

A Late Medieval Inn at the White Hart Hotel, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

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SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Chase Homes Ltd to carry out archaeological and historical investigation of the White Hart Hotel Chipping Norton prior to and during its conversion to residential and retail use. This important local building fronting the High Street in the middle of Chipping Norton, retained its elegant 18th-century stone frontage, behind which lay the remains of earlier timber-framed structures. During building work a number of previously unknown elements were exposed. These included the c. 15th-century main timber frame of the building and an almost intact late medieval timber gallery at the rear. During the building work much was revealed about the historic development of the building as well as its decoration, fixtures and fittings. The archaeological investigations showed that medieval pits and quarries dating to the 11th-12th centuries were present in the western and central parts of the site, nearest to the hotel building. A buried soil deposit apparently dating to the 13th century occurred further to the east. The medieval deposits were truncated by ranges of 18th-19th-century limestone outbuildings, constructed along the northern and southern sides of the property.

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Chase Homes Ltd to undertake a programme of building analysis and recording as well as an excavation and watching brief at the White Hart Hotel, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The White Hart Hotel is a Grade II* Listed Building dating from at least the 16th century, which served as a coaching inn on the main road from London to Worcester (see below). The building work involved the conversion of the former hotel buildings into a number of self-contained flats and retail units. The stables and ancillary buildings at the rear of the site were also either converted or demolished. Building work (and archaeological monitoring) took place from 2003 to 2005.

The White Hart Hotel is located between High Street and Albion Street in the centre of the medieval market town of Chipping Norton (NGR: SP 3144 2712; Fig. 1), 18 miles north-west of Oxford. The site occupies a long and narrow burgage plot (120 m. by 17 m.) which rises steeply away from the road, with the main buildings of the historic inn situated at the west end, fronting onto the High Street (Fig. 1). The former stables and cart sheds and part of the modern hotel accommodation lie on the rising land at the rear, with a rear access from Albion Street. The site lies at c. 205 m. O.D. and the geology is loam overlying Chipping Norton limestone.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site is located in the centre of Chipping Norton, which historically first emerges as Norton, a farming settlement in the Saxon kingdom of Mercia. However, archaeological evidence relating to Roman occupation has been found, which includes coins and sherds of pottery.¹ During the Norman period, in 1081, the church and living were granted to St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester, and Domesday Book (1086) records the ownership of the manor

¹ R. Anthony, 'Chipping Norton: Medieval Market Town', in *Cotswold Life*, July 1984.

