



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

ON

STARBANK HOUSE, HIGH STREET,

THAME, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SP 70481 06042

On behalf of

Mr R & Mrs C Carmichael

DECEMBER 2014

REPORT FOR Mr R and Mrs C Carmichael
Starbank House
23 High Street
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Starbank House, 23 High Street, Thame

Building Assessment

SUMMARY

A Building Assessment was carried out at Starbank House, 23 High Street, Thame, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 70481 06042). The structure lies in the historic town, parish and manor of Thame and is sited on the south side of the High Street.

Thame is known to have originated as an early medieval ecclesiastical centre probably in the 7th century, although earlier origins are sometime claimed. The original settlement is considered to have been located at the west end of the High Street and extending north to the area around the abbey and minster church. This is the area of the town in which Starbank House is located.

A number of historic maps exist of Thame but the vast majority of them only indicate that the area of the site is already developed. It is only the Inclosure Map of 1826 and the Ordnance Survey maps of the 1:2,500 series that indicate the shape and, therefore, the development of the building. These suggest that the main part of the building was constructed by 1826 and that the rear single storey extension had been added by 1881.

The Building Assessment and site observations indicated that the development of the structure was probably more complicated than had previously been imagined. Stone foundations were identifiable under the front part of the house and a kerb principal rafter in the west wall, which had mortise joints that would have held timbers extending into the present space occupied by Starbank House. The structures 23 and 24 were probably all part of one structure and part of a brewing establishment.

Phase 2 probably saw the construction of a stone structure to the rear of the building. The cellar was also probably part of an earlier construction, possibly phase 3, and there was also a brick culvert uncovered. The back part of the building had had its early 19th century front moulded to an earlier component. This had parapet gables and is thus presumably post 1707. Phase 4 saw the addition of the 19th century structure.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location

The building is located on the High Street in Thame, Oxfordshire (SP 70481 06042). Thame is a historic parish with the current parish church being at the heart of a *parochia* (early medieval minster parish). The larger parish previously included Tetsworth, Attington, Sydenham and Towersey. Besides these there is now also evidence to include Great Haseley in this arrangement due to the association of the church at Latchford with that of Thame Abbey. The site was located in the Hundred of Thame and in the historic County of Oxfordshire. Thame now lies in South Oxfordshire District Council.

The development site is located on the south side of the High Street so that the property is bordered to the north by that thoroughfare. On the east side it is bordered by the front garden of a further house fronting onto the High Street, but there is an alteration or stagger in the line of the street frontage. On the west side there is a small lane with cobbles and a complex of dwellings, some probably converted from earlier industrial buildings. The passageway is covered by a first floor partially owned by this property and the neighbouring one. On the south side the property extends to a small back lane from which access is obtained.

Thame is located on a terrace on the south side of the River Thame, near the confluence of that river with the Cuttle Brook or Meadow Brook. The site is located between 70m and 75m above Ordnance Datum.

The underlying geology is a Kimmeridge Clay Formation of siltstone and sandstone that was formed 151 to 156 million years ago in the Jurassic period (mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html). This is capped by the superficial deposits of the River Terrace Deposits 3 and 4 that were formed some 2 million years ago in the Quaternary period.

1.2 Commission

The report was commissioned by Mr and Mrs Carmichael.

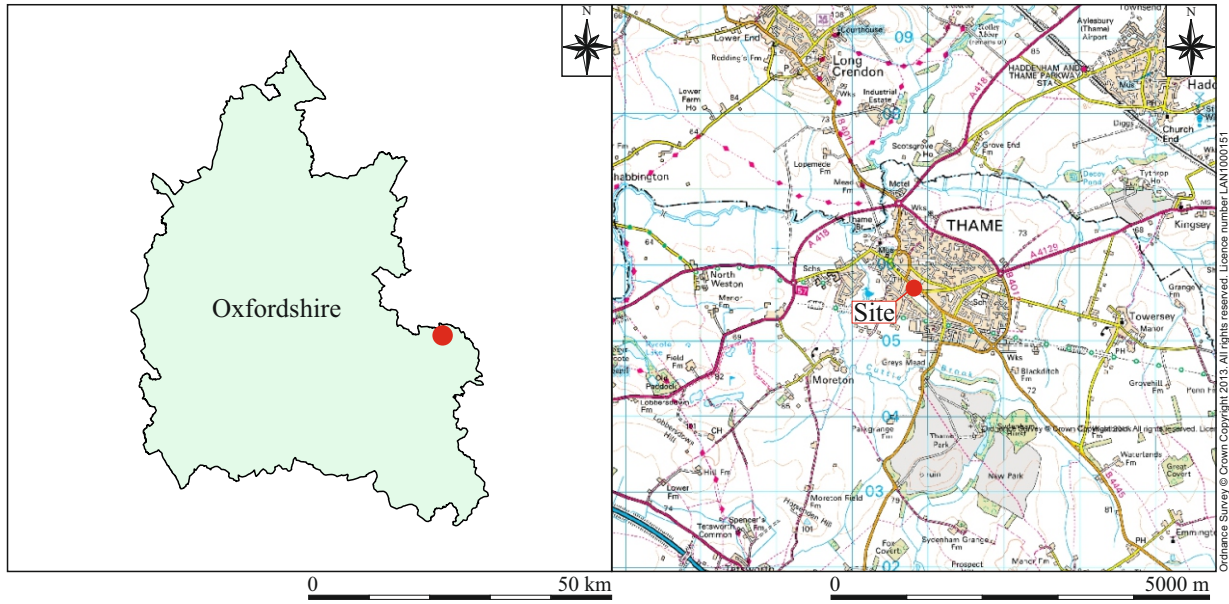
1.3 Aim of Investigation

The aim of the report is to provide an historical and architectural assessment to the building, which will be undergoing certain minor alterations.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Designations

The structure is a listed building under the name of Starbank and adjoining cottage previously known by the number 23 High Street (EHBID 248523: SP 70481 06042). The listing for the property is as follows.



Key
■ Study building

Figure 1: Site location

Townhouse, now house and offices. Early C18, refronted early C19, mid C20 alterations. Lined render, on brick; C20 flat roof not visible, slate to rear roof slope; various brick and rendered brick stacks. 3-storey, 3-window range. 6-panel door to centre with incised square Greek Doric column surround supporting cornice. 16-pane unhorned sashes to left and right with pilaster-strip surround and cornices on brackets. Three 12-pane unhorned sashes to first floor with architrave surrounds and cornices on brackets. Three 6-pane unhorned sashes to second floor with architrave surrounds. Cornice to base of plain parapet. Left return: 3-storey, 2-window range. 12-pane unhorned sashes with architrave surrounds to ground and first floor right; blind recessed panel with architrave surround to first floor left; 6-pane unhorned sash with architrave surround to second floor right; blind recessed round panel with architrave surround to second floor left. Interior: probably mid C18 open-well staircase, with baluster balustrade to rear centre, from ground to first floor, reputedly from Rycote House. Fielded panelling to entrance hall. Early C19 fireplaces, to some rooms. Mid C20 alterations to third floor. History: drawing held by the Bodleian Library shows the early C18 front prior to remodelling. (The Book of Thame, by Gerald Clarke, 1978).

There is no specific mention of the name Starbank House in the Buildings of England Series: Oxfordshire for here it is listed as no 23 (Sherwood and Pevsner 1974, 815-7). No 23 is mentioned as a square stuccoed villa of c. 1820 with three bays, three storeys, the hoods of the windows on scroll brackets and the doorway with Soanean incised decoration. A description is given of no 24 as being timber framed and stuccoed in the 18th century and sash windows. There is one gable with a first floor overhang and a carriageway to the left. The structure is dated to the 16th to 17th century.

