

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**BUILDING ASSESSMENT**

**ON**

**61 BRIDGE STREET, CHESTER**

**NGR SJ 40579 66117**

*On behalf of*

*Firstplan*

**AUGUST 2012**

**REPORT FOR** Firstplan  
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London,  
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# 61 Bridge Street, Chester

## *Building Assessment*

### **SUMMARY**

*A building assessment was carried out at 61 Bridge Street in the city of Chester (SJ 40579 66117), to ascertain the date of construction of two walls at the rear of the building as they could be altered with the insertion of ducting. The results indicate that neither the areas of the upstairs or downstairs wall concerned in this proposal are of a particularly old date, probably 19<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Location**

The premise is located on the east side of Bridge Street in the historic heart of Chester (SJ 40579 66117). The town is located on the river Dee on the North end of the Cheshire Plain.

### **1.2 Commission**

The report was commissioned by Sam Harper of Firstplan, as part of a planning application to transform the unit into a restaurant. As a result of the application the conservation officer for the City of Chester has requested an assessment of two walls in the property that may be affected by alterations.

### **1.3 Aim of Investigation**

The aim of the investigation is to ascertain the age of walls at the rear of the property.

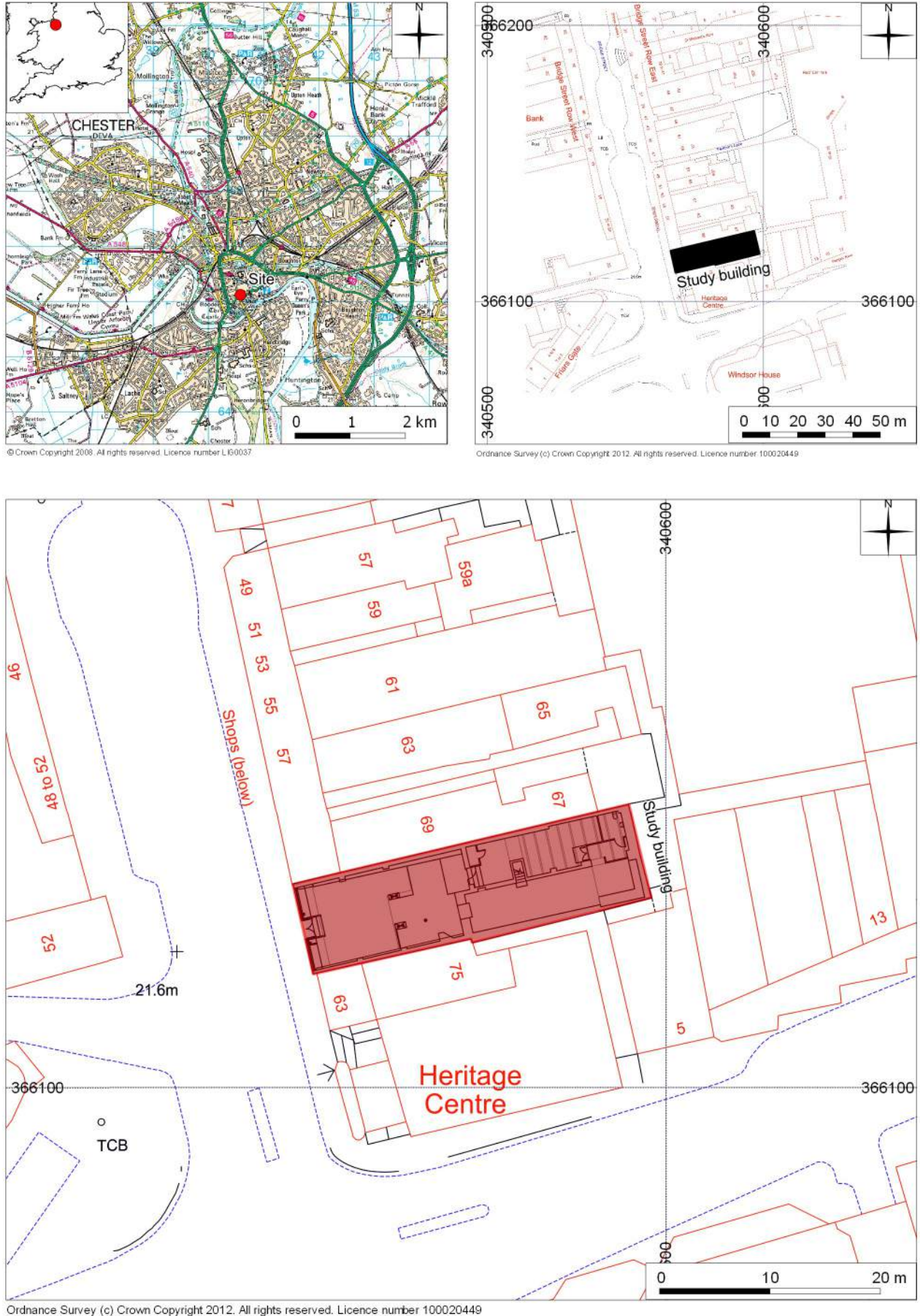
## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Designations**