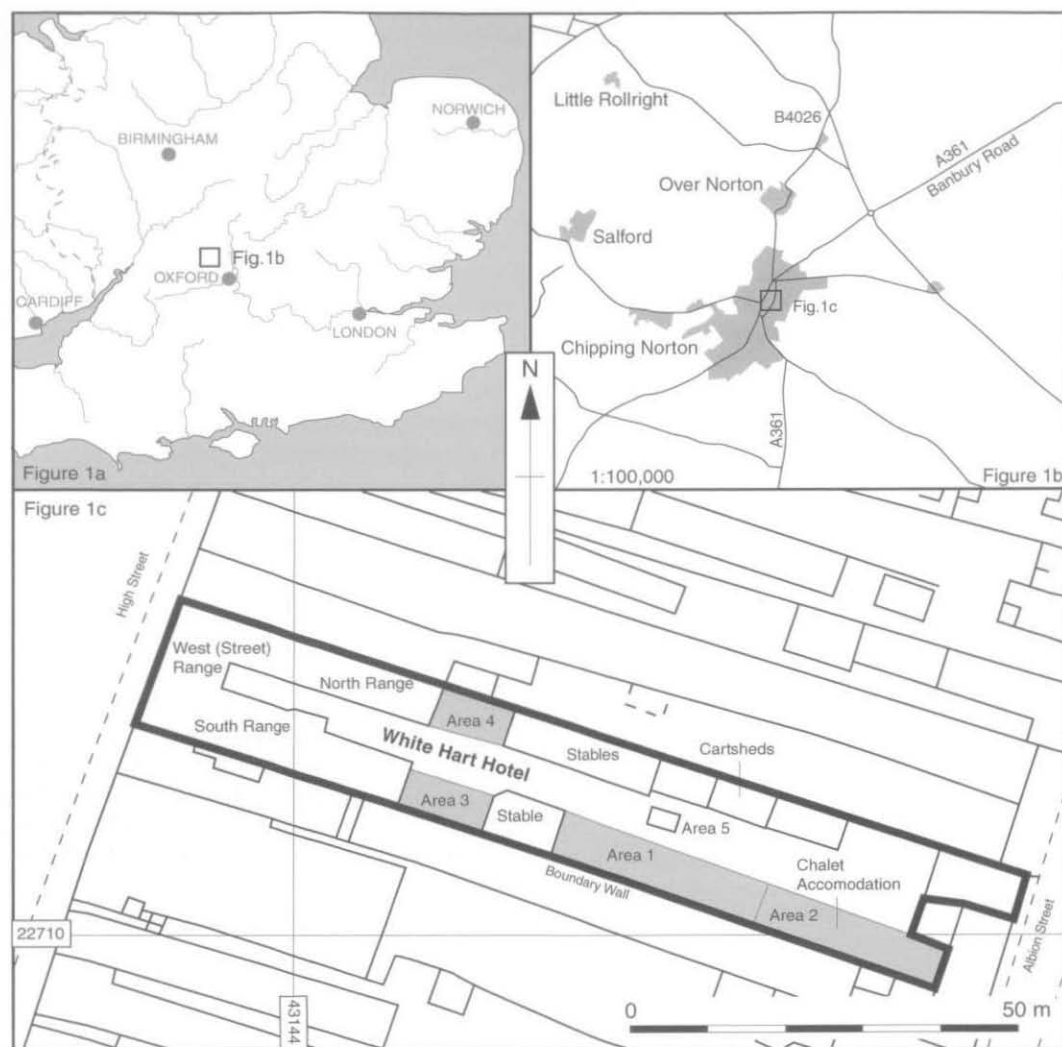


Fig. 1. Site location

as Ernulf de Hesdings. 'Chipping', is a corruption of *Ceapan* meaning a market or place of trade. The market place, in which the White Hart is located, was laid out in 1205.² Recent archaeological investigations suggest that medieval development did not extend beyond Albion Street (formerly Back Lane) to the east.³

In the Middle Ages the wealth of the Cotswolds was based on the wool industry, and Chipping Norton was one of a number of towns and villages that saw increased growth and some fine buildings financed by the profits of the wool trade. The importance of this trade

² W. Rodwell, *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire* (1975).

³ OA, 'White Hart Hotel, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation' (unpublished report, 2003).

slowly dwindled in the 17th and 18th centuries, although the town remained an important commercial and trading centre, as is attested by numerous post-medieval buildings. Around the market place many of the original buildings like the White Hart were rebuilt or refaced in the 18th century with Georgian fronts, although earlier styles are still evident in New Street.

The early history of the White Hart itself is unknown although the name may be suggestive of an early origin (the white hart being the livery badge of Richard II and a common pub name throughout England), and it must have been an inn from c.1500. Fortunately a number of early probate inventories survive for the property, transcribed by the Chipping Norton Historical Research Group.

The 17th-century inventories are particularly useful in that they give many details of the hotel's basic layout as well as furnishings and fittings. What they show is that from even as early as 1615 the inn was divided into a number of separate lodging rooms each known by an individual name (e.g. the *Harrford Chamber* or the *Queenes Chamber* and interestingly the *Chappell Chamber*). As well as the chambers there was a brewhouse, a hall and a kitchen. The pattern of well-furnished chambers is repeated in the later inventories, and it is clear that the inn was a large establishment complete with many of the requisites required by visitors of the better sort. By the inventory of 1694 the inn was almost luxuriously furnished with turkey work (woven) chair covers and numerous carpets. Although these early inventories only tell us about the 17th-century history of the inn it is likely that the building fulfilled the same function of accommodation for better off guests in the 16th century and it certainly continued in this role into the 18th to 20th centuries.

Historic map evidence shows the development of buildings on the site from c. 1770 to the present day.⁴ Davies' map of 1797 shows that the town of Chipping Norton, was considerably developed by this time. Structures in the location of the White Hart Hotel are depicted for the first time, although the level of detail is not enough to discern individual elements. The Ordnance Survey 25-inch town plan of 1880 is the first detailed map of Chipping Norton, and shows the layout of the town much as it is today. The plan of the White Hart Hotel shows two long ranges projecting westwards towards Albion Street. The OS Map of 1922 provides further detail of the hotel, with the archway entrance to the rear ranges being depicted.

HISTORIC BUILDING INVESTIGATION

The building recording work was requested by West Oxfordshire District Council in advance of work on the historic fabric as a condition of building consent. The main aim was to produce a record of the building, prior to its alteration. During restoration work new features were also recorded as they were revealed. This took a broad approach concentrating on the structure, construction, layout, surviving fixtures and fittings within the building. This facilitated an understanding of the age, phasing and significance of the building in its entirety. In addition, a more targeted approach was undertaken on features which were likely to be lost during the conversion.

The investigation was carried out to RCHME level II⁵. This level of recording reflects the fact that although the building is of historical interest, it was to be converted rather than demolished, and major loss of historic fabric was not anticipated.

⁴ Cartographic sources consulted: 1770 Enclosure Award map; 1797 Davies Map of Oxfordshire; Ordnance Survey 11" map 1814; Ordnance Survey 25" Plan 1880; Ordnance Survey 25" Plan 1922.

⁵ RCHME, *Recording Historic Buildings. A descriptive specification* (3rd edition, 1996).

*Description**The West (Street) Range*

The building's western frontage looks out over Chipping Norton's central market place. This elegant 18th-century front is made of neatly dressed limestone ashlar. The range is three stories in height and six bays in length. The two centre bays are recessed whilst the outer bays project slightly towards the road. The fenestration consists of large rectangular sash windows. The visible part of the rear (eastern) range is very different in character from the front elevation, being a simple gable made up of rendered brickwork. The range has a slate covered roof and two stone stacks. The only major intervention on the main façade of the building was the re-creation of the former coaching arch, which gives access from the street to the yard at the rear. This arch was blocked during the early 20th century.

As work progressed it became apparent that the symmetrical 18th-century stone frontage was applied to a far more complex multi-phased building within and that more survived of these earlier buildings than was originally foreseen.

Basement and cellars

Two cellars lie beneath the west (street) range. Under the north end lies a vaulted brick basement of 19th-century date, accessed through a hatch by a narrow stair. Under the south end lies a stone vaulted cellar made of high quality limestone. This exceptionally well-built and rather elegant cellar is likely to belong to the 17th century and is very different in nature from the hotel's two other more utilitarian brick cellars.