2.2 History of Development

Stukeley stated that Thame was the location of a Roman town (VCH 1962, 160-78). However, it is not known on what evidence this was based on. Recently a cemetery with Iron Age and Roman burials has been located on the Oxford Road on the outskirts of Thame. This implies that there is Roman activity around the town, and that there has to be settlement of some kind in the area.

The name of the town and the name of the river Thame are invariably linked together. The earliest recorded form of the river name is *tame* in AD 956 (Gelling 1953, i-10-11), for which Ekwall offered no satisfactory conclusion. The 675 form as *Thamu* is in a text that was written in the 13th century. The initial ideas were that the names Thames, Thame and Tame, besides others were all linked and that they referred to dark water (Rivet and Smith 1979, 466); suggestions are now that it is related to a route word that means to flow. Personally I don't find any of these arguments fully explanatory.

A church at Thame is considered to have existed from an early date in the early medieval period (VCH 1962, 199-219). King Wulfhere of Mercia is believed to have sworn on the altar of Thame c. 675. This phrase implies that there was a church and presumably manor at Thame from the 7th century.

An abbey was constructed at Thame in the 12th century, and was associated with monastic reforms (VCH 1962, 160-78). The chancel is known to have been built in the early 13th century in an Early English style. This area also contained a Bishop's Court House and a Prebendal House of which the earliest was probably dated c. 1140.

The church was recognised as a mother church and was recognised as having chapels

at Sydenham, Tetsworth and Towersey in the 12th century. These chapels were separated from the mother church in 1841. A chapel at Latchford is also known to have been attached to the Abbey at Thame in the medieval period (Pearman 1892, 13-17; Yeates 2014, 9).

The manor at Thame is considered to be one of a group of manors held from an early date by the Bishop of Dorchester on Thames (VCH 1962, 160-178). Thame is first mentioned historically in 675, and in 971 a manor was associated with Oscytel. When the see of Lincoln moved in 1070 the possession of the manor was transferred to the new bishop. The Old Town of Thame lay under West Thame at the west end of the High Street. This is the area in which Starbank House is located.

There are two references to the manor of Thame in the Book of Winchester (Morris 1978, 6.2, 6.10). The main reference in 1086 to the estate at Thame consisted of 60 hides (VCH 1962, 160-78; Morris 1978, 6.2). Of these hides some 27 belonged to the bishop and 33 to his knights. The bishop's land is considered to have been located in Thame, Moreton, North Weston and Tetsworth. The knights' lands are considered to have been located at Attington, Moreton, North Weston, Tetsworth and possibly Waterstock. The main estate listed 27 villagers with 26 smallholders, and a mill. The second reference to Thame (Morris 1978, 6.10) refer to 10 hides held by Robert, 4 hides by Seawold, 3 hides by William, and 6 hides by Alfred. The estate contained 16 villagers with 21 smallholders and 8 slaves.

From 1126 there are confirmation grants indicating that the bishop of Lincoln held the manors of Old Thame and New Thame (VCH 1962, 160-78). The manor remained with the bishops of Lincoln until 1547 when Henry Holbeach sold the manor of Thame and the bishop's land. Land at Rycote went to Sir John Williams of Burghfield. The land that was still held by the bishop at this time went to the Norreys family, while those lands associated with Thame Abbey went to the Wenmans. Thus land at Priestend was considered to be associated with the prebendaries of Thame Abbey, later coming to the Wenmans. A manor was known to be associated with the Baldington's in 1419, which was known to have been dispersed.

The town of Thame is considered to have originated as a post-Conquest planned seigniorial borough, which was cut out of the demesne land of the bishop (VCH 1962, 178-93). In 1183-4 the Tuesday Market is known to have taken place, and this activity appears to be integrally connected to the foundation of the borough. In 1219 the Oxford to Aylesbury road is known to have been diverted so that it passed through the town. There is a suggestion that the original burgages in the town developed from Field Acre Strips. This development is considered to have predominantly occurred in the 12th and early 13th centuries, dates which coincide with the rebuilding of the parish church. The structures that lie in the centre of the High Street are considered to have developed from stalls used in the medieval period (VCH 1962, 178-93). In 1345 there is a record of '*le shop rew*', and '*le boucher rew*' in 1377. The Moot Hall or Market House is recorded in the early 16th century in 1509. Place House in Friday Street was the centre of Baldington Manor and has an origin that goes back to the medieval period. By the mid-15th century the town extended to Friday Street, later called North Street. A house of this period is the Bird Cage; however, most houses are dated to the 16th to 17th centuries for example the Original Grammar School of 1569, or the 18th or early 19th centuries. Public buildings were constructed in the 19th century including the

Congregational Chapel in 1827, the Workhouse in 1835, the County Court in 1861 and Lord William's Grammar School in 1878.

Externally to Thame a mill is known to have existed as early as 1086 (VCH 1962, 178-93), which is considered to have been located on the Aylesbury Road. There was a windmill in the West Field in 1594, when a directive is given for its relocation. There was a further windmill in the Barley Hill Field in the early 17th century. By the 15th century the process of Inclosure of the open fields had commenced; this activity is associated with the economic move to pastoral regimes usually for wool production.

Maps of Thame date back to the 17th century, however, it is only in the 19th century that cartographic evidence produces the plan of the Starbank House plot of land in any great detail.

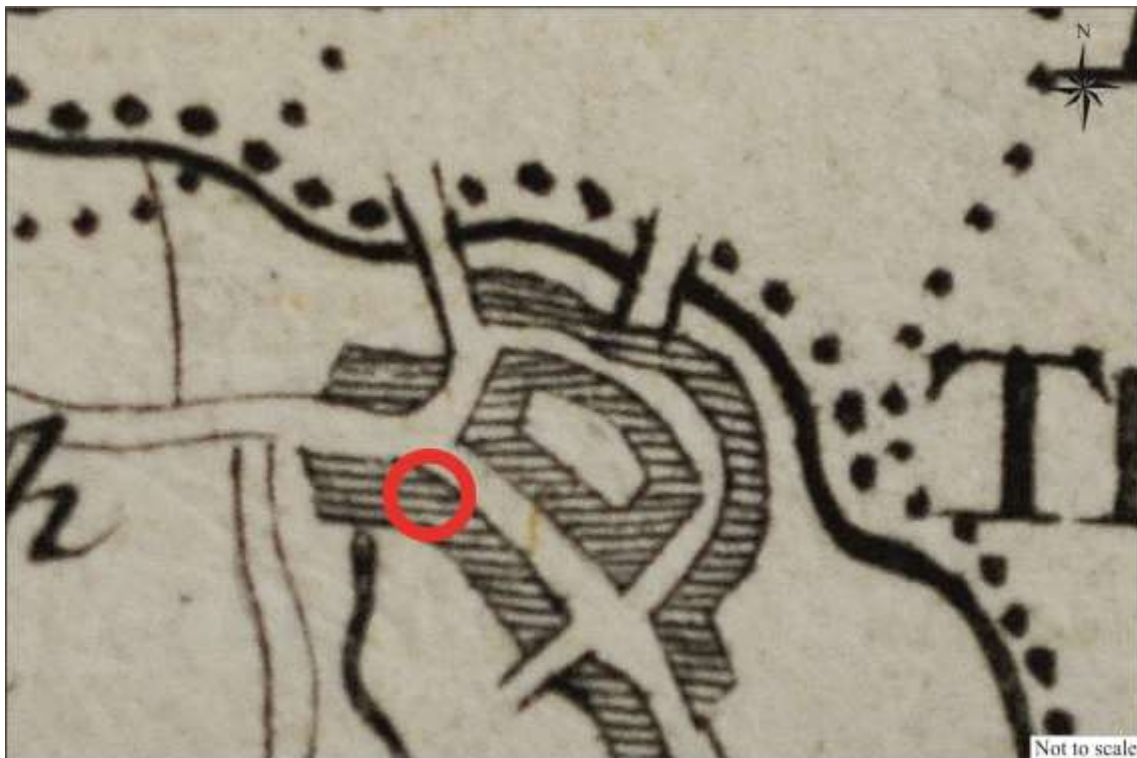


Figure 2: Morden's map 1695

The map of Morden of 1695 (CH.XXIII/9a) shows development along the High Street and around the west end of Thame (Fig. 2).

