

**Rebow House,
Colchester,
Essex**

Heritage Asset Assessment



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June 2016

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58-62 Head Street,
Colchester, Essex**

Heritage Asset Assessment

This assessment is intended to inform and accompany a Listed Building Application to Colchester Borough Council.

Summary

Rebow House was formerly one of the most important mansions in Colchester, rebuilt on the site of a medieval predecessor in *circa* 1700 by Sir Isaac Rebow, who served as the town's MP from 1689 until 1722. Although much altered in later years the building preserves fine bolection moulded panelling and stone fireplaces on its upper storey that may well have been admired by King William III who visited the house on at least three occasions between 1693 and 1700. It was one of only four mansions in the town of sufficient status to be depicted in profile on Reade's map of 1745, which shows a very different facade to that of today with a highly unusual attic storey and a central gable that has since been removed. A large garden with geometrical paths lay to the rear, extending almost as far as Trinity Street, and Morant notes that Sir Isaac 'gravelled and made handsome' the adjoining Walk which bears his name. The present oriel window is a fine addition of *circa* 1800 which blocked three of the original seven tall, narrow sash windows and lay above a rusticated entrance door which survived until the mid-20th century. The main seat of the Rebow family moved to Wivenhoe Park in the mid-18th century but the property remained a private residence until the late-19th century as the ground-floor shop fronts are not present in a photograph of *circa* 1865. An impressive staircase was added as part of a major refurbishment in the second quarter of the 18th century, along with a back stair of the same date, and the house reflected the standard layout of its period with a central stair passage dividing a large dining room on the right (now the St Helena Hospice charity shop) from a series of smaller withdrawing rooms and probably a rear kitchen on the left (now a party shop and print shop). An entire chimney stack which divided the front and rear drawing rooms was removed in the latter part of the 20th century, and the lower storey has been extensively remodelled for commercial purposes, but a fine medieval cellar with flint-rubble walls survives beneath. The common joists of the cellar ceiling are lodged on massive oak binding joists in a manner normally found only in the 13th century or before, and the structure is exceptionally well preserved with original braces supported on stone corbels. A tantalising 15th century timber-framed doorway exposed in the central print shop suggests that more early framing may lie hidden in the remaining walls where any evidence is completely hidden by plaster. Even without its royal association the building's architectural details are more than sufficient to justify its listing at grade II*.

Documentary and Cartographic History



Figure 1. Location plan highlighting Rebow House in red with the castle at top right.

Rebow House is a grade II*-listed building on the corner of Head Street and Sir Isaac's Walk, immediately north-east of the site of the walled town's medieval Head Gate. Named in the Schedule of Listed Buildings as 'Headgate House or Rebow's House' it is now relatively inconspicuous, with three shop fronts on its lower storey, but was formerly one of the most important mansions in Colchester.

Speed's highly stylised but generally accurate map of 1610 (figure 2) shows the intact gate with a row of medieval or Tudor gabled structures on the approximate site of the building, with an empty plot of land to the rear (east). There is nothing to indicate a property of unusual scale or importance. Deane's map of 1745, in contrast, shows the same empty plot, now laid out as a pleasure garden with geometrical paths, and a substantial mansion house on the corner of Head Street and 'Sir Isaac Rebow's Walk'. The building is one of only four houses in the entire town to be illustrated in perspective, with its facade turned towards the viewer to emphasise its quality and status.

Sir Isaac Rebow (1655 – 1726) was the leading political figure in Colchester during the late-17th and early-18th centuries, serving with occasional intervals as one of its two members of parliament from 1689 until 1722. He divided his time between two principal residences, according to his will drawn up in 1709: one in Pall Mall and another called 'Headgate' in Colchester (Essex Record Office D/DB 105). Most of his estate, which included Colchester castle, was left to his grandson Isaac Lemying Rebow as his son had already died. Isaac Lemying bought Wivenhoe Park in 1734 which was subsequently rebuilt in 1759 as the family's main seat. Sir Isaac was the descendant of Dutch Protestant refugees who fled religious prosecution at the beginning of the 17th century and became wealthy cloth merchants. His name is accordingly pronounced with emphasis on the 'b' but not the 'e'. He appears to have been a personal friend of William III, who shared his Dutch origins and was a regular visitor to Headgate House on his frequent journeys home via Harwich (Narcissus Luttrell (1657-1732), 'A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs, 1678-1714', published in

1857, vol. III p. 65, 216, IV p. 698). Rebow offered vigorous military support during the wars following William's accession to the throne in 1688, and in 1692 was appointed vice-admiral of Essex on a substantial salary of £150 per year. In March the following year he was knighted when the king further honoured him by dining at his house ('History of Parliament' by Hayton et. al., 2002).