Ground Floor (Fig. 2)

The ground floor was latterly used as the hotel's bar and lounge areas and was entered from the street through a central door. Directly ahead of the central door lay the staircase to the first floor which was set in a tall (19th-century) arched opening. Most of the walls were stone although the former coaching arch had been blocked in 20th-century brick. Although this floor had been extensively altered and rearranged in the 19th and 20th centuries some early features of interest remained. Two fine limestone fire surrounds remained in situ, each consisting of a shallow four-centred arch over the fireplace supporting a large projecting mantel. The style of the stonework suggests that these rather grand fireplaces were installed in the 17th century.

First Floor (Fig. 3)

The first floor is accessed through a staircase running up the rear of the building, which was demolished during the current rebuilding. The stair gives access to a corridor running along the rear of the building and this in turn gives access to two main rooms, the larger (south room) of which had been subdivided. The corridor itself was lit by a large (late 19th- or early 20th-century?) group of windows overlooking the yard to the east. On the west side was a plastered wall, which on stripping revealed a simple timber frame along almost the entire length. It is clear that this framing was never intended to be exposed and in appearance it is strongly suggestive of a late (possibly 19th-century) date.

Beneath the modern wall treatments in the large southern room were entirely panelled walls, which were almost universally painted in a bright pea green. The panels were rather simple with small fields surrounded by moulding at the base and large plain fields above. Two previously hidden doorways were found (one complete with door), each inserted into the panelling at a later date. There was little to date the panelling although in appearance it was suggestive of the first part of the 19th century. The panels within the windows were different in form, with chip-carved diamond-shaped lozenges (with central medallion) on their rear (hidden) side. This style of carving is entirely consistent with the second half of the 17th century, and they may even have been the shutters from the earlier windows which