An 18th century map (CH.XXIII/8) of Oxfordshire shows Thame with a picture of a developed town, but with extended urban development along the Oxford Road, High Street and also along the road to Aylesbury (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: An 18th century map (CH.XXIII/8)



Figure 4: Kitchen's map of 1753 (CH.XXIII-11a)

Kitchen's map of c. 1753 (CH.XXIII/11a) shows a map of Thame that indicates the area of the west end of the High Street was fully developed (Fig. 4).



Figure 5: Jefferys' map 1767

Jefferys' map of 1767 (CP/103/M/1) shows the High Street and parts of the town to the north of the High Street as being developed (Fig. 5).



Figure 6: Davis of Lewknor's map of 1797

Davis of Lewknor's map dated 1797 (CH.XX.2) shows that the site of Starbank House

is occupied by a dwelling (Fig. 6).



Figure 7: Smith's map of 1804

Smith's map of 1804 (P350/M/1) shows simply that the High Street is fully developed (Fig. 7).



Figure 8: Carey's map of 1805

Carey's map of 1805 (CH.XXIII/12) shows that the west end of the High Street is fully developed (Fig. 8).

Bryant's county map of 1824 simply shows that the High Street is developed and that the site of Starbank is occupied (Fig. 9).



Figure 9: Bryant's map 1824



Figure 10: Inclosure Map of 1826

The Inclosure Map of 1826 (QSA/D/A/book 56) shows the first detailed plan of the town (Fig. 10). The property is shown as a rectangular structure that extends out in front of the neighbouring property to the east. This could be an inconsistency in the map. The map does show that the two single storey rear extensions do not exist.



Figure 11: Ordnance Survey map of 1834

The Ordnance Survey map dated 1834 (CH.XLVII/1) shows the site of the house along the High Street developed.

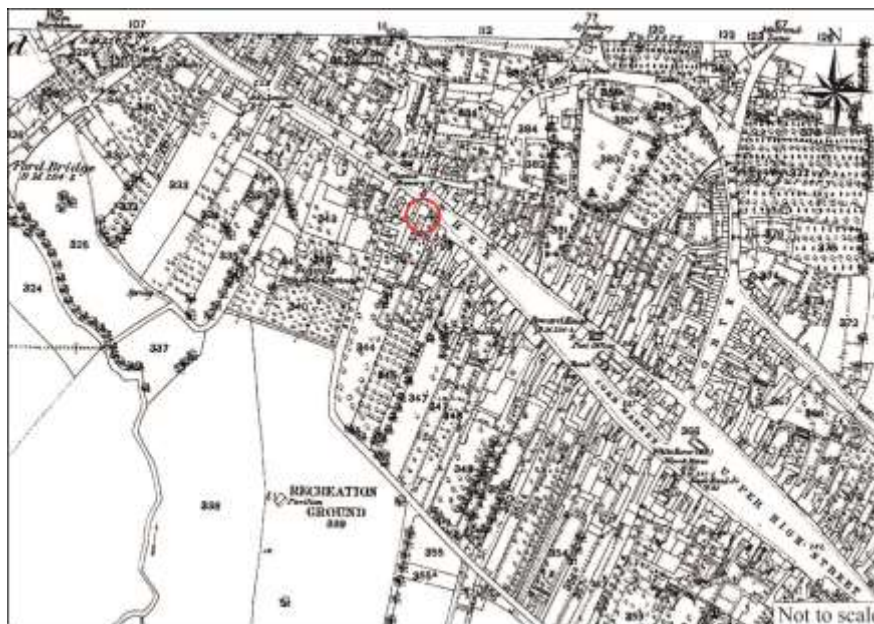


Figure 12: Ordnance Survey map of 1881

The Ordnance Survey maps of the 1:2,500 series are detailed maps that give accurate

representations of Starbank House (Fig. 12). The earliest of these, the First Edition, is dated 1881 (Oxon 41.3). This shows the building with the extended single storey rear extension.



Figure 13: Ordnance Survey map of 1899

The Second Edition dated 1899 (Oxon 41.3) shows the same arrangement with the large irregular front of the property with the single storey extension to the rear (Fig. 13). The Third Edition Ordnance Survey map dated 1921 (Oxon 41.3), which shows the building in the same form (Fig. 14).