The building is a listed structure now classed as Numbers 71 and 73 Row, but previously listed under its street number of 61, and is part of the city of Chester conservation area.

A historic assessment of the structure has been provided under the English Heritage listing. The building is a grade II structure (EHBID 470095: SJ 40579 66117).

*Probably 2 undercrofts and town houses, then undercroft shop and town house, now undercroft shop, Row shop and storage. Medieval, rebuilt from Row upward c1760, altered C20. Flemish bond brown brick with grey slate roof, ridge at right angle to street and hipped to front. EXTERIOR: 4 storeys including undercroft and Row, probably 2 medieval bays converted to one C18. Modern shopfront to street has end-piers covered. The Row front has rendered end-piers, 2 cast-iron Roman Doric intermediate columns and timber rail on stout turned balusters; altered boarded stallboard 1.67m from front to back, now scarcely sloped, with 2 steps down to lagged Row walk. The modern shopfront has a blocked C19 door south and a glazed modern door; plaster ceiling sloping down from Row-front to shop; large Row-top bressumer has*



*modillions to a former cornice. Brick upper storeys have painted stone sills and rusticated wedge lintels to replace horned 12-pane recessed sashes; full cornice of painted stone and tall brick parapet with plain coping; a lateral chimney set back, north. INTERIOR: the front part of the undercroft, 3 steps down from the pavement, is lined, with no features visible; the back part is paired, with the south chamber under a C18 brick barrel-vault, now plastered. Observations during refurbishment in July 1988 revealed medieval stone walls with a doorway and fair east face to the present back wall, suggesting a similar rear undercroft chamber to that in No.57 Street (qv). The Row storey has some reused C17 oak beams. The 6-flight open-well open-string stair behind the blocked south door, the lower 3 flights not presently in use, has softwood treads and risers, carved brackets, turned newels, 3 column-on-vase balusters per step, swept rail and, up to the third storey, dado pilasters and rail and landing balustrade to the now floored well. A later one-flight stair to the third storey looks late Georgian, but altered, with steps covered, turned newel, closed string, stick balusters and rail swept only to the bottom newel. The third-storey landing to the older stair has 3 doorways with shouldered architraves, doors to the front chamber and rear wing removed but to the second room of 6 fielded panels. The front chamber over the Row has a panelled doorway, well-panelled embrasures, an integral cast-iron grate-and-mantel and a substantial cornice to west, south and east walls; a probably brought-in stop-chamfered C17 beam over entrance to rear wing. The fourth storey front room has a cast-iron grate in a damaged surround with mantel cut off; a door of 3 broad boards on butterfly hinges.*

The building is briefly mentioned in the latest Buildings of England Series, where it is noted that no.59 has a 20<sup>th</sup> century exterior encasing a 17<sup>th</sup> century structure (Hartwell, Hyde 2011, 260). Between this structure and Saint Michael's church are a couple of Georgian fronted buildings. One of these is no.61.