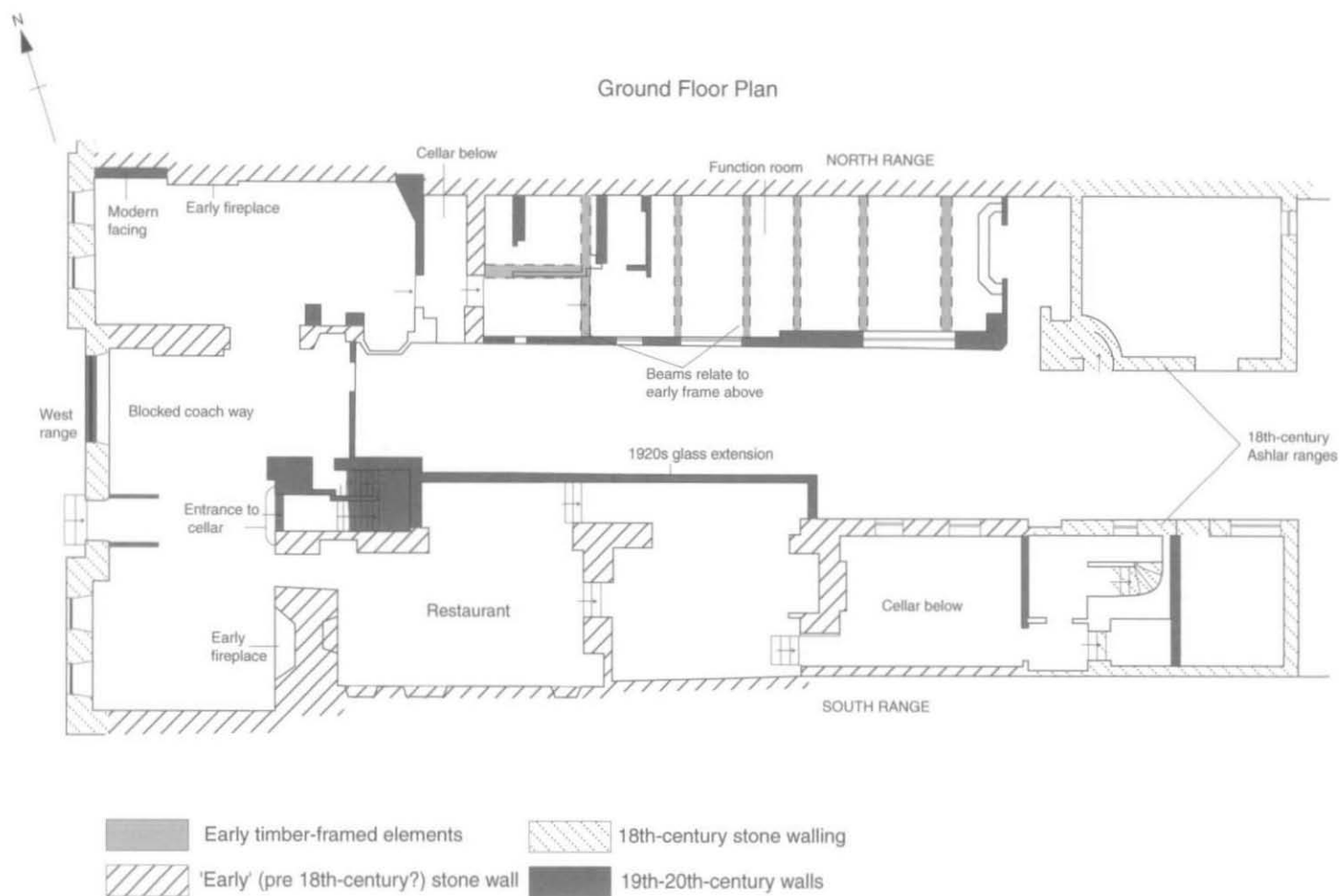


Fig. 2 Ground floor plan of White Hart Hotel

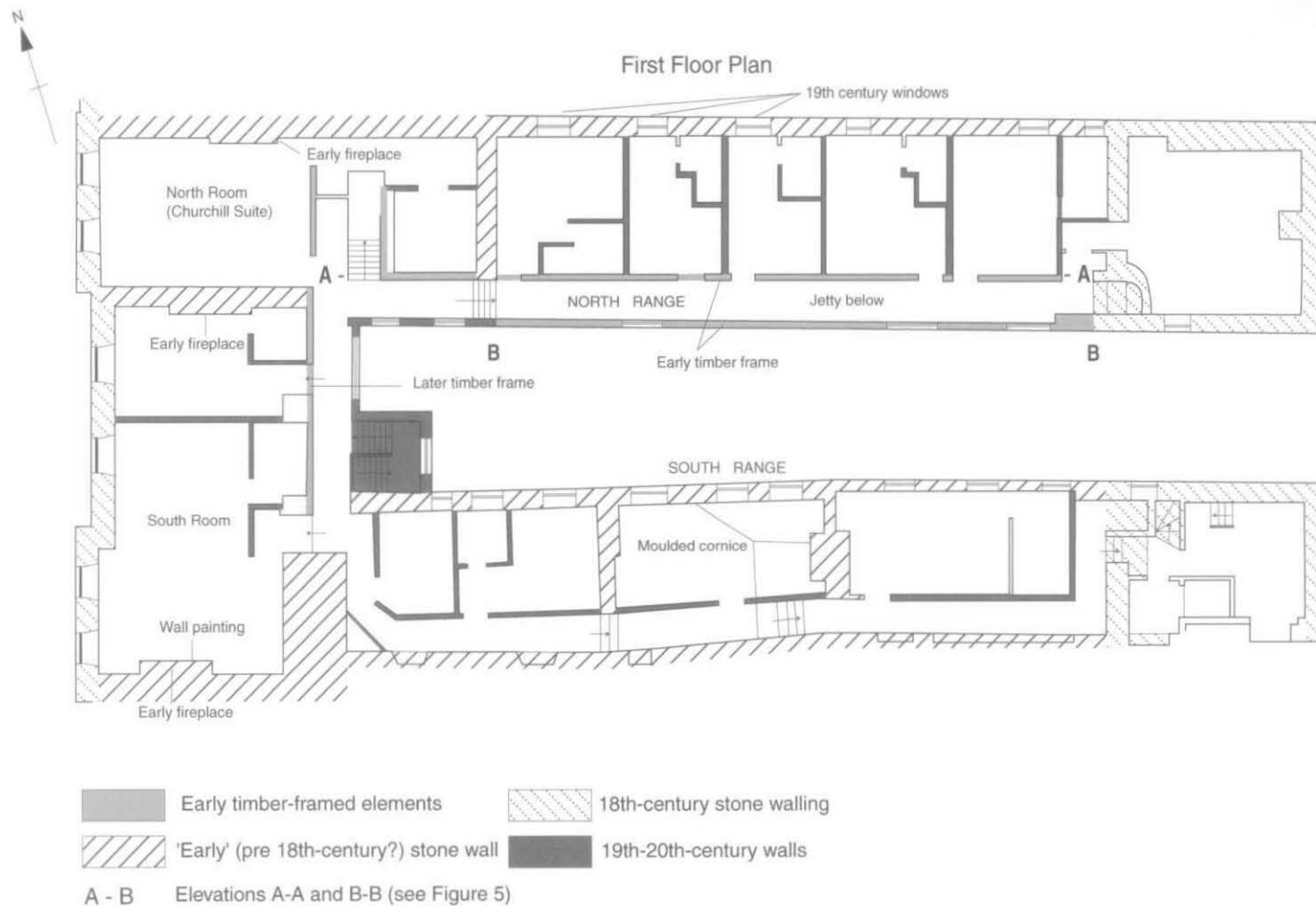
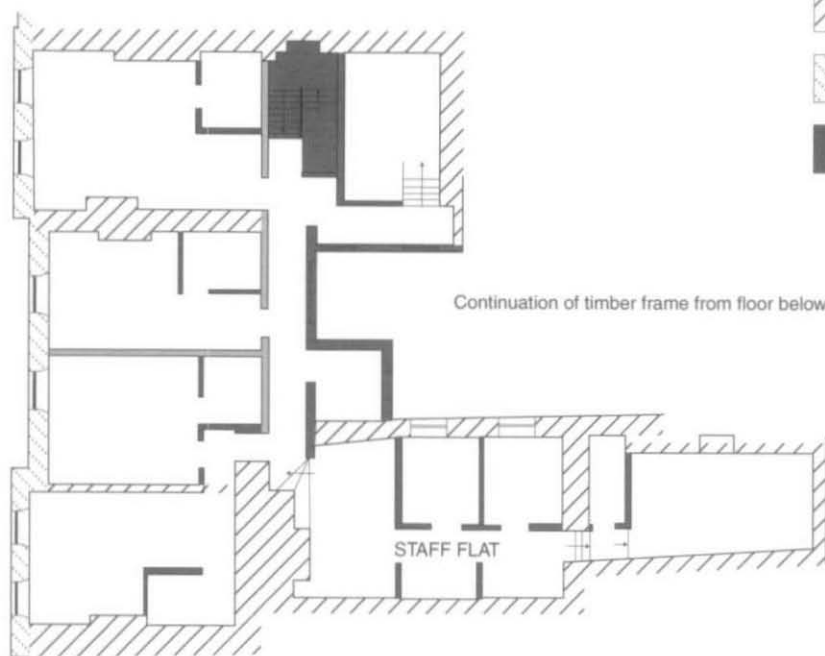


