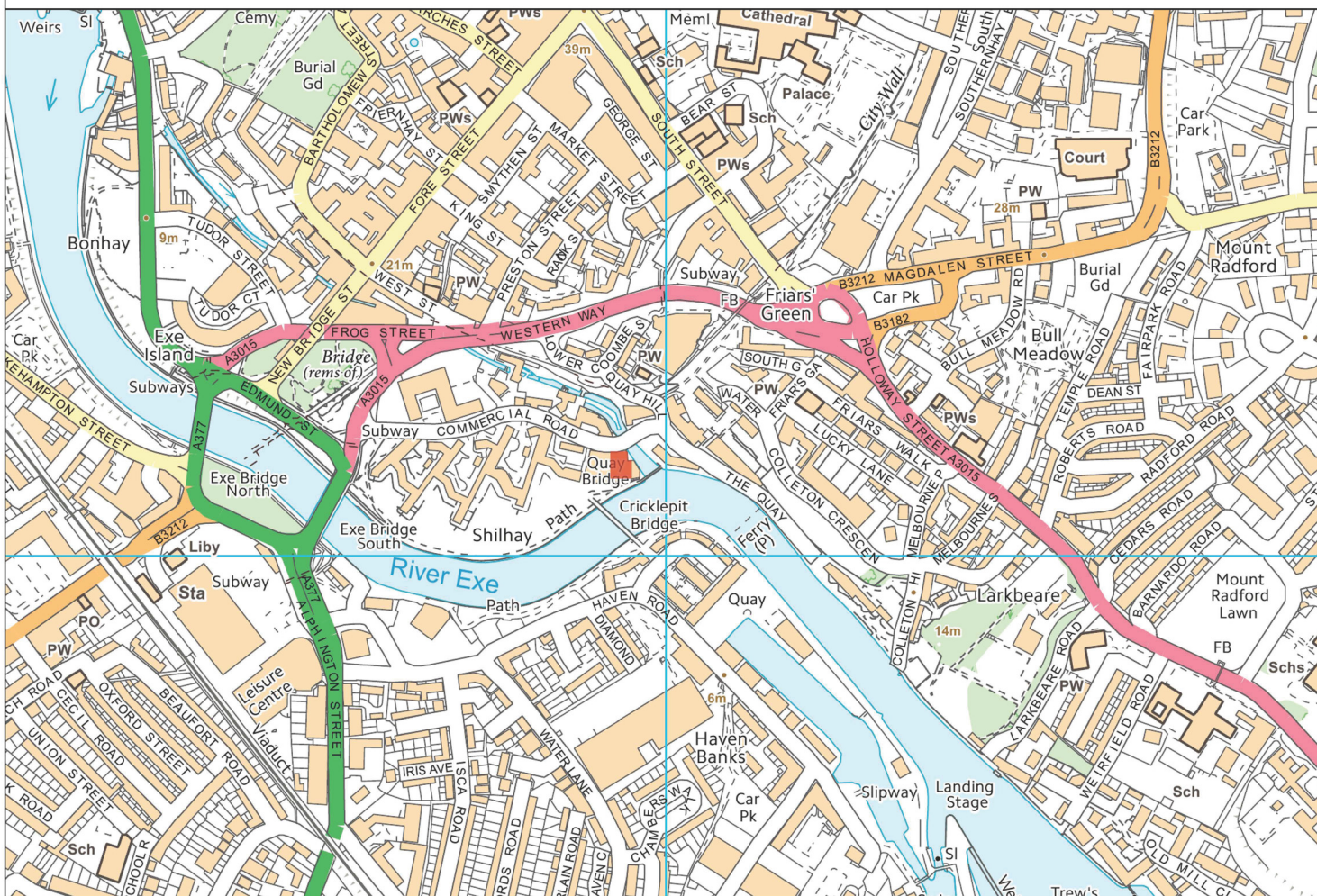
6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1** This report was commissioned by Colin Ritchie Architects Ltd on behalf of St Austell Brewery and Quay Construction (SW) Ltd. The project was managed for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore and carried out by Stella De-Villiers. The report was written by Stella De-Villiers, with the illustrations prepared by Elisabeth Patkai.