## **2.2 History of Development**

The history of Chester has been discussed on a number of occasions, and its structures assessed (VCH 2003; 2005; Mason 2001). Chester was established as a-typical Legionary Fortress in the later part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD on the banks of the river Dee. It was subsequently transformed into a medieval city, through the long duree.

Bridge Street represents is on the site of one of the major thoroughfares of the Legionary Fortress and appears to have been known by a name with that meaning from 1121-9 when it was called *vicus ad Pontem*, and from the 13<sup>th</sup> century known in its English form *Bruggestrete* (Dodgson 1981, 10).

Like many of the central streets in Chester it contains a group of buildings known as the rows. These are structures with undercrofts above which are the ground floor, in which is placed a row or walkway. There are further floors above this. Tradition has it that the rows were an important part of the design of central Chester from the 12<sup>th</sup> century as a Lorimers' Row is documented in 1155 (VCH 2005, 225-9). This has not been demonstrated satisfactorily that it refers to the type of structures now apparent in Chester. In 1293 it is mentioned that rows existed near the cross. On the east side of Bridge Street (the location of the site) there is mention of Mercer's Row in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century it is apparent that the superstructures of a number of the buildings were reconstructed and that from 1850 there was a movement to actively preserve the rows as an important part of Chester's identity.

Numerous historical maps of Chester survive, the earliest of which dates back to 1581, while the first Ordnance Survey map dates from 1872 (Figs. 2-6). Though early maps exist it is pertinent to remember that the accuracy of such maps is not always reliable. Having stated this it is possible to note one or two aspects of the drawings that could have a bearing on the

development of the site in question and the walls. The map of 1581 (CRO PM 14/1) is of interest as no.61 Bridge Street is located 2 doors away from the church of Saint Michael. The 1581 map shows the church sat in a churchyard extending to the north and potentially into the area where this property is located. There is a row of houses fronting on to the north side of the churchyard or a small lane on that side of the churchyard. It is feasible that the undercroft if of a medieval date formed part of this structure and that the superstructure above this previously carried a series of timber framed gables. The map of 1610 (CRO PM 14/7) also shows a cemetery around Saint Michael's church, which can be identified to the southwest and northeast of the church, while to the north the street frontage is drawn as if extending to the church. A similar situation is indicated on the map of 1729 (CRO PM 2/22). The map of 1745 (CRO PM 18/3) shows the block of land between Bridge Street and Fleshmongers Lane as being completely built over apart from an area running around the east and northeast side of the church,

The maps from 1789, although they may not be completely accurate, do show a further level of competency. The first map of 1789 (CRO PM 18/4) shows the rows running from Saint Michael's church north past the front of the premises. There are paths drawn around the church and a courtyard to its east. A similar arrangement is on the map of 1796 (CRO PM 14/12). The 1805 map (CRO PM 15/1) shows the rows running down to the church for the first time along Bridge Street. Behind the rows there are a series of buildings extending back from the rows, but with passages between them. How, this arrangement worked is not known, but it may feasibly explain why there is no vaulted undercroft in the northern part of the premises. Access is still shown around the church from the east end. The map of 1817 (CRO PM 15/3) shows a similar arrangement. The map of 1833 (CRO PM 18/5) shows roads running back from the rows, but also appears to indicate that the rows were not present in the structures just to the north of Saint Michael's church. The first series Ordnance Survey of 1872 shows the individual building components for, but this map indicates more clearly how the long narrow alley ways or gardens only extend partially into the building range and not fully to the rows.

### **3 DESCRIPTION OF 61 BRIDGE STREET**

#### **3.1 Introduction and General Description**

The building is a four story structure from the exterior. There is an undercroft with row above. Shop fronts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are visible on both these levels although the structures into which these fronts are fitted are considered far older. Above this a first and second storey contains three bays of sash windows. Inspection occurred in the undercroft and the back of the ground floor, and an account is given not of the whole building (which has seen a detailed assessment by English Heritage – see above), but simply the discussion of what was observed in respect to two walls at the rear of the building.

