

The structural history
of
OXFORD HOUSE
12 St Martin's Street
WALLINGFORD
OXFORDSHIRE



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for
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THE STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF OXFORD HOUSE, 12 ST MARTIN'S STREET, WALLINGFORD

Introduction

This report describes the history and structural development of Oxford House, a grade II listed building on the west side of the Market Place (St Martin's Street), Wallingford, Oxfordshire. It was commissioned to inform future proposals for the development of the building which was formerly used as commercial premises. It is proposed to retain the ground floor street frontage in commercial use but to convert the remainder of the property into three self-contained flats. The drawings used as a basis for the survey (Figs 2-4) are those supplied by the architects, Spratley Studios.

History

Wallingford originated as a burh of King Alfred and was a medieval borough. The building occupies a characteristically long narrow burgage plot fronting onto the Market Place but little is known of its history before the 19th century. By 1820 it was a public house, The Queen's Head, whose licensee John Childs was also the postmaster (Hardman 1994, 158); he was still there in 1850 (Fig 1; Dewey 1977, 120-1). In 1861 the pub was renamed the Oxford House and was kept by Mary Ann Tillings who was still the proprietor in 1873. By 1899 Thomas F Tappins had taken over and the building was known as the Oxford Hotel (Hardman 1994, 242). Tappins came to Wallingford in 1893 and can be seen (holding a horse) in a photograph of the building taken c.1900 (Fig 5; Beasley 1994, 28). The hotel closed in 1907 and from the 1920s to the 1970s the building served as the church house for St Mary's, to which it is adjacent. By 1977 it had become Adkin's estate agents. The building was modernised in the late 20th century but a set of undated plans were made before this took place which record the previous internal layout (Figs 2-3; supplied by architects).

Description

Exterior (Figs 2-5)

The street frontage is two bays wide and there is a straight joint with the property to the north. The ground floor is rendered and has a wide front door in a raised arched surround with pilasters and a keystone. The six-panelled door and decorative fanlight are of 18th century pattern. To the north there is a modern eight-light shop window

which replaces a sash window similar to those on the first floor (compare Fig 5). The first floor is built of grey brick headers with red brick dressings to the quoin, the windows and the dentil course at eaves level. There are two four-light horned sash windows and a large wrought iron bracket over the door which formerly held a hanging sign (Fig 5). The roof is tiled and there is a reconstructed chimney stack at the north end.

The south elevation is rendered, comprising the gable end of the front range and a lower wing to the rear; all windows are modern replacements. The rear wing has a hipped roof at the west end and a short brick return wall with a twelve-light horned sash window. At ground level the façade continues as a boundary wall and the building is set back behind a passageway which has a modern flat roof. The first floor elevation of this section is brick, butted against the build to the east and has a single window (the frame is modern). Below the cill the wall is rendered; for the height of the jambs it is Flemish bond with vitrified headers and the top of the wall including the segmentally arched lintel is red brick in irregular bond. The gabled return wall has been thickened in later 19th century red brick like that used for the hall to the west.

The hall at the rear of the plot has a lower eaves level which has been extended to the rebuilt boundary wall by a modern glazed lean-to roof so that the elevation is only visible internally. The roof is tiled and there is a pyramidal louvre towards the west end. The west elevation of the hall, visible from gardens to the rear, is gabled with overhanging bargeboards and a large six-light window under an arched lintel. The northern return is plain brickwork to the point where it abuts the back of No 13.

Interior (Figs 2-3, 6-8)

Ground floor - The interior is only one room deep and has been extensively modernised. A series of mid 20th century plans record the earlier layout showing that there was formerly a passage on the south side of the building from the front door to the back of the plot (G1/5/7). The two front rooms have been thrown together for commercial purposes, replacing the passage with an internal porch and removing the partition wall. A lateral passage (G3) to the east of this once led to the staircase against the north wall where the lower flight to the basement still survives. This has been replaced by a modern staircase against the west wall of the inner room (G4)

where there was formerly a fireplace. The front room has a chimney breast in the north wall. Both rooms have modern cladding or plaster and carpeted floors which hide any earlier finishes. The front room (G2) also has a modern suspended ceiling; the ceiling to the back room is lower and may be older. There is a possible cased beam north of centre.