Fig. 3. First floor plan of White Hart Hotel



Second Floor Plan



Early timber-framed elements

'Early' (pre 18th-century?) stone wall

18th-century stone walling

19th-20th-century walls

Continuation of timber frame from floor below

STAFF FLAT

Fig. 4 Second floor plan of White Hart Hotel

were replaced by the 18th-century façade. The panelling was removed during the building work and the walls beneath were exposed. Much of the south wall was still covered with a layer of plaster, upon which were the very fragmentary and faint remains of wall paintings, showing a repeating pattern of large stylised flowers and tendril-like branches. Although this pattern does not relate to other known Oxfordshire wall paintings, it does appear remarkably similar to the large embroidered hangings popular from the 16th to the early 18th centuries.

To the north of this room lies a smaller room known during the latter life of the hotel as the 'Churchill Suite'. This room was lit from the west by tall 18th-century windows, and it had a small modern en-suite bathroom attached to the east side. The most notable feature of this room was the wall panelling which consisted of small flat fields in pegged frames. An area of decorative panelling sat behind the hotel bed and was made up of chip-carved roundels and lozenges. Whilst this was almost certainly early work, it was out of place and must have been removed from an item of furniture. The remaining panelling may be largely 17th-century in date, although parts were clearly 19th- or early 20th-century additions.

Second Floor (Fig. 4)

The second floor was approached up a 19th-century staircase which rose from the north end of the first floor. The simple timber frame which made up the corridor of the wall on the first floor below, extended up to the second floor and forms the rear wall of the rooms on this floor. There are three main rooms on this floor, although these were again subdivided during the building's latter use as a hotel. A corridor runs along the rear and this gives access to the rooms. A curious feature was the alignment of the main floor joists in the central room. These were clearly not perpendicular with the partition walls and indeed partially ran under one of these. This may suggest that the floor timbers relate to an earlier arrangement pre-dating the 18th-century façade, possibly when the building was made up of several unconnected properties.

The North Range

The north range is a long narrow two storey building lying on the north side of the narrow yard. The rear (north) wall is stone built and partly terraced into the hillside.

Ground Floor (Fig. 2)

The ground floor was made up of a set of lavatories and entrance hall at the west end and a large central room at the east. A small unconnected room lay in the stone built block to the east, which probably dates to the late 18th century. After the removal of modern fittings, the construction of the main range became more apparent. All the internal partitions were confirmed to be modern as was the floor and the plasterboard walling. The flooring was entirely 20th century and no historic features survived. The ceiling however was largely intact and was made up of a number of large trusses relating to the timber frame above (see below). At the west end these were missing and had been replaced by later work.

First Floor (Figs. 3, 5 and 6)

The first floor is partially encased with the hotel's front range, although before the addition of the rear corridor this would not have been the case. Before building work began it was clear from the exterior that the first floor was an early feature and was made up of a projecting corridor supported on a timber rail (held by the trusses of the room below). After the clearance of many modern plasterboard and later lath and plaster concretions by the contractors, the scale and importance of these early remains became apparent. What was revealed was an almost complete late medieval timber gallery, which (due to the size and quality of its timbers) had survived in an almost unspoilt condition (Fig. 5). This gallery survived for a length of almost 21 metres from the interior of the hotel to the stone range at