#### **3.2 The walls of the undercroft**

The front of the undercroft is open across the premises. The rear of the undercroft is divided into two, with a thick central wall. On the south side the structure contains a barrel vault, which has not been precisely dated, but could be medieval (which is assumed above by English Heritage) and is almost certainly 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier. To the rear of this part of the building the barrel vault does not exist, but there are the remains of extremely thick walls in the lower part of the walls on the east and south sides extending some 0.5m above floor level. It is probable that these are extensions of the old undercroft walls.

In the neighbouring north undercroft no vault survives. The rear (or east) wall to this part of the building is an extremely thick wall, a measurement of 0.9m was made through the wall in a hole that had been placed for a small extraction unit. Plaster was not removed from this wall

but the section along the bore hole for the extractor fan was observed. The extractor fan unit had been fitted some 0.3m below the ceiling level. It indicates that the makeup of the wall is probably as follows. On the internal part of the wall there is a wall of hollowed breezeblocks to a width of 0.36m. Observations externally in the courtyard showed that the outer layer some 0.1-0.12m was of red brick. No size or measurements were obtained as there was no access to the private courtyard. Of the internal structure there seems to be a 0.4m section of what seemed to be a white or extremely light brick, no red ceramic was noted and possibly a concrete or pale yellow brick is suspected. A well made wall of a white grey local stone is possible, but there seemed to be no evidence of a lime mortar with charcoal that one would expect with a bonding material.

On the present evidence it is highly likely that at the very base of the wall (perhaps 0.5m) a medieval or 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier wall could exist. This would explain the width in the upper part of the wall, the lower part of the wall as it was not being affected was not investigated. A wall approximately 0.4m wide was constructed above it in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that a red brick facing was later placed over this on the outside. This red brick wall has moulded brick forming a dado line, it is a moulded brick and a 19<sup>th</sup> century date is likely. Internally the wall width was standardised with the insertion of a breezeblock walling.

### **3.3 Ground floor rear walls**

There is also alternative proposals that will see the insertion of holes through the walls upstairs, for ducting. Plaster was removed from part of these walls to show the nature of an internal wall and an external one. It was noted on both sides that bricks were visible on both sides of the internal wall. This was where a venting duct had previously been taken through the wall, some patching around this was done by modern engineering bricks. The bricks measured 220mm 110mm x 75mm, the depth of the brick is considerable, which is suggestive of a 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century brick rather than an 18<sup>th</sup> century or earlier brick (unless there is a locally large brick size tradition which the author is unaware of). The door through this wall is probably not an original passage. Plaster was also removed from within the door frame, this was due to the thickness of the wall at 0.45m. Such a wall could have contained 2 courses of later bricks sandwiching an earlier timber frame (as at the Red Lion, Brill, Bucks). The removal of the plaster here revealed that the wall was of three brick courses, and that some of the bricks were placed on their edge, thus making good the inconsistencies with the insertion of an entrance and a patching of the edge to create a uniform shape for the door frame.

The joists exposed in this part of the property were modern attached to the wall in modern hangers. There were already two large ventilation ducts placed through the back wall.

## **4 ASSESSMENT**

### **4.1 Observations**

The aim of this assessment was not to obtain a complete phasing of the building but to identify potential dates for two individual walls. It is likely that the very base of the back walls do contain an earlier wall of the undercroft, possibly medieval, but almost certainly 17<sup>th</sup> century at least. However, this can only be seen extending in the south part of the undercroft for some height of 0.5m, and an assumption is made that this may be the same in the northern part of the undercroft. It is apparent that a narrower brick wall was constructed on this wall, from brick sizes and colouration it is likely that this occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, probably as late as the second half of that century. The walls of this phase probably extend up the rear of the structure into the back of the ground floor. Externally a red brick skim was added and internally in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a breeze block addition was added.



## 4.2 Listed Status

The building is a grade II listed building, as stated above.