To the west of G4 there was formerly a small room (G6) with a door to the north of the transverse chimney stack. This has been subdivided to form WC and kitchen spaces with a passage on the north side. Apart from a segmental archway marking the position of the former corridor (G5) to the south of the chimney stack there are no visible historic features. The new passage turns at right angles to connect with the original corridor on the south side (G7). This and a store room to the north have been cut out of a larger room (G8) which has a chimney breast in the north wall and two exposed ceiling beams. Both are cased but the longer east-west beam appears to have traces of cut-back mouldings above the boarding on the soffit. At the west end there is a modern cupboard (under a staircase) and in the south wall there are paired sash windows each of twelve lights with narrow glazing bars and no horns, suggesting a date of c.1800.

The passage to the south (G7) has a large cased transverse beam at the east end which carries the corner of room 1.6 but the remainder of the ceiling is modern with top lights. Immediately to the west of the paired sash windows to G8 there is an archway to a staircase. This is a straight flight with a closed string on the east side inset from a boarded partition; it has turned vase-shaped balusters, a rounded handrail and a square lower newel post with small chamfers and a low moulded cap. The upper newel is a plain square post. The face of the adjoining west wall is uneven and at first floor level incorporates a small window into the adjoining hall.

There is a formerly external door in the west wall of G7 leading to a continuation of the passage. This has a vitrified brick floor, a modern glazed lean-to roof and a modern south boundary wall. On the north side there is a late 19th century hall built of brick in Flemish bond with two bands of vitrified headers below window cill level. Doorways are arched; windows are of casement type with flat brick lintels. The principal door towards the centre is double and has side-lights. Internally the hall is

four bays long, articulated by pairs of shallow pilasters below the roof trusses. The walls have a high panelled dado, there are no openings on the north side but there is a large six-light window in the west wall and a stage at the east end. The pine open roof is of arch-braced type secured by iron bolts and the middle truss has a tie beam. The apex is hidden by a canted ceiling of tongue and groove boarding.

Cellars – there are extensive cellars accessed from a winder stair set into the north wall between G2 and G4 (Figs 2, 6); these are of mixed brick and rubble stone construction. The front basement room has been subdivided by a modern blockwork wall. There is a blocked light-well in the front wall, which is of rubble construction, and it is spanned by a pair of transverse ceiling beams; the joists are hidden by modern boarding. The south and west walls are also largely rubble-built and a three bay brick arcade c.1m deep has been constructed against the south wall; this housed wine bins. The floor is brick, skimmed with concrete.

To the rear is a second cellar, also rubble-built with similar arched brick wine-bins against the south wall; these are subdivided by internal partitions. A large cast iron pipe has been punched through the brick partitions in both cellars. The exposed ceiling joists are machine-sawn pine of late 19th or 20th century date. A pair of brick piers divides off the east side of the room to form one end of a sloping passage to a third cellar at the back. This has rubble walls with piers of brick at intervals and there is a former light-well with steps in the middle of the south wall. The corners are curved for half their height and squared-out above. The ceiling joists are of late 19th or 20th century pine.

First floor – this has a corridor against the north wall and there were formerly four principal rooms. Like the ground floor it has been modernised and all doors are modern fire-doors. The front room (1.1) has a higher floor level than the rooms to the rear and spans the full width of the building with two windows overlooking the street; these have 19th century architrave mouldings. There is a chimney breast in the south wall and the flue of the ground floor fireplace against the north wall. The walls and ceiling are plainly plastered with a simple skirting and there is a cased transverse ceiling beam. The upper part of the attic staircase formerly projected into the south-

west corner of the room; this has been removed and there is now only hatch access to the top floor.

The head of the former staircase from the ground floor (1.3) has been turned into a cupboard and the replacement staircase has been cut out of the west end of room 1.5 enclosed by a modern glazed partition. Over the stairs just below ceiling level there is a large exposed tie beam but this room has no other visible historic features. To the east a former passage and attic staircase (1.2) have been made into a cupboard with a modern door. To the west room 1.6 has been subdivided; there is a chimney breast at the east end and an original window in the west wall. Room 1.8 at the end of the range has unaltered dimensions but a modern suspended ceiling; a panel has been removed to expose the original, which is plain plaster without a cornice. There is an off-centre chimney breast in the north wall and the centre of the floor has a pronounced sag.