Figure 14: Ordnance Survey map 1921

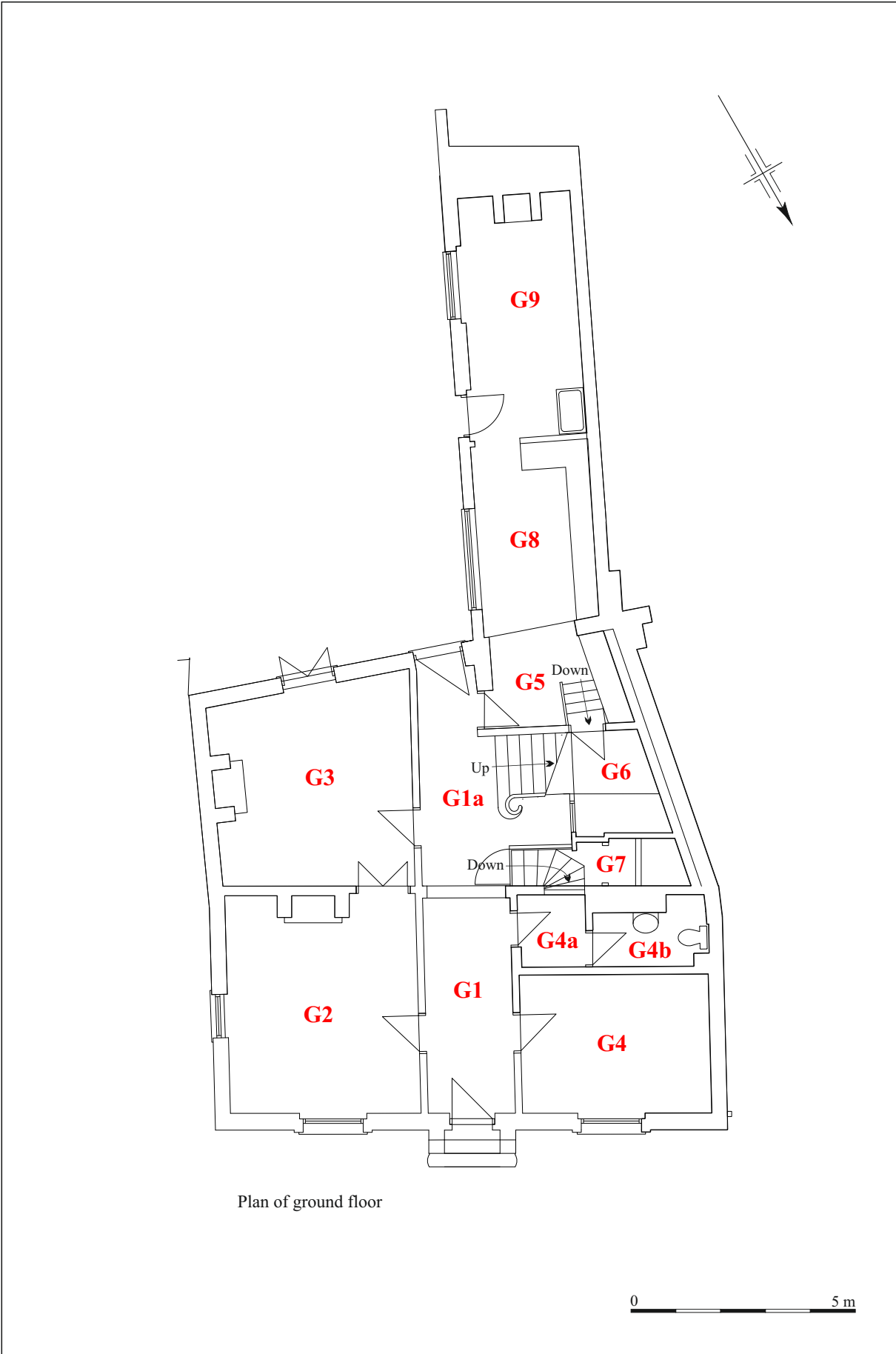


Figure 15: Ground floor plan

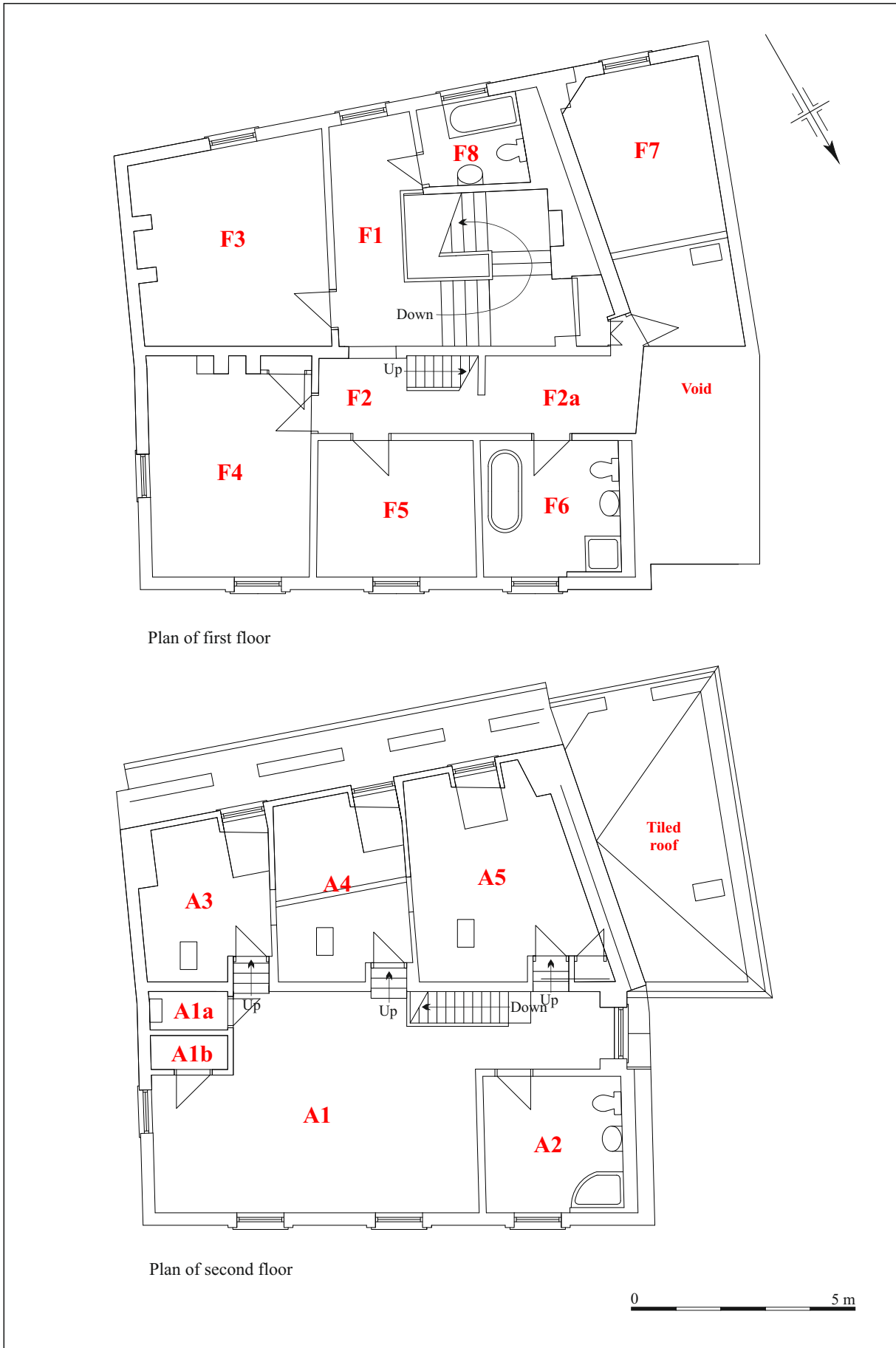


Figure 16: First and second floor plans



Figure 17: Northeast and southeast external elevations



Figure 18: Southwest and southeast external elevations

3:1 DESCRIPTION OF STARBANK HOUSE

3.1 Introduction and General Description

Externally the building appears to be a three storey structure with an additional basement that occupies part of the front of the house (Figs. 15-16). There are two gables at the east side of the building that support two roof ridges. There is a rear extension to the south of the structure. On the west side the building partially extends over a carriageway.

3.2 Front façade

The front façade (Fig. 17, E2) of the building contains three bays above a black painted podium in which there is located a light for the cellar. The ground floor contains a central door with a porch supported on square pilasters with square capitals. The columns support a cornice with a blank entablature. The two flanking windows contain sash windows under scroll supported hood mouldings. The first floor contains three windows all of which are sash and square-headed and contain a hood supported on scroll mouldings. The second floor or attic floor contains three sash windows with moulded surrounds. Above this there is a cornice and parapet. The roof is not visible from the front, but it is evident that this was part of a slate roof.



Plate 1: Front façade

3.3 Southeast façade

The southeast façade appears to be a mixed affair (Fig 17, E1, Plate 2). Part of the building can be associated with the rebuild of *c.* 1820, while the back part of the façade appears to contain earlier features. At the rear of the building there is a central chimney on the back gable. To the left of this there is a partial gable with copping. To the right of the chimney the wall imitates the front façade of the building, and the structure is designed with two bays. On the ground floor there is a sash window with moulded surround. On the first floor there is a similar square-headed sash window with a moulded surround, while centrally a similar moulding is produced that is a blind window. On the second or attic floor there is a smaller sash window with a moulded

surround. On the second floor centrally there is a circular moulded feature also probably representing a blanked window. Above this there is a cornice and parapet, with the cornice continuing around the chimney.



Plate 2: Southeast elevation

There is a single storey rear extension with a series of large windows located in the southeast wall (Fig. 18, E4). At the north end there is a combination window containing three sash windows, with a further broad sash window at the south end. Centrally there is a door.