## 4.3 Historic and Architectural Assessment

The foundations of the rear of the building may be old, but the rear of the building was probably remodelled in the 19<sup>th</sup> or even as late as the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The old walls (medieval) in the rear wall may not exceed much above the floor level. That the older foundations are there would indicate why the wall is so wide above, but observations indicate that the wall in the upper part of the undercroft has been rebuilt. The observed brick dimensions would suggest a later date than the remodelling of the front.

## 5 THE CURRENT PROPOSAL

The current proposals have two suggestions depending on the age of the wall. The one sees the insertion of a hole through the upper part of the undercroft wall. The other sees the insertion of a duct through the floor an internal wall and the back wall. In both cases the proposed course of the ducting does not go through ancient walling, both walls are in the opinion of the author of a 19<sup>th</sup> century date. Ducting has already been inserted through the internal wall and the rear wall of the latter option.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

An assessment of the walls could not find any indication in either option that an ancient or medieval wall would be disturbed. The ancient wall probably forms the very base of the foundation, but the upper parts of the undercroft walls have been rebuilt at the rear of the premises. Such a construction date is probably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Mason, D J P 2001 *Roman Chester: City of the Eagles*, Stroud: Tempus

VCH 2003 *A History of the County of Chester*, volume 5, Part 1: The City of Chester, London: Institute of Historical Research

VCH 2005 *A History of the County of Chester*, volume 5, Part 2: The City of Chester, London: Institute of Historical Research

### Historic Maps

CRO PM 14/1 1581 Map by George Braun and Frans Hogenberg

CRO PM 14/7 1610 Map by John Speed

CRO PM 2/22 1729 Map by Pieter Vander Aa

CRO PM 18/3 1745 Map by Alexander De Lavaix

CRO PM 18/4 1789 Map by James Hunter

CRO PM 14/12 1796 Map by John Stockdale

CRO PM 15/1 1805 Map by G Cole

CRO PM 15/3 1817 Map by Samuel John Neele

CRO PM 18/5 1833 Map by John Wood

OS XXXVIII. Sht. 11 1872 First series OS of Chester

Stephen Yeates

*John Moore Heritage Services*

12<sup>th</sup> October 2011



1581 (CRO PM 14/1)

Not to scale



1610 (CRO PM 14/7)