Top floor – this is confined to the front of the house over room 1.1 where there are two attic rooms (not fully investigated) divided by a central partition. They are formed within the roof space with sloping ceilings which are fully plastered out on old laths. The collar and post from a roof truss are visible built into the south wall. Holes in the plaster indicate that the roof has been renewed and the rafters replaced, removing the dormer window which formerly lit the space. There was no access to the roofs of the rear ranges.

Structural development (Figs 2-4)

1 *Pre 18th century* - the extent of internal modernisation and the lack of distinctive historic features make the dating of the building difficult. However the overall plan and height of the range suggest that the oldest fabric probably survives in the central part of the building (G4-8), although modified by later alterations. Access to the back of the plot was formerly by a passage against the south wall with the main rooms to the north. Room G4 had a large fireplace in the west wall where there is a visible tie beam at first floor level. Room G8 had a fireplace in the north wall and there is a grid of ceiling beams, one apparently with a cut-back moulding. There are no other features of particular note on the first floor. It is probable that this part of the building was originally timber framed, like other pre-18th century buildings in the town. The external elevations appear to have been refaced in brick but elements of

framing may survive internally behind later finishes. The differing widths of the two units suggest that they were built at different periods, although on present evidence it is not clear which is the older; they probably date to the 17th century.

2 *Later 18th century* – the brick street frontage dates to the second half of the 18th century and has a good surviving door with a fanlight. The first floor window openings are original to the build although the sashes are mid 19th century replacements and there was formerly a third window of the same pattern on the ground floor. The greater height of this range, which has an attic storey and the discontinuity of the floor levels internally suggests that the front of the building (rooms G2, 1.1) was completely rebuilt at this period. The rear wings were probably faced in brick at this time; the external elevation of room 1.8 is chequered brickwork. Internally no historic features are visible in the new rooms at the front of the house; all doors have been replaced and fireplaces blocked.

3 *c.1800* – at a similar or slightly later date to the previous phase paired sash windows were installed in room G8 and a staircase built against the west wall. This has an open archway at the foot indicating that the passage to the south was roofed over at this date. The change in the bond of the external brickwork at first floor level indicates that this part of the building (1.8) was heightened at this time.

4 *later 19th century* – the hall at the back of the plot dates to this period when the property was a public house; it has separate external access. The sash windows on the front of the building were replaced and the large iron sign bracket, visible on the photograph of c.1900 (Fig 5) survives from this time.

5 *late 20th century* – the building was extensively modernised; externally all but the windows on the façade were replaced, the southern boundary wall was rebuilt and the adjoining passage roofed over. Internally partitions were removed from the rooms at the front and the staircase was relocated to the west wall of G4, the rooms to the west were subdivided and the through-passage was blocked off. On the first floor rooms 1.5 and 1.6 were subdivided and the stairs to the attic rooms at the front of the house removed.

Impact of proposals

It is proposed to retain the shop on the ground floor and convert the rest of the building into three flats. The shop space would remain unaltered but would no longer have access to the rear of the building. There would be a new partition in front of the modern stairs at the west end of G4 with a WC below. The space to the west would be reconfigured so that the stairs can be used as access to a new flat on the first floor over the shop; the partitions to be altered here are modern. Room G8 would become the living area of a second flat and modern partitions would be removed to restore it to its full size. The modern flat roof would be removed from the adjoining passage so that the paired sash windows would be external and there would be new access from the south. The existing archway to the stairs at the west end would be glazed and the lowest steps would be modified to form a winder, giving access from G8. On the first floor room 1.8 would be subdivided to form a corridor and access between rooms 1.5 and 1.6 closed. Rooms 1.1-5 would be unaltered.

The hall at the back of the plot would become a separate flat with the two bays at the west end providing open-plan living space but the east end being floored over to provide new bath and bedrooms.

The proposals overall will have a limited effect on the historic fabric, given the extent of modernisation which has already taken place. The two areas most affected are the hall, which will be partly subdivided and floored over and the staircase of c.1800 west of room G8 where it will be necessary to alter the foot. In both cases sensitive detailing would mitigate the impact on the historic fabric.