It is not entirely clear from the published sources whether Rebow was knighted at his house in Colchester or Pall Mall, but most local commentators have opted for the former including his contemporary Philip Morant, who in 1737 became Rector of St Mary-at-the-Walls where Isaac and his ancestors are buried – and therefore would have received first-hand accounts. In his history of Colchester published in 1748 Morant specifically places both the dinner and knighting by the king 'who was at that time a guest at his house in Head Street in this parish'. Apart from its roof the facade of Headgate House depicted in 1745 is typical of the late-17th and early-18th centuries, but the precise date of its construction is uncertain. In 1701 the Borough charged £20 to release its claim on a piece of land 'right unto Head Gate' upon which Sir Isaac had erected a brick building, but no plan is given and this may refer to a structure such as stables which physically adjoined the gate on the southern side of Sir Isaac's Walk (ERO D/DB 105). The present building on this site is an Edwardian replacement. Whether or not it relates to the existing house the document confirms that Rebow was building in the immediate vicinity in or shortly before 1700. Morant further notes that he 'gravelled and made handsome' the walk which bears his name, presumably when laying out the adjoining gardens shown in 1745 (quoted in Cromwell's History of 1825, which confirms that he lived on the corner). The listing description dates the building to the 'late-17th century', while noting its medieval cellar, but the most recent edition of Pevsner offers a more precise 'circa 1697' (edited by James Bettley, 2007). The original edition of Pevsner contained only '17th century', and no explanation is given either for this change or of Bettley's mysterious addition of 'two gables at the rear with jettied first floor supported on carved brackets'.

The following figures illustrate the changing appearance and outline of the house to the present day.

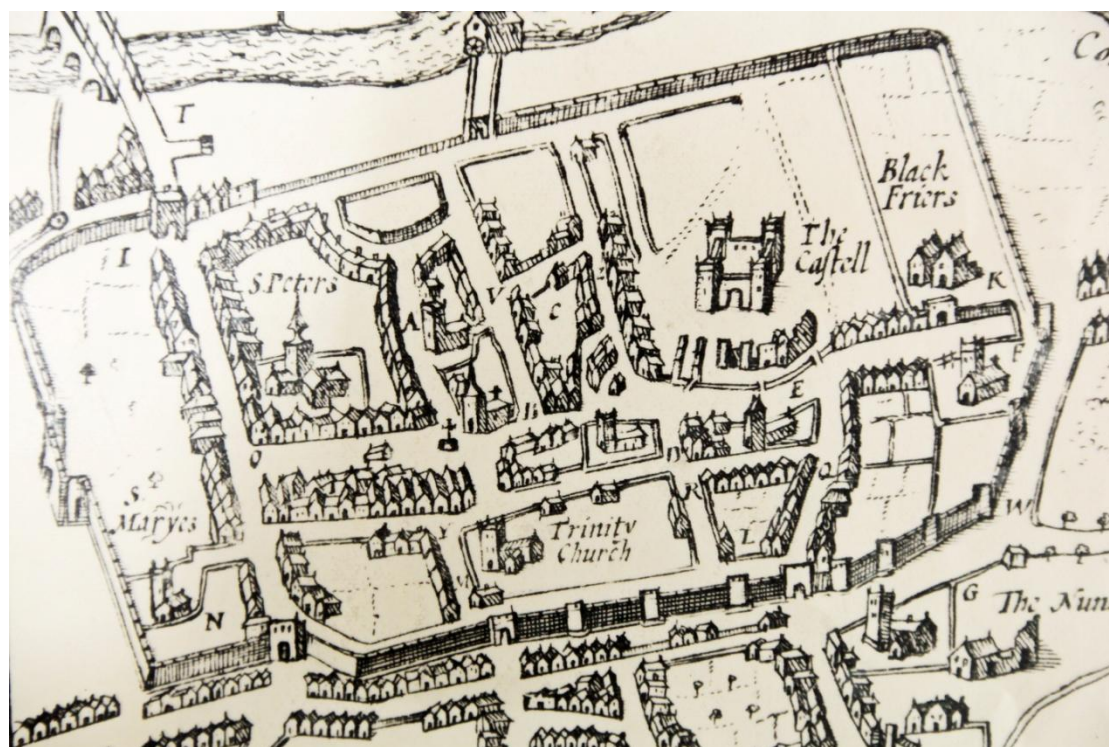


Figure 2. John Speed's 1610 map of Colchester.



Figure 2a. A detail of the 1610 map. The gabled buildings to the right of Head Gate presumably occupy the site of the medieval cellar, with an empty plot of land to the north of what is now Sir Isaac's Walk.