Not to scale


 Study building

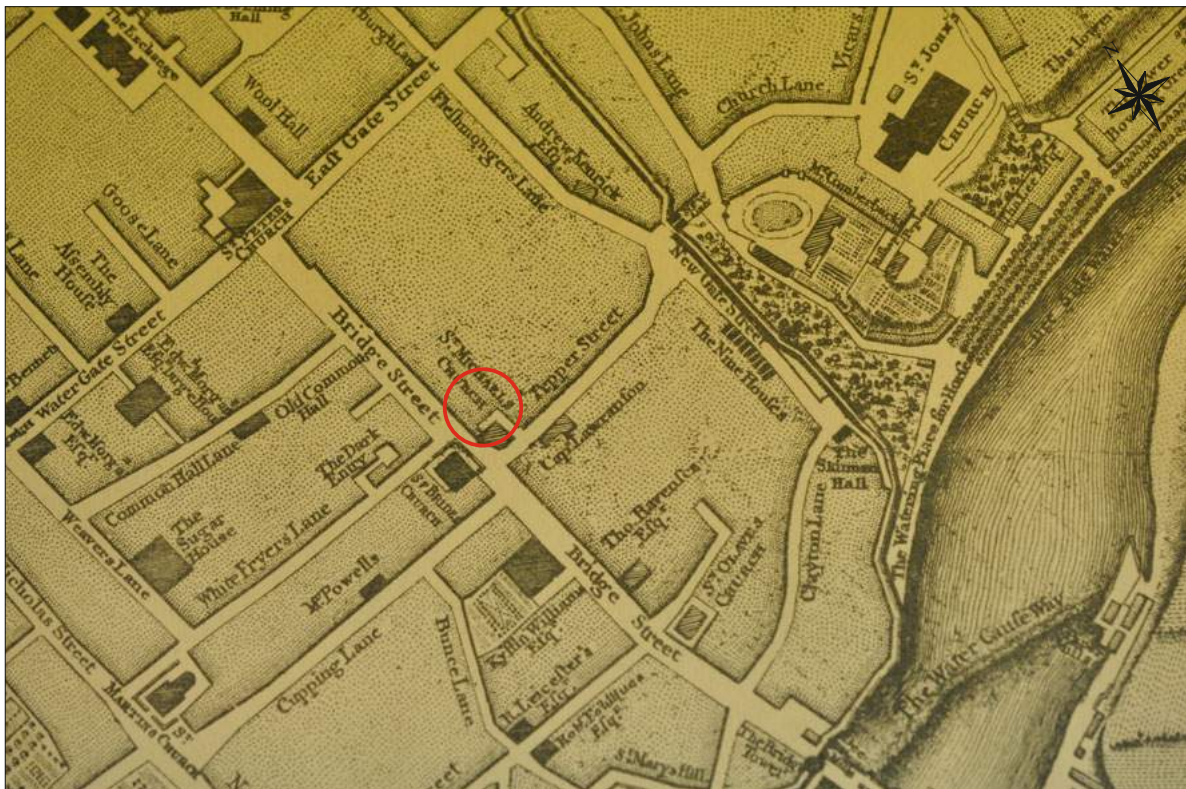
Figure 2. Antiquarian maps





1729 (CRO PM 2/22)

Not to scale



1745 (CRO PM 18/3)

Not to scale


 Study building

Figure 3. Antiquarian maps





1789 (CRO PM 18/4)

Not to scale



1796 (CRO PM 14/12)

Not to scale


 Study building

Figure 4. Antiquarian maps





1805 (CRO PM 15/1)

Not to scale



1817 (CRO PM 15/3)