3.4 Rear façade



Plate 3: Rear elevation

The rear façade (Fig. 18, E3) contains a ground floor level that has two doors on the ground floor, which have square heads and a moulded surround. The door on the east side of the building only has the moulded surround, while the door that is centrally located contains additional decoration (Plate 4). On the west or left hand side of the building there is a gable end of an extension. To the west of the extension there is a

carriageway. On the first floor there were four bays of square-headed sash windows. Three of these are surrounded by mouldings, while the western window has no moulding. The second floor is shown from the rear to be an attic storey. It is here that the real lines of the building become apparent. There are three flat roofed dormer windows covering the building. Here the roof is covered in grey slates. On the east gable end there is a parapet with copping and on the west side there is a further parapet, which would originally have been located at the west end of the building. The fourth window on the first floor sits below a hipped tile roof.

Though not clearly visible from anywhere on the ground it is apparent that there are two ridge beams between which a raised and flat roof is placed.



Plate 4: Rear door

3.5 Northwest façade

Little of the northwest façade is visible as this links in with the line of the neighbouring roofs. Thus above there is an area of wall with a single attic window above the gable of the neighbouring west building. The wall contains the continuation of parapet and cornice.

The other area of walling on the façade is in the carriageway where the wall bows (Plate 5), with a stuccoed podium below and brick walling above. There is the remains of a timber framed structure in the rear and upper part of the brick wall (which ties in with internal evidence visible from stripping, Plate 6). The rear part of the house is a stone wall in the passage. There are a number of attached timbers; some concerned form part of the external frame for the original gateways at either end of the

carriageway. There is a single storey extension to the rear, which is a single blank wall.



Plate 5: Cart way



Plate 6: Cart way with remains of timber framing

3.6 Ground floor and cellar

The front door is panelled and enters into a long central hall (G1 & G1a) that runs the length of the main part of the building to a rear glazed and panelled door. On the east side of the hall there are two panelled doors. On the right, west, side of the hall there are two doors, before one reaches a central decorative arch (Plate 7). Beyond the central arch on the right there is a large stairwell to the first floor and smaller side stairs that leads down to the cellar (Plate 9). Beyond the stairs there is a further door on the right hand side. The central decorative arch has square pilasters and capitals; the edge of the arch is decorated by beading. The walls of the hall both in the front of the hall and the back are decorated by panelling along with moulded skirting board and a cornice. The cornice contains a band of decoration based on egg and dart. There are also a series of features that are based on guttae of classical architecture (Plate 8).



Plate 7: Room G1a



Plate 8: Decorative coving room G1



Plate 9: Cellar entrance G1



Plate 10: Stripped out room G4 with uncovered chimneybreast

The removal of the floor in the hall uncovered the remains of the top of a brick arch in the northern part of room G1a. This relates to a feature still extant in the cellar.



Plate 11: Chimneybreast in room G2

The doors immediately to the right and left of the front door are both panelled doors with bead decoration. The door on the west side (Plate 13) leads into a room with a sash window in the north wall (G4).



Plate 12: Patio door room G3

There is a door on the west side of the hall that is new. This leads into small rooms that now incorporate a toilet and are called the Ante and Cloaks (G4a & G4b). The removal of the internal walls revealed that rooms G4, G4a and G4b had originally all been one room and that set in the south wall was the remains of a fireplace that had lost its fittings (Plate 10).

The door on the east enters a room (G2) that has a sash-window in the north wall, and a further one in the east wall. In the south wall there is an elaborate fireplace with roundels (Plate 11), which has a built-in cupboard to its left and also a double panelled door to the right. The doors are panelled but not elaborated in the same way as those entering onto the hall. Removing the floor revealed the cellar wall and brick channel (Plates 14-15).

The double doors lead into a rear room on the east side (G3). There is a panelled door leading back into the hall in the west wall. There is a chimneybreast with fireplace in the east wall; the design of the fireplace is in-keeping but extends either side of the chimney perhaps indicating a replacement. In the south wall there is a double patio door with glass panelling (Plate 12). This door has a panelled surround and there is moulded skirting.

A further door on the west side of the hall leads into a small rear room (G5). It is from this room that the single storey extensions run. These rooms had already been joined together and gutted although it is apparent that there were various butt joints in the walling and an internal wall creating two spaces (G5/G8 & G9). Room G5 was joined to G8 but clearly represents a space that belonged to the early 19th century house. In the east wall of G8 there was a large window; a group of three sash windows. In the

north wall of room G5 there was a panelled glass door that leads down some stairs into a small storage room underneath the staircase (G6). Parts of this room contain glass panelling. There was a further wider sash window in the east wall in room G9 along with a door. In the south wall there was a fireplace.



Plate 13: Door into room G4



Plate 14: Edge of cellar as seen from room G2

Back in the hall there are two stairwells. The smaller one on the north has a decorative rail and gate (Plate 9). It leads down to a small area under the stairs (G7) that is entered through an arch with bead decoration. There is a flap in the stairs that lifts up and allows access to the cellar. The cellar (Fig. 19) features included brick stairs, a series of

exposed timber beams, brick columns, and an arched feature in the south wall, and in the north wall a light which may have started off as a coal shoot.



Plate 15: Brick channel in room G2

The larger grander stairs in the hall leads up to the landing. This has a large sweeping stairs with a timber rail with balustrades containing twisted carving. One or two are designed like columns with fluting and capitals. There is a decorative underside of the stair rail that contains an egg and dart design, which borders the opening of the stairwell. On the stairwell there were two alcoves of different widths that contain arches decorated with bead design and flanked by square pilaster.



Plate 16: Ceiling above stairwell

3.7 First floor



Plate 17: Landing F1 looking south



Plate 18: Landing F1 looking north

The slightly C-shape stairs lead up onto the first floor landing (F1). The walls are panelled in a similar way to that of the hall below. The ceiling has a less elaborate cornice to the hall with guttae containing flower or leaf designs and there is a central roundel with bead decoration and leaf motifs (Plate 16). In the south wall there is a sash window (Plate 17). In the southwest there is a panelled door in a panelled wall leading into a small bathroom (F8) with a sash window in the south wall. The décor of the bathroom is modern. In the east wall of the landing (F1) is a door facing the stairs.



Plate 19: Fireplace room F3

The east door leads into a bedroom (F3), which has a fireplace in the east wall (Plate 19). This has its original features with fluted and roundel designs. There is a moulded cornice with roundel designs (Plate 21). In the south wall there is a sash window with moulded surround (Plate 20). The skirting board is high and with a moulded top.

On the north side of the landing (F1) there is an arch with a moulded surround (Plate 18) that imitates the central arch of the hall (G1). This has fluted pilasters and a bead decorated arch. This arch leads into a further part of the landing (F2 & F2a) in the north part of the house. Here the north and south walls show indications of panelling, but there is no cornice or skirting. There is a stairs on the south wall of this part of the landing that leads up to the second floor. There is an opening adjacent to the stairwell that has a square-head that leads into the western part of the landing. In the east wall there is a panel door with moulded surround, in the north wall there are also two doors, that in F2 a panel door with a moulded surround, while the one in F2a is a glass panelled door. In the southwest corner of landing part F2a there is a panelled door into a further room and also a panelled door into a section of wall behind the large stairwell. The wall at the back of the cupboard is made by plank panelling.



Plate 20: Window room F3



Plate 21: Moulding F3

Stripping back of the west wall of the landing in part of F2a there was evidence of an earlier timber framed structure (Plate 25). The timber form can either be part of a jewelled head or gunstock head; the form lying between the two forms. This would indicate, in conjunction with the tie-beam above and the possible kerb principal, that this was part of a kerb principal truss from a box framed timber building. This apparent feature, a kerb principal truss, can be dated from the 14th to the 16th century (RCHME 1981, 58-98).