7. SOURCES CONSULTED

Collings, A.G., Pye, A.R., and Harper, S., 1996, *Lower Mills, Exeter, Documentary Sources and History 1452-1936*, Exeter Archaeology report No. **96.14**

Passmore, A., 2013, *37 Commercial Road, Exeter, Devon, (NGR SX 91957 92091), Written Scheme of Investigation for historic building recording, Exeter City Council planning reference 13/3019/03, condition 12*, AC archaeology Document No. **ACD837/1/1**



0 250m
Scale 1:7500@A4



Site location

PROJECT

37 Commercial Road, Exeter

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site



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Wall of adjacent property



1878



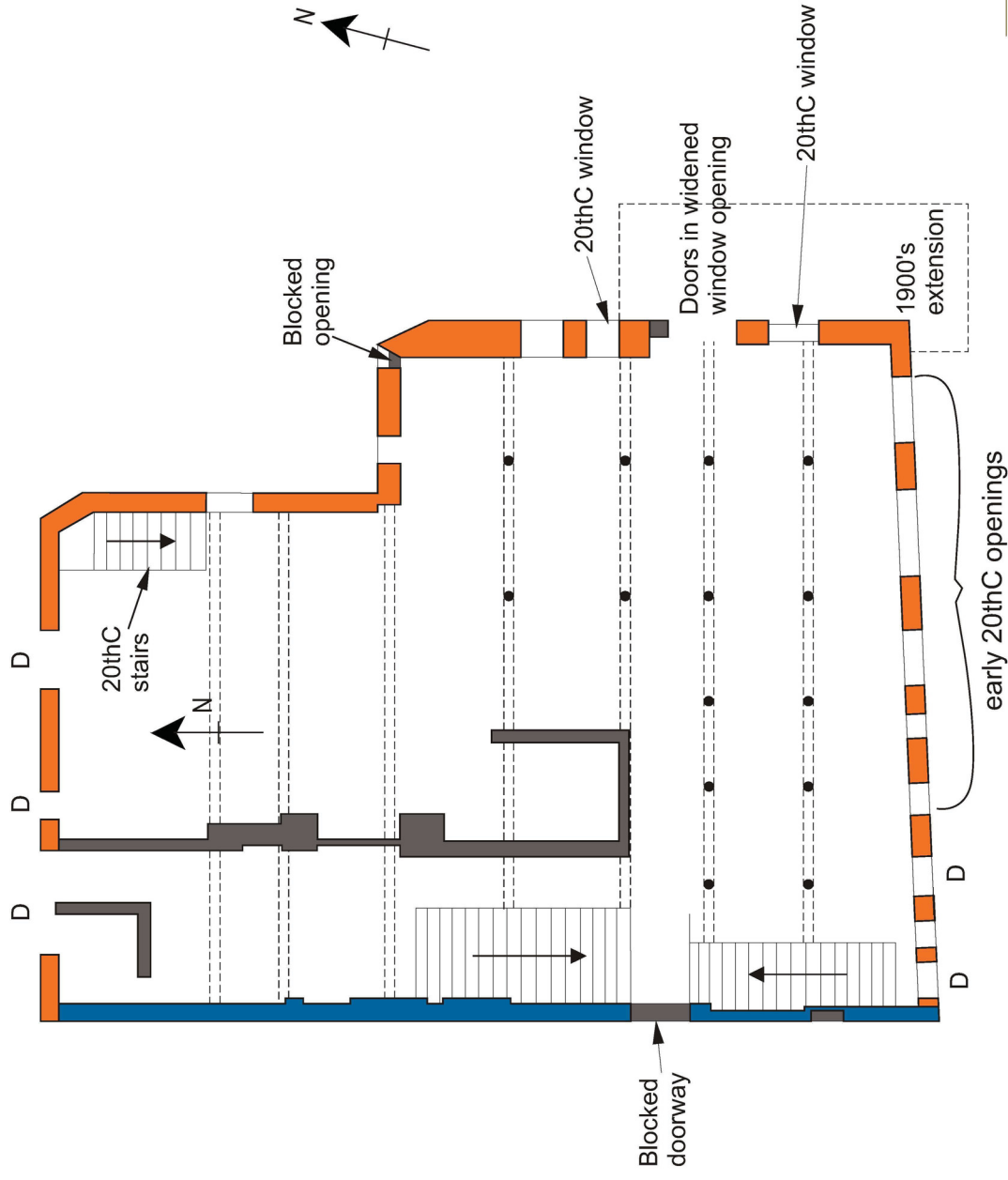
Late 20th Century



Doorway

D

First floor beams
and columns



PROJECT

37 Commercial Road,
Exeter

TITLE

Fig. 2: Phased ground
floor plan



ACI archaeology



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Plate 8: The roof structure, viewed from the south.

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