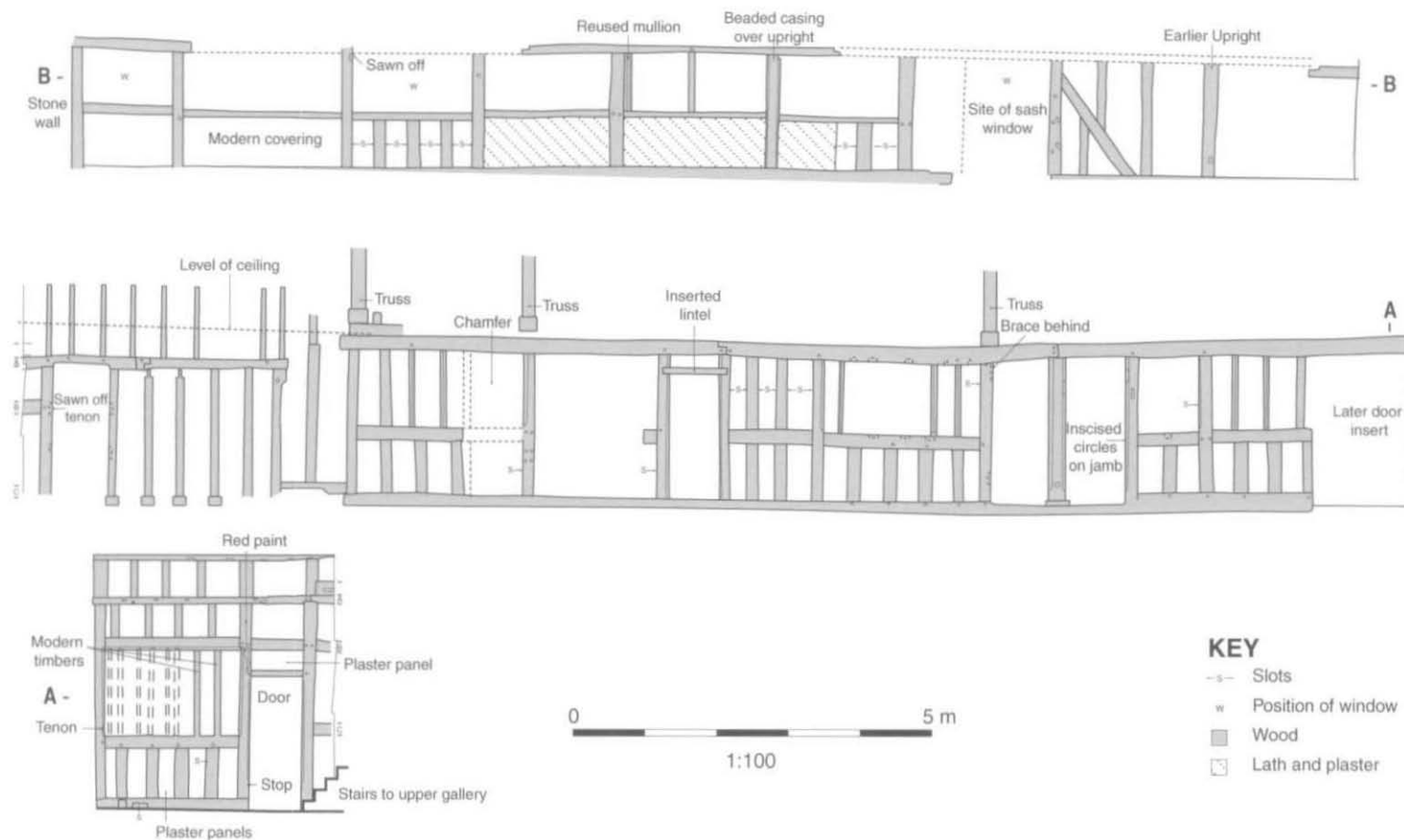


Fig. 5 Gallery elevation in north range of White Hart Hotel

the rear. This framing survives along almost the entire length although a small part of the central area has been replaced with later and inferior framing resembling that in the main range of the hotel.

The main part of the gallery to survive was the east-west timber framed wall, which made up the inner face of the gallery; this was complete with original doors, windows and substantial areas of fabric. The outer wall of the gallery was also well preserved and encased in the later jetty wall. A small north-south element of the framing survived and was situated at right angles to the west end of the gallery.

The gallery is made up of a bowed outer wall looking over the courtyard, and despite later infilling it is clear that it was unglazed and had a solid wall to waist height with rail and roof supports above. The gallery gave access to a number of rooms at the rear; these lay behind a close-studded half-timbered wall which ran the entire length of the building. Light for the rooms was provided through unglazed but shuttered windows and a number of mullions and shutter hinges relating to these survive *in situ*. The inner wall and the outer gallery wall were both made up of large close-studded timbers and these were filled with plastered boards set into notches. Both the rear and gallery wall supported large rails which in turn supported trusses which may have held a ceiling above the gallery. The doors (only one of which remained unblocked) had chamfered frames with small carved stops at their bases. At the east end two adjacent doors gave access to separate rooms.

As the gallery was preserved beneath later accretions, elements survived of colour schemes which are so often obliterated in half-timbered buildings. Large areas of red and green paint were noted on all the early elements of the frame and areas of panelling were often covered with a thin light pink colour wash. These remains were fragmentary and undated but it is possible that some elements relate to an early colour scheme. Fragments of wallpaper were also found on the frame, although despite its seemingly Jacobean design it is possible that the paper is in fact 19th century in origin. An artistic reconstruction of the gallery is shown in Figure 6.



Fig. 6. Reconstruction of the White Hart gallery, c. 1540 (by Peter Lorimer)

The South Range

The south range mirrors the north across the yard but in construction and appearance it was quite different. As with the north range a smaller stone building was appended to the eastern side. The main part of the building was of brick and whitewashed stone. A small brick cellar was found under the main part of the range.

Ground Floor (Fig. 2)

The main part of the ground floor was occupied by a dining area in the glazed extension and by a kitchen to the rear. Twentieth-century alterations had removed much of any early features on this floor and the timber framing visible on the walls was entirely modern. After removal of plaster a broken fireplace lintel similar to those seen in the west range was found reused as building material in a wall which pre-dated the glazed 20th-century extension. A small stone stair at the west end of the main range is also an early feature.

First Floor (Fig. 3)

The first floor contained two main rooms (excluding the small eastern extension) which during the later history of the hotel were further sub-divided by a number of partitions into a corridor and small rooms. The western room had a crude plaster cornice of repeated large dentils running around the top of the walls, which in appearance is suggestive of an early date (late 17th-mid 18th-century?). The eastern room had curious bowed walls that tapered towards the base and were in appearance not unlike the sides of a barrel vault. These features are problematic and perhaps the most likely explanation is that the floor was once much lower and that there was once an elaborate plasterwork ceiling with recessed walls. There is little evidence to support this but many large urban inns were once graced with tall 'ballrooms' or halls which were used for functions and even on occasion as courthouses.

Attic Rooms (Fig. 4)

A small suite of rooms may be found in the attic space and were accessed through the second floor of the west range. These rooms were used as staff accommodation in the latter years of the hotel.

Stables and outbuildings

To the rear of the main hotel buildings, a number of smaller outbuildings line either side of the property aside the central roadway (Fig. 1). Excluding the modern chalet accommodation at the top of the site these are all made of local yellow limestone supplemented with areas of brickwork. It was noted from scars on the property's exterior walls that there had been other structures along the yard but these had been demolished during the occupation of the hotel.