Plate 22: Window F2



Plate 23: Fireplace room F2

The east panelled door leads into room F4 (Plate 24), which has a chimneybreast in the south wall with a probable original fireplace and cast iron grate (Plate 23) and built in

cupboard to its right. In the east and north walls there are sash windows. The door in the west wall, from the landing, has a moulded surround.



Plate 24: Door room F4



Plate 25: Kerb principal truss in F2a

The north door from the landing leads into room F5, which has a sash window in the north wall with moulded surround. Internally the door has L-shaped hinges and an original lock.

The north door in landing F2a is a later door that is half panelled and half glazed, which leads into a bathroom (F6). There is a sash window with moulded surround in the north wall.

The panelled door in the southwest corner of landing F2a leads into an irregular shaped room (F7) that lies over the back part of the carriageway that runs on the west side of the building through a passage. The peculiarities here with the property boundaries between the two dwellings are perhaps indicative of this and the neighbouring property being joined together previously. In the south wall there is a sash window, and in the southeast corner there are the remains of a blocked-up corner chimneybreast. There is a dado rail and a support in the roof, perhaps indicating an earlier division of the space.

3.8 Second floor

The stairs to the third floor are a simple ladder type stairs with a moderate slope. This enters a large room (A1) that takes up most of the space in the front part of the building. In the west wall above the stairwell there is a window looking out over the neighbouring roof top. In the northwest corner and the southeast corner of this room there are smaller rooms. In the north wall of the large room (A1) there are two sash windows, smaller than those on the ground floor. In the west wall there is a further window, while in the north wall there are three doors entered by three short flights of stairs.



Plate 26: Truss in rear of second floor

Room A2 is located in the northwest corner of room A1. There is a sash window in the north wall and a modern door in the south wall. The interior bathroom fittings were modern. In the southeast corner there is a boiler room (A1a) and a linen cupboard (A1b).

The three rooms on the south side of the second floor or attic space are all of irregular

shape. Room A3 is in the east part of the range. There is a chimneybreast and possibly blocked fireplace in the east wall. In the southwest wall there is a sash window set in a dormer. In the west wall there is part of the roof truss containing a king post with struts (Plate 26).

Room A4, the central room, contains a sash window dormer in the southwest corner of the room. In the east and west walls there are the remains of trusses, both with king posts and trusses.

Room A5 is the east room and the larger room, which contains a sash window in a dormer in the north wall. In the southwest corner there is a boxed-in area, which could feasibly be associated with the chimneybreast in room F7 on the first floor. At any rate there is no evidence of a chimney surviving externally. In the east wall there is a roof truss with king post.

3:II ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

Though we were commissioned to provide a historical study of the building, we were not at the time asked to carry out a Watching Brief. However, it became apparent that it was possible to make observations from exposed places that were important in identifying buried features that would imply that the house contained significantly older components. There were two internal sondages and one external cut for the new build (Figs. 19-20). The dispersed nature of the test pits meant that it was difficult to give these features an overall homogenous matrix for the house and gardens.