Not to scale


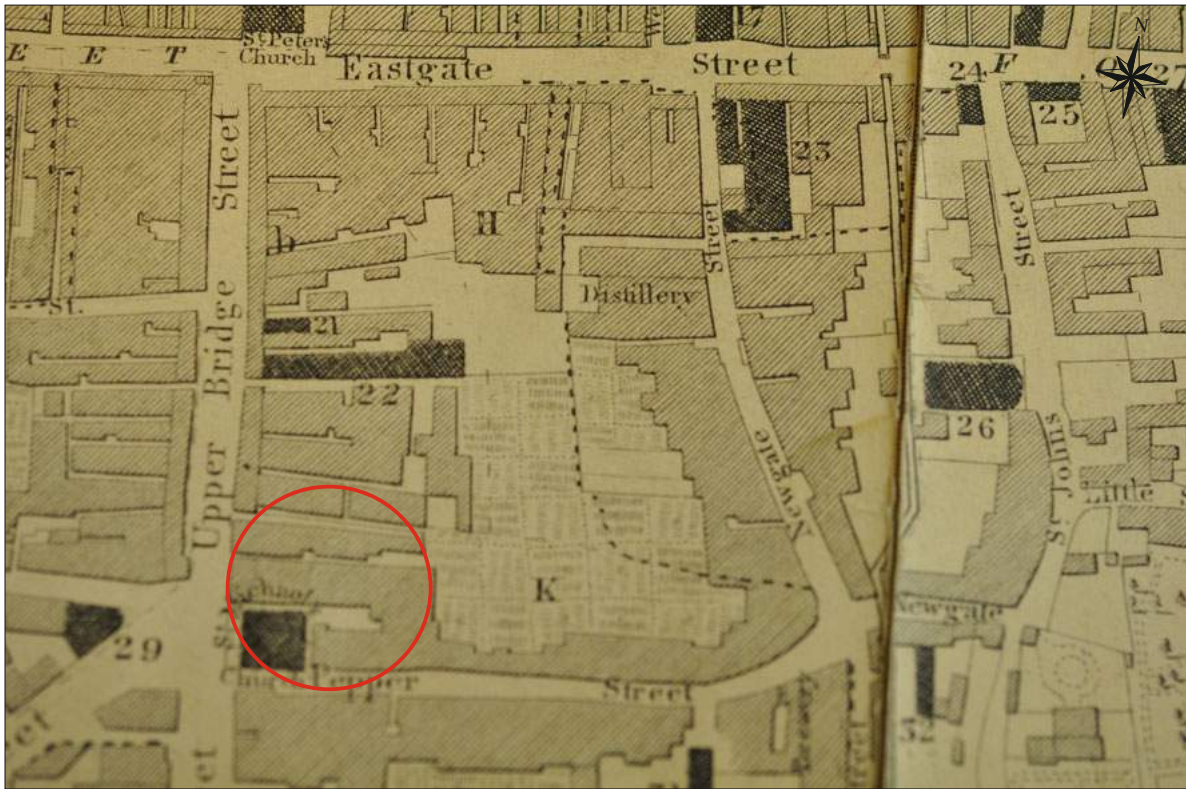
 Study building

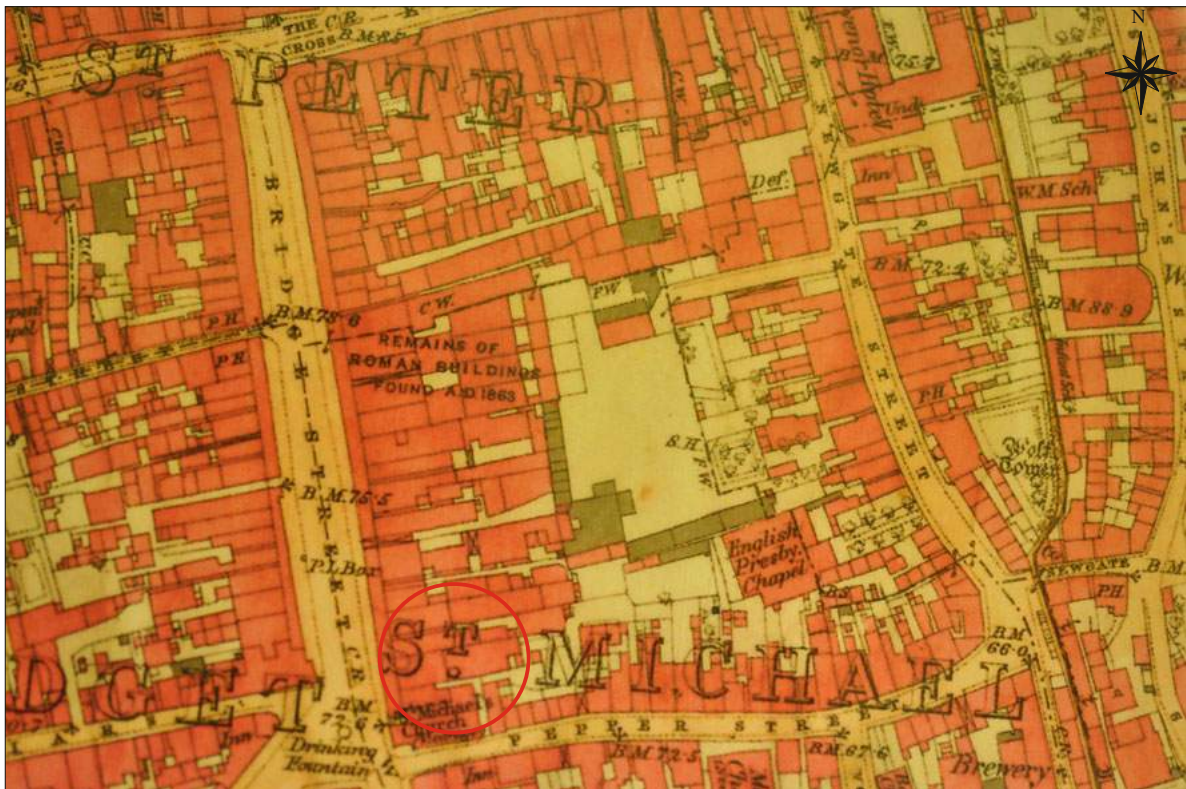
Figure 5. Antiquarian maps





1833 (CRO PM 18/5)

Not to scale



1872 (OS XXXVIII Sht. 11)