The largest buildings were the two storey stables near the west end of the group and adjacent to the hotel. Both buildings retained the stall divisions, cobbled floors, hay racks etc and were clearly built as stabling. The remaining buildings comprised a number of open cart sheds with limestone rubble walls which may also have acted as stabling for horses.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND WATCHING BRIEF

An excavation and watching brief on land to the rear of the main White Hart Hotel building (Fig. 1) was carried out in 2004 and 2005. Four discrete areas were excavated (Areas 1-4), corresponding to the footprints of the proposed buildings (Fig. 1), and Area 5 was covered by a watching brief. The aims were to investigate areas of proposed new build to recover any evidence for the early origins of the White Hart or the preceding use of the site, and to clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion.

A total of four test pits (c. 0.75 m. x 0.75 m.) were initially dug in Areas 1 and 4, confirming the presence of archaeological deposits. Modern overburden was then stripped from each of the four areas

under archaeological supervision, using a mechanical excavator with a toothless bucket. Stripping proceeded to the first archaeological horizon, with the exposed archaeological features then being excavated by hand. Area 5 comprised part of a quarry pit revealed as part of the watching brief.

Excavation results

Archaeological remains were revealed within all four excavation areas. A single cut feature was also encountered during the watching brief in Area 5, in the course of construction of an E.-W. aligned service trench through the centre of the site (Fig. 1). Watching brief monitoring of the groundworks in the upstanding outbuildings along the northern and southern sides of the site meanwhile revealed only an undated well.

The results from Areas 1-5 suggest a sequence of three broad phases of activity across the site:

Phase 1: Medieval pits and quarries

Phase 2: 18th-19th-century stables and outbuildings

Phase 3: Late 19th-early 20th-century alterations to these buildings

These phases are summarised in turn below.

Phase 1: Medieval period

Medieval features consisted of pits or quarries cut through the limestone bedrock within Areas 3 and 4, and possibly also Area 5. The pits ranged from 1.5 m. to 3.8 m. in diameter and from 0.75 m. to 1.65 m. in depth. Small quantities of 11th-12th-century pottery came from the pit in Area 3, while a single sherd of probable 11th-century pottery came from the lower fill of the pit in Area 4. No datable finds were recovered from the pit in Area 5, and the feature is only tentatively placed in the medieval period by analogy with the quarrying in Areas 3 and 4. A medieval buried soil layer up to 0.2 m. thick was also encountered in Area 2, which contained a quantity of pottery mainly dating to the 13th century.

Phase 2: 18th-19th centuries

Phase 2 saw the construction of stables and other outbuildings along both the northern and southern sides of the site. These buildings were characterised by walls constructed of rough-cut limestone blocks and mortar, and floors of limestone cobbles or slabs set in mortar bases. No direct dating evidence for these buildings was recovered. However, they clearly formed an integral part of the same building ranges as the upstanding 18th-19th-century outbuildings on the property (see above).

Phase 3: Late 19th-early 20th centuries

Subsequent alterations to the Phase 2 stables and outbuildings were largely carried out in brick, and included the re-laying of floors and the insertion of drains. The character of the bricks places these alterations in the late 19th-early 20th century (see Cotter below).

Undated features

Groundworks within one of the upstanding 18th-19th-century outbuildings (cartsheds) along the northern side of the site revealed the presence of a dry-stone lined well, which had been capped with large limestone blocks resting on inserted iron bars (Fig. 1). Unfortunately, no artefacts were recovered from the well, and there was no stratigraphic relationship to the original features of the outbuilding within which it was found. It seems intrinsically more likely that the well preceded the outbuilding rather than being constructed within it, not least due to its closeness to a structural wall.

FINDS⁶

POTTERY by PAUL BLINKHORN

The pottery assemblage comprised 67 sherds with a total weight of 2278 g., and was recorded using the coding system and chronology of the Oxfordshire County type-series.⁷ It consisted of a mixture of early medieval (11th-13th century) and post-medieval (mainly 19th century) material. The bulk of the medieval material dated to the 11th-12th centuries. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region, with the majority of the medieval material originating from Cotswolds sources.

CLAY PIPE by JOHN COTTER

Two pieces of clay pipe stem were recovered. These consisted of one piece (2 g.) from context 1092 and one piece (4 g.) from context 1095. Both date to the 19th century.

CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL by JOHN COTTER

A total of 12 pieces of ceramic building material (CBM) weighing 4435 g. were identified from the site. The assemblage consists of types of domestic brick including ordinary building brick, paving brick and a refractory firebrick, the latter probably from a fireplace. All the material appears to be of 19th- to early 20th-century date.

GLASS by HUGH WILLMOTT

A small assemblage of glass, totalling 80 fragments from a minimum number of 19 vessels and a fragment of window glass, was recovered. With the exception of three very small fragments of wine bottle and a recent piece of window glass, all the glass comes from just two contexts. The first is a recent topsoil deposit overlying a cobbled floor in Area 1. All the glass can be dated to the first half of the 20th century and can clearly be related to the use of the White Hart Hotel. The remaining glass all comes from a shallow pit in Area 2 cutting the medieval buried soil, and all the fragments are from between 7 and 13 different wine bottles. There are some slight variations in form, suggesting that some belong to the later 18th century, whilst others are clearly early 19th-century in date.

OTHER FINDS by LEIGH ALLEN and REBECCA DEVANEY

Three metal objects were recovered, comprising two nails and an irregular fragment of lead. One fragment of worked flint was recovered from the medieval buried soil in Area 2.