References

- Beasley, D, 1994 *Around Wallingford in old photographs*, Alan Sutton
Dewey, J & S, 1977 *The Book of Wallingford*, Barracuda
Hardman, J S, 1994 *Wallingford: a history of an English market town*, privately published

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Appendix: Statutory List

WALLINGFORD . MARKET PLACE SU6089SE (West side) Wallingford 11/119 No.12 (Adkin, Chartered 17/03/70 Surveyors, Auctioneers, Estate Agents) (Formerly listed as Church House) GV II House, now office. Mid C18, with C20 alterations. Lined render on brick to ground floor; grey brick with red brick dressings to first floor; old plain-tile roof; brick and stack to right. 2-storey, 2-window range, 6-panel door with decorative fanlight and rendered plain surround with keystone to left. C20 shop window to right. Two 4-pane unhorned sashes with cambered brick heads to first floor. Dentil course to eaves. Interior not inspected. Included for group value.

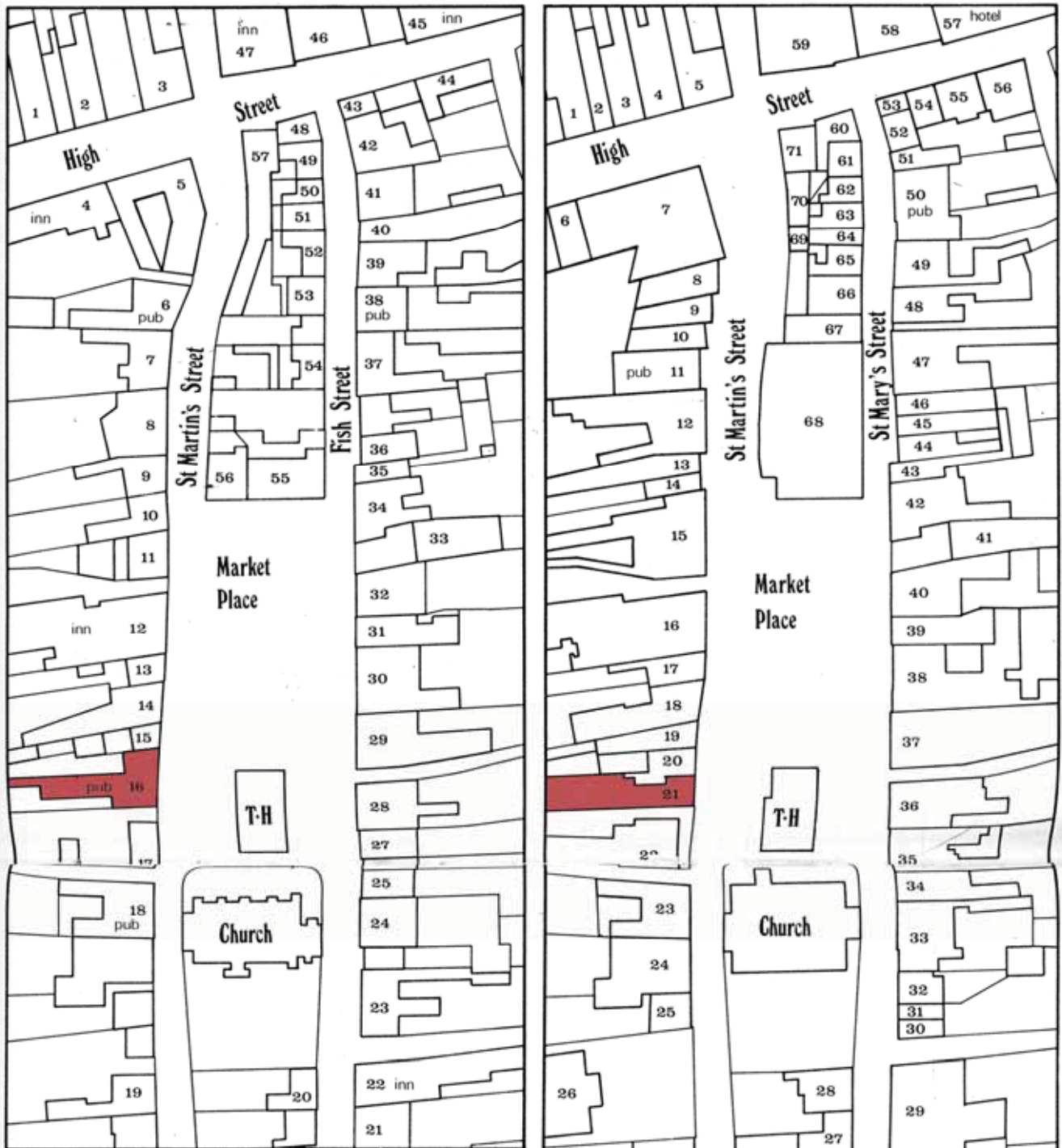


Fig 1

The Market Place in 1850 (16; left) when the building (16) was a public house; The Queen's Head. In 1977 (21; right) it had become Adkin's estate agents (Dewey 1977, 120-1)





First floor.

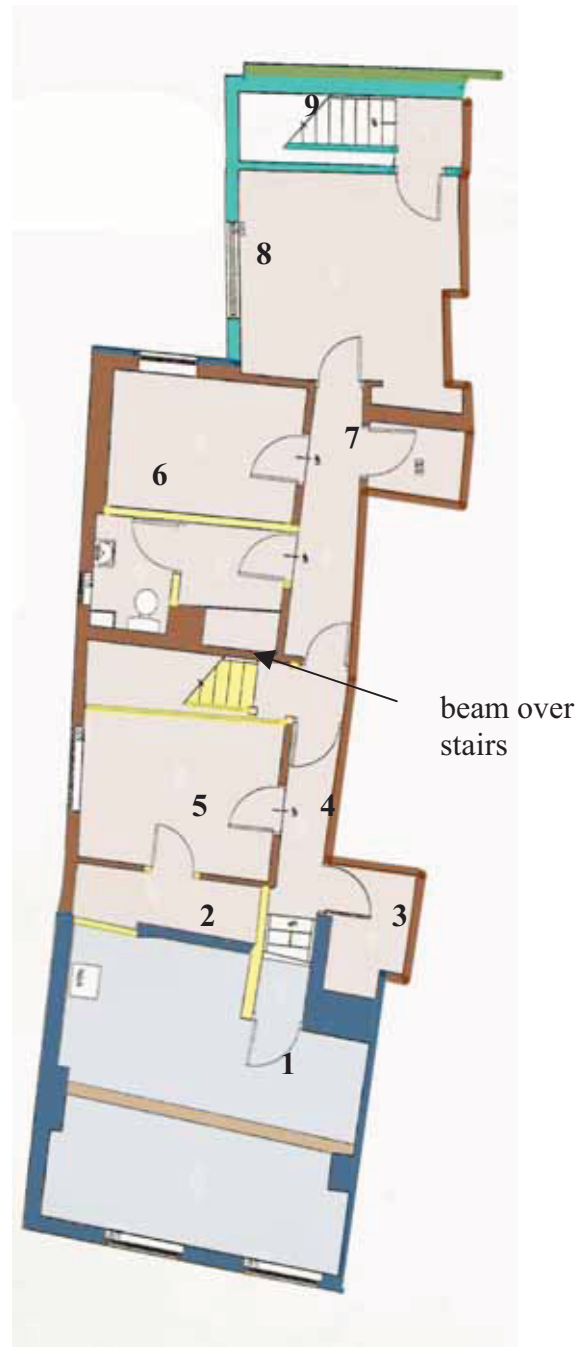


Fig 3 Plans

First floor before late 20th century alterations (left)

Current first floor plan

Top floor before late 20th century alterations (no current plan)