Not to scale


 Study building

Figure 6. Antiquarian maps

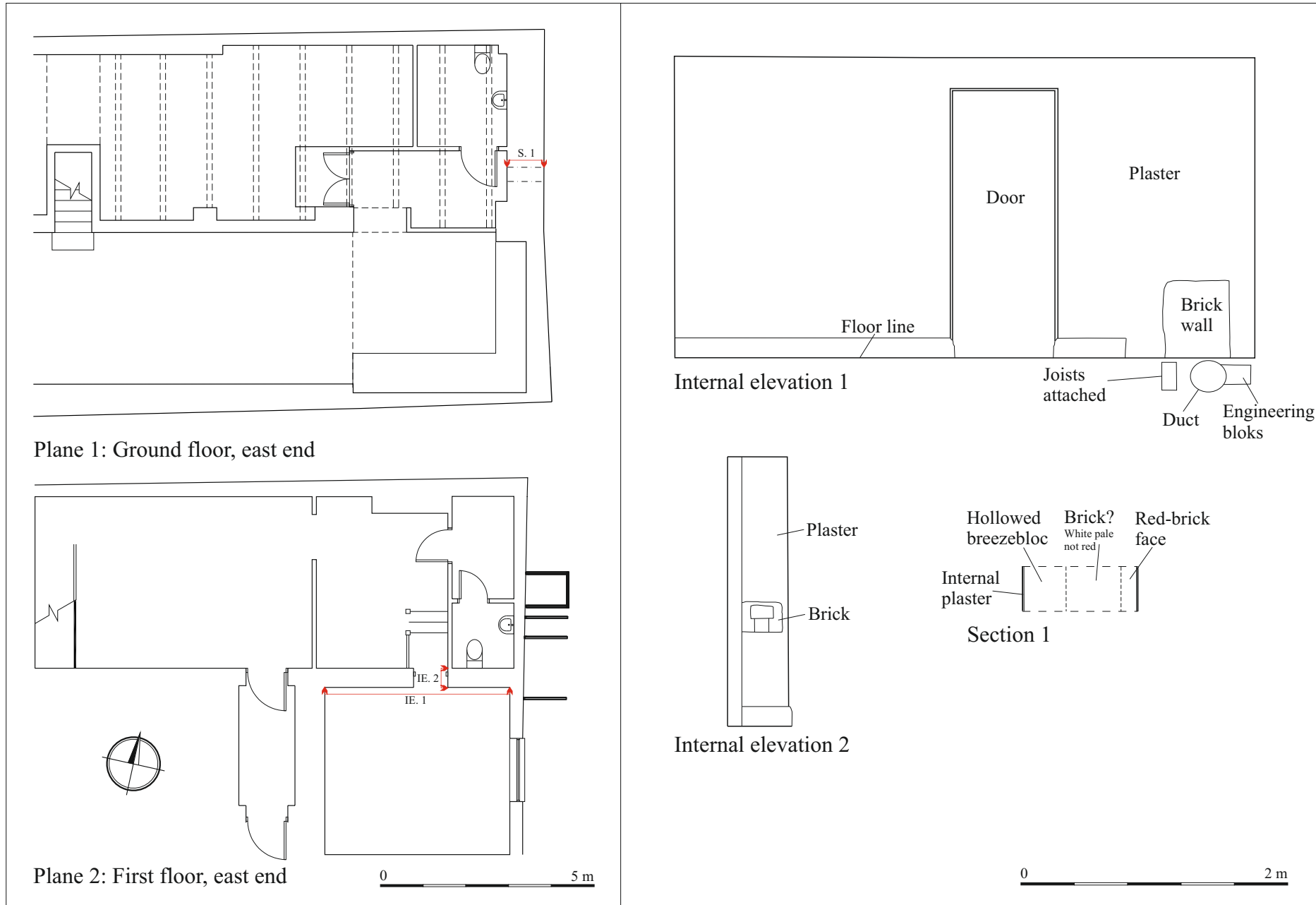


Figure 7. Plans, internal elevations and section