Plate 27: Sondage 1 in G2

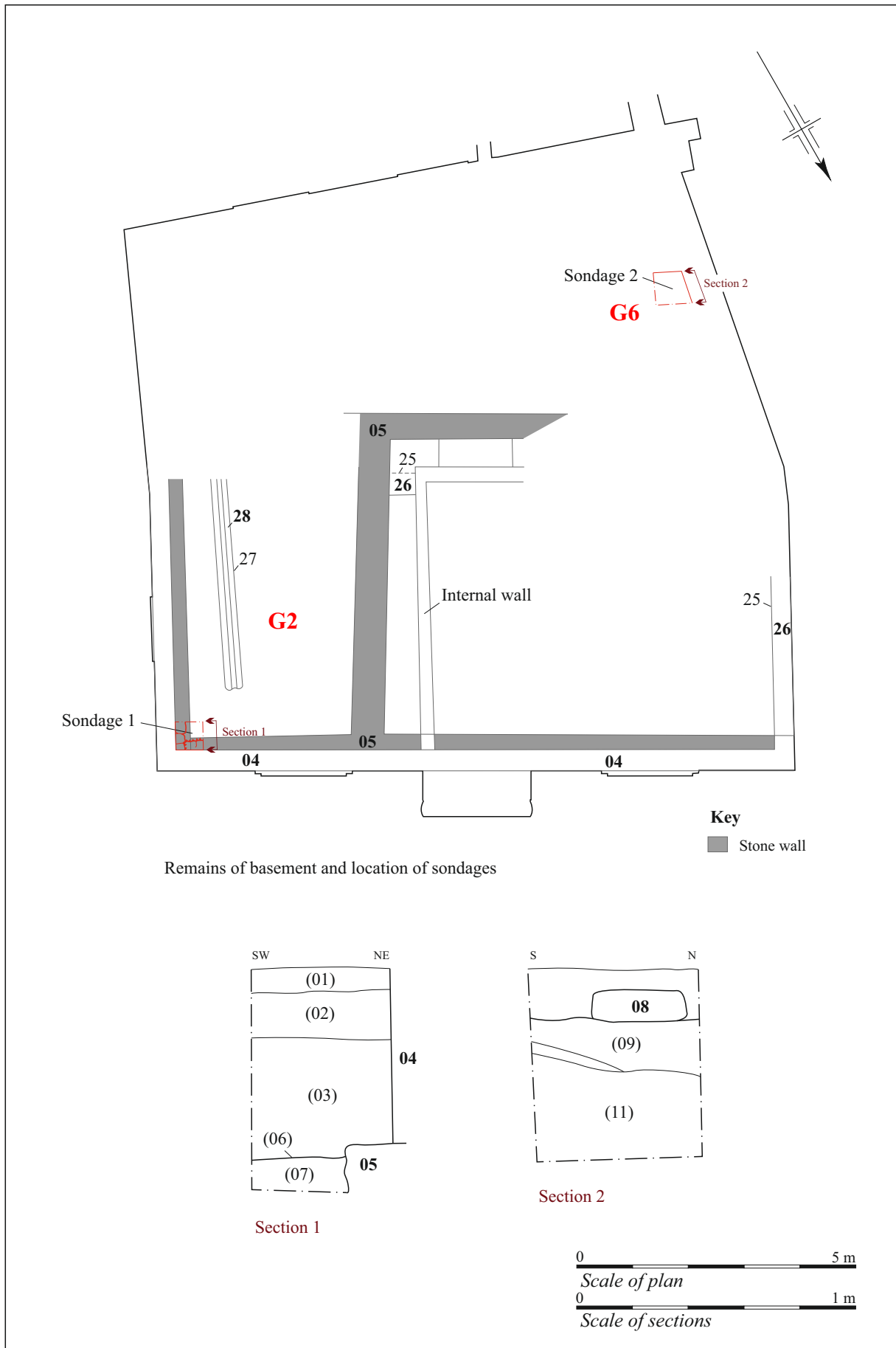


Figure 19: Plan of features with sondages and sections of sondages

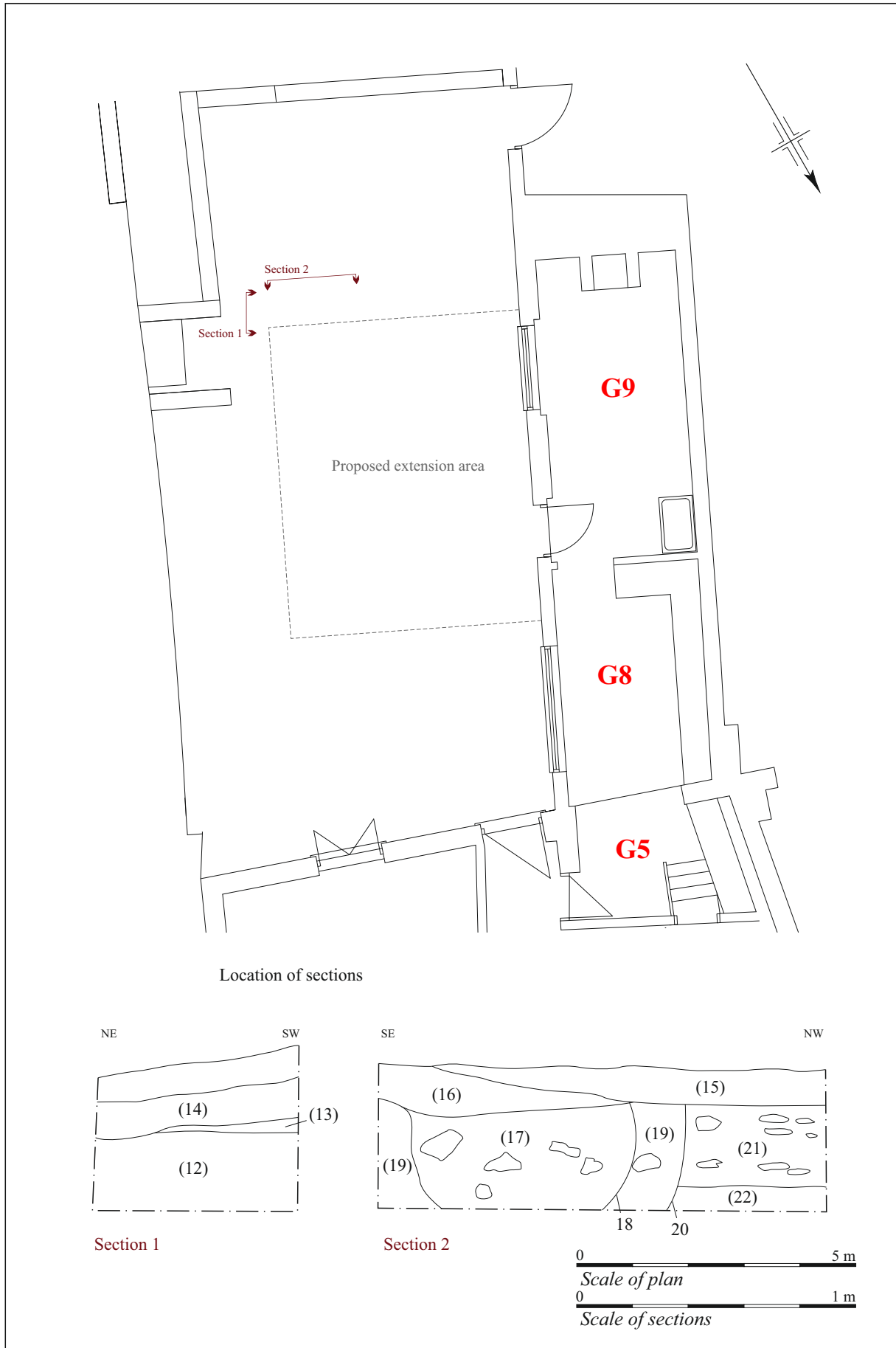


Figure 20: Sections in corner of proposed extension area

3.9 Internal features G2

Two small sondages were placed internally, one in the northeast corner of the building (Room G2) and one in the southwest part of the building (Room G6).

The sondage in room G2 (Plate 27), outside the area of the cellar, had a lowest recognisable level with context (07) a compact mid to dark grey silt clay (Fig. 19, Section 1). It was not apparent from the small insertion if this layer was truncated by cut 23 or if layer (07) represented a layer that had been spread internally within the structure. Cut 23 is used here to represent the probable five linear cuts that would have formed the foundation cut of the earliest structure. The cut was filled by masonry wall 05 a limestone rubble structure constructed with narrow bands of stone. The wall was probably at least 0.5m wide and could have been as much as 0.6m wide. Two of the wall lines were visible in the room G2 sondage, while two of these stone walls continued into the cellar (east and north side). There was possibly a further stone wall running to the rear of the segmental arched alcove on the south side. The depth of the wall implied from the cellar is that it is likely to extend at least 1.7m below the current internal floor level. Butting up to that wall and most certainly laid internally is the remains of context (06) a compact white mortar-sand layer some 0.04m thick. This represents an earlier floor layer internally. It is possible that a door or earlier window was identified in the sondage as the wall on the north side contained brick infill extending to a lower level, practically to the level of the mortar floor. These features are undoubtedly part of the earliest recognisable phase of the building. Though there is no dating evidence a broad range of dates from the later 11th to the 16th centuries is feasible.

The next phase saw the construction of a red brick wall 04, which was built in stretcher construction and bonded by mortar. The way that this section of brick appears to sit lower within the earlier stone walls suggests that it is an area of infill, as stated previously. For various reasons it may not necessarily be associated with the present early 19th century phases above. Presumably truncating an unrecognised deposit was cut 25 a large rectangular area that was inserted between a number of the walls 05. Internal to this cut were constructed two brick walls 26, of a cellar, which were located on the west and the south side of that feature. The wall on the south side contained a right angled stairs, and a brick vaulted arch. A brick floor was also laid. It is assumed that these brick structures were earlier than the early 19th century, as the bricks observed from that structure appear to be a paler yellow colour. Layer (03) was a compact light grey silt clay that contained inclusions of rubble stone, tile and bone. It is possible that this was obtained from excavation of the cellar. Set within the top of this was a sloping brick channel. It is presumed that this lies in a linear cut 27 that was some 0.3m wide and over 5m long. Set in the cut was masonry structure 28 that was formed with two rows of brick with a gap in the middle forming a channel (Plate 15). The exact purpose of this feature is not known but it is probable that it indicates that there was some early industrial process taking place on the site.

It is presumed here that the early 19th century house was constructed on the walls above these earlier features, as the bricks of the superstructure that were uncovered appear to be more of an orange to yellow colour and the fact that the cellar does not appear to fit properly within the design and layout of the later walls, then it is apparent that they are of two different phases. The two remaining deposits were layer (02) a

moderately compact yellow to off-white sand mortar, and layer (01) a mortar floor of a light yellow sand composition laid over a plastic membrane.



Plate 28: Sondage 2 in G6

3.10 Internal features G6

The second sondage in room G6 (Plate 28) had a lowest layer (11) a compact red brown silt clay that was over 0.4m deep (Fig. 19, Section 2). The lowest levels were decidedly different here and it is apparent that this deposit must represent a layer that was deposited externally to the original building. This would imply that due to the differences that existed between this layer and layer (07) that the latter may represent a layer deposited internally within the structure.

Overlying deposit (11) was layer (10) a compact black silt clay with charcoal inclusions, which is part of a tip or dump 0.05m deep. Overlying this deposit was layer (09) a compact light red brown silt clay, which measured at least 0.16m deep.