ANIMAL BONE by EMMA-JANE EVANS

A total of 23 bones (526 g.) were recovered from this site, all surviving in good condition. Seven bones were identified to species, the majority of which were bird bones (including chicken and swan), with others being sheep/goat and horse. Butchery marks on a number of rib bones and two large (probably cattle) vertebrae suggest that animals were processed nearby, and the presence of swan may indicate that the site was of quite high status.

⁶ The reports presented here are summaries, full versions of which may be found in the site archive.

⁷ M. Mellor, 'A Summary of the Key Assemblages. a Study of Pottery, Clay Pipes, Glass and other Finds from fourteen Pits, dating from the 16th to the 19th century', in T. G. Hassall, C. E. Halpin and M. Mellor 'Excavations at St Ebbe's', *Oxoniensia*, xlix (1984), 181-219; M. Mellor, 'Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and early Post-Medieval Pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, lix (1994), 17-217.

DISCUSSION

Both the building survey and excavations have revealed a number of different phases of activity on the site of the White Hart Hotel, from the medieval period onwards, although the exact origins of the inn itself remain somewhat uncertain. Set below is a summary of the main phasing.

Medieval

Excavation has confirmed the presence of medieval features on the site, in the form of pits or quarries dating to the 11th-12th centuries. These pits were confined to the western and central parts of the site, behind the main building as the High Street frontage. Meanwhile, a buried soil deposit apparently dating to the 13th century occurred further east at the rear of the plot next to Albion Street in Area 2 (see Fig. 1).

Beyond the fact that small-scale limestone quarrying was occurring, little can be said as to the nature of the medieval activity. The only finds datable to this period consisted of a modest quantity of pottery, the assemblage being typical of the region and shedding no light on site function or status. The medieval deposits had suffered from truncation by the post-medieval building foundations, and any shallower features contemporary with the quarry pits may well have been obliterated. Truncation may also explain the absence of clear evidence for activity on the site between the 14th and 17th centuries, given the fact that the White Hart Inn is known to have been flourishing from at least the 16th century.

The site of the White Hart certainly lies within one (or possibly two?) burgrave plots of the medieval town. The early origins of the building are at present unclear but both the name (the white hart being the livery badge of Richard II) and the surviving buildings indicate that there may have been an inn here from an early date. The form of the medieval and early post-medieval buildings was largely speculative before the recent alteration works. It is now clear that while little remains of the medieval buildings on the street front, there are substantial remains of a timber-framed gallery on the north range. This gallery presumably (on purely stylistic grounds) dates to before c. 1550. It is known that late medieval inns had galleried accommodation (such as the George Inn at Dorchester-on-Thames, Golden Cross, Oxford, and the Reindeer, Banbury), but only a very small number survive, and this is another good example in the region.⁸

Post-medieval

By the 17th century the inn was a large and well equipped establishment, as shown by contemporary inventories. In form it retained at least one old timber range at the rear and substantial parts of the building were framed although there were large areas of limestone walling. The presence of large, good-quality 17th-century stone fire surrounds attest to the importance of the inn. In the 18th century the inn was used as a meeting place of the local corporation and was even the scene of a riot in 1745. By the middle of the century the inn was provided with its elegant stone-built front elevation, with classical coaching arch.

The basic form behind this façade however would have remained much as before. Other 18th- or early 19th-century additions included decoration of the large panelled room on the first floor and the plasterwork on the first floor of the south wing. Similarly the remains of a possible vaulted ceiling in this wing may relate to a tall 'ballroom' or 'courtroom' which may have been the meeting place of the corporation.

The post-medieval limestone foundations encountered in all four excavation areas confirm the cartographic evidence that rows of outbuildings formerly extended along the whole length of both the northern and southern sides of the property. Although no direct dating evidence was recovered for these foundations, they could be seen to form integral parts of the same ranges as the upstanding outbuildings on the site, which date to the 18th-19th centuries. The cobbled floors with central gutters found within the demolished buildings indicate that these served as stables at a time when the White Hart was an important coaching inn.

⁸ W. A. Pantin, 'Medieval Inns', in E. M. Jope (ed.), *Studies in Building History* (1961).

19th-20th centuries

In the 19th century the inn underwent a number of additions and alterations, perhaps the most important of which was the replacement of almost all the roof structures on the west and north ranges. The brick cellar under the west and south ranges were 19th-century additions and the stabling at the rear also appears to be largely 19th-century in date although it is presumably built on the sites of earlier buildings with the same function (see above).

The 20th-century alterations were mostly internal and included at least two major re-orderings of the guest accommodation, the kitchens and the bar area. The arch was blocked in c. 1925 and at perhaps the same time the new glazed dining area was provided on the ground floor of the south wing.

Conclusion

The White Hart is a fine example of a large country town inn which developed from at least the 16th century (and possibly earlier) to the late 20th century. Earlier activity of some nature stretching back as far as the 11th-12th century was identified on the site.

The building has undergone successive phases of addition and embellishment to meet changing tastes and circumstances. Despite some major alterations however, it retained a number of early features which have allowed some analysis of the history and development of this venerable building.

Particularly significant survivals included the successive schemes of decoration in the large (south) chamber of the first floor. These indicate changes in the appearance of the room from a brightly painted Tudor or Stuart phase, through a panelled 18th-century phase to sub-division into small hotel rooms and bathrooms in the 20th century.

The most important surviving element of the historic building however must be the timber-framed gallery in the north wing. Although this area was clearly expected to retain some early features, its state of preservation and scale was unexpected and quite remarkable. The gallery was so intact that it allowed the creation of a reconstruction drawing showing the gallery as it may have looked in c. 1540 (Fig. 6).

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