for key see Fig 4



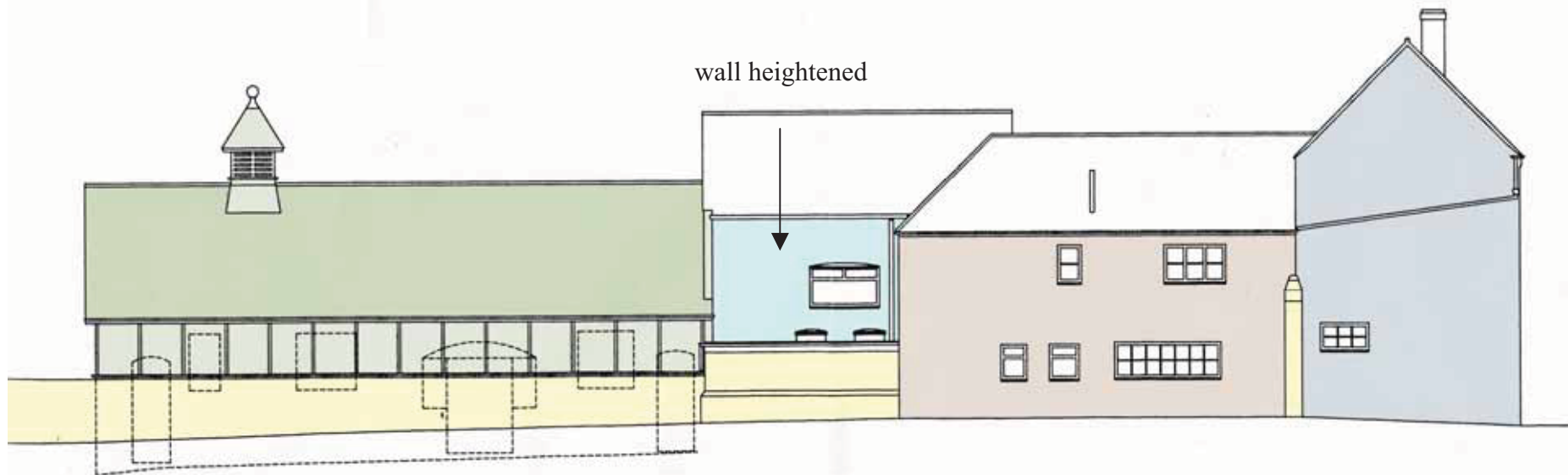
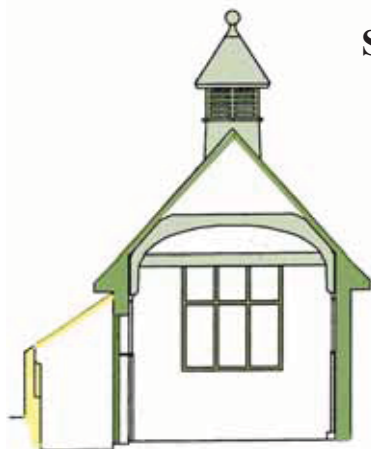
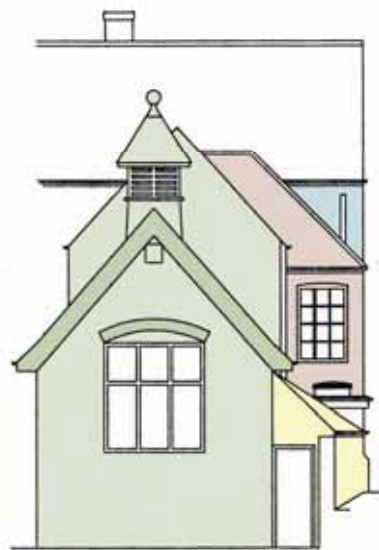


Fig 4 Elevations

South

West (left)

Section through hall looking west









-  beams
-  pre 18th century
-  later 18th century
-  early 19th century
-  late 19th century
-  modern



Fig 5 Exteriors
(clockwise from above)

Street façade c.1900 (Beasley 1994, 28)

Market Place elevation (east) today

South elevation from the west

South elevation from the east

The hall from the south-east; modern wall & roof in foreground





Fig 6 Interiors

Ground floor (G2 & 4) looking towards street, modern finishes

Ground floor (G2 & 4) looking west, modern finishes & stairs

Wine bins in front cellar, looking east

Cellar at rear looking west



Fig 7 Ground floor
(clockwise from above)

Staircase west of G8

Passage (G7) looking east with windows to G8 on left

Ceiling beams in G8 looking west

Passage south of hall looking west

Interior of hall looking east





Fig 8 First floor

(clockwise from top left)

Room 1.8 looking north-east

Tie beam over modern staircase, west wall of 1.5

Rear staircase (1.9)

Front room (1.1) looking north-east

South wall of attic over 1.1 (viewed through hatch)