Cut into deposit (09) was foundation cut 24, which was for the rear range that butted up to the original front structure 05. This was filled by the three walls of masonry structure 08, which was made of limestone rubble and bonded with mortar. In this location it was apparent that the foundation cut extended below the floor level to a depth of 0.2m; however, the floor in room G6 was some 0.5m below the floor levels in the rest of the rear of the house (G1a, G3, G5) thus implying that the foundation for the rest of the structure was probably 0.6-0.7m below the current floor level. Internally there a floor was laid above this; a brick floor with a mortar skim above.

3.11 External features (Fig. 20)

The lowest layers recognised externally are layers (12) and (22). Layer (12) was a compact grey silt sand with some stone rubble and tile inclusions at least 0.3m deep. Layer (22) was also a compact grey silt sand with minimal tile inclusions about 0.1m deep. Overlying deposit (22) is deposit (21) a compact grey silt sand with significant tile inclusions, which was 0.28m deep. Though it is possible to divide deposits (21) and (22), due to the amount of tile contents; however, with the combined thickness and soil type it is apparent that these two deposits are comparable to layer (12) and that they should be seen as an extension of the same deposit. These layers are probably associated with demolition layers of the house at sometime in the post-medieval to Imperial period.

Overlying layer (12) is deposit (13) a compact red brown silt sand with a depth of 0.05m.

Cut into the top of layer (21) is pit 20 a cut of a probable oval or circular shape that was over 1.1m across and 0.4m deep. The fill (19) was a compact yellow silt clay with minimal rubble inclusions.

Cutting into the top of deposit (19) was cut 18 also of an oval or round shape that was 0.8m across and over 0.34m deep. The fill (17) was a compact yellow grey silt sand with rubble stone inclusions. Overlying the fill (17) was deposit (16) a compact light grey silt sand with some stone inclusions 0.18m deep. This was probably the same deposit as layer (14) a compact light grey silt sand with rubble inclusions up to 0.14m deep.

Overlying these deposits was layer (15) a moderately compact dark black grey silt sand with pea-gravel inclusions.

4 ASSESSMENT

4.1 Phases

Investigations have shown that there are a number of interesting and early features on the site. Phase 1 included the stone walls beneath the front part of the house, four of which can be identified and labelled 05 (Fig. 19). There is also an early mortar floor level associated with one of the identifiable rooms where the cellar was not located (sondage in G2). Further early features are the timbers revealed after stripping in the west wall of the front of the building. It is difficult to determine if these are actually part of the same phase of building or if they are part of different phases. Here for convenience they have both been placed as part of Phase 1. The depth of the walls could imply that there was a medieval building on the site of some antiquity, which has become infilled over time and the floor levels raised, but not enough of this was seen to determine when this process began.

The timber revealed in the west wall is either a jewelled or gunstock head timber, above which there is a tie-beam and a further angled beam in the truss, which is likely to be the kerb beam. If this interpretation is correct, and it seems highly plausible, then

it implies that this timber is part of box framed timber building that was constructed at some date between the 14th and the 16th centuries, or at the very latest the very early 17th century (RCHME 1981, 58-98). The Royal Commission's study of central York identified a few structures that employed this construction technique. The earliest of these structures is the Merchant Adventurer's Hall that has been given a date of 1358-60, while the second was Saint Anthony's Hall that was dated to *c.* 1450. The discussion adds the proviso that lesser buildings using this type of structure are often later and generally date to the 16th century although there is a possibility that a date in the very early 17th century is possible. The Commission then gives an example of 23 Stonegate, which was constructed *c.* 1590.

The subsequent question is to which structure this timber frame was associated with, Starbank House (no 23) or the adjacent property at no 24. The date attributed to no. 24 in the Buildings of England: Oxfordshire is of the 16th to 17th centuries, which would be consistent. However, there are mortise joints in the upright timber; this implies that horizontal timbers extended from this upright post across the area of land on which Starbank House now stands. The implication here is that Starbank House occupies part of a structure of at least the 16th century that occupied the site of both nos. 23 and 24 High Street.

Timbers of the lower part of this frame can be seen in the carriageway walls.

Phase 2 probably saw the construction of the stone buildings to the rear of the property. It is difficult to provide a precise date for this build. The stone foundations are considerably shallower here and extend at least onto the first floor. The stone wall only appears to survive at the west end.

Phase 3 saw the redevelopment of the building probably in the 18th century. The cellar was excavated or new walls were constructed in an earlier stone cellar. This cellar construction and the infill in the front wall of a possible doorway are considered to be a different phase than the latter 19th century development here. The reason for this is that there is a mismatch between the wall lines in the cellar and the building above. Timbers and later brick piers appear to be inserted to maintain the upper structure, which was essentially unsupported. The back parapet gables may be a product of this development. Parapet gables became fashionable in Britain after a piece of 1707 legislation in London concerning the display of timber frames and their projection over the street. A post-1707 date can be assigned to this parapet, and it predates the early 19th century rebuild of the structure. The brick channel in room G2 would imply that the 18th century development had an industrial process.

Phase 4 saw the redevelopment of the site in the early 19th century. This produced the revamped building that is evident today.

4.2 Listed Status

The building is a grade II listed structure.

4.3 Historic and Architectural Assessment

The observations from the building work being carried out on this structure have noted

some important factors concerning the complicated development of the site. The front of the building has deep set stone foundations with at least one earlier mortar floor surface surviving some 0.6m below the later floor surfaces of the 19th century. Part of a timber frame was observed of a probable 16th century date, but which could feasibly be older.

There are other recognisable phases that can be roughly placed between the 17th and 18th century although this is masked. The 19th century structure was an extremely decorative piece of late Georgian or early Regency design. The design of the structure with a central passage and flanking rooms is also a standard feature of the 18th to early 19th century. What is perhaps surprising is that for a house of this type the stairwell is extremely large and elaborate. This may be the case because though the 19th century was rebuilt in many areas above ground level there were still some underlying constraints concerning the location of earlier walls and the size of the plot on which the structure was built.

Phase 5 saw the addition of an extension to the rear. Phase 6 saw the later addition of a further single storey extension. Phase 7 saw 20th century alterations.

5 THE CURRENT PROPOSAL

The building at present is undergoing refurbishment and internal alterations. Externally a rear extension has been added.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Historically the most significant part of Thame is considered to be the area around the church and the west end of the High Street. It is this area around the church where the early medieval settlement of Thame is considered to have been focused. Claims of an earlier Roman settlement in Thame have not been proven, and little evidence has been produced to demonstrate its existence. However, recently JMHS has identified the remains of a significant Roman cemetery outside the town on Oxford Road. Starbank House is located in the area on the west end of the High Street where the earliest indications of occupation are considered to survive.

Though not requested by the planning procedure, observations were made of the internal alterations at the request of the clients. In a sondage in the front of the building (room G2) it was noted that the stone walls at the front of the property were extremely deep set and that there was at least one earlier mortar floor surface evident.

The remains of timber framing were noted in the west wall of the front part of the house, internally and in the adjoining carriageway. The design of the timber suggested that this was part of a kerb principal truss from a box frame structure. Early dates associated with these structures can date back to the 14th century, but as a feature in smaller dwellings it is often dated to the 16th century. The mortise joints in the timber imply that horizontal timbers extended from the timber post into the space of the current structure.

A rear stone extension was presumably added after the 16th century and before the 18th century. The cellar and the rear extension may have been reworked in brick in the 18th century. With these developments it is possible that the building served some type of industrial process and may have been part of the premises associated with the Brewery that lies on the west side of Starbank House.

The front of the building and the internal part of the building were reworked in the 19th century.

Phase 5 saw the addition of an extension to the rear. Phase 6 saw the later addition of a further single storey extension. Phase 7 saw 20th century alterations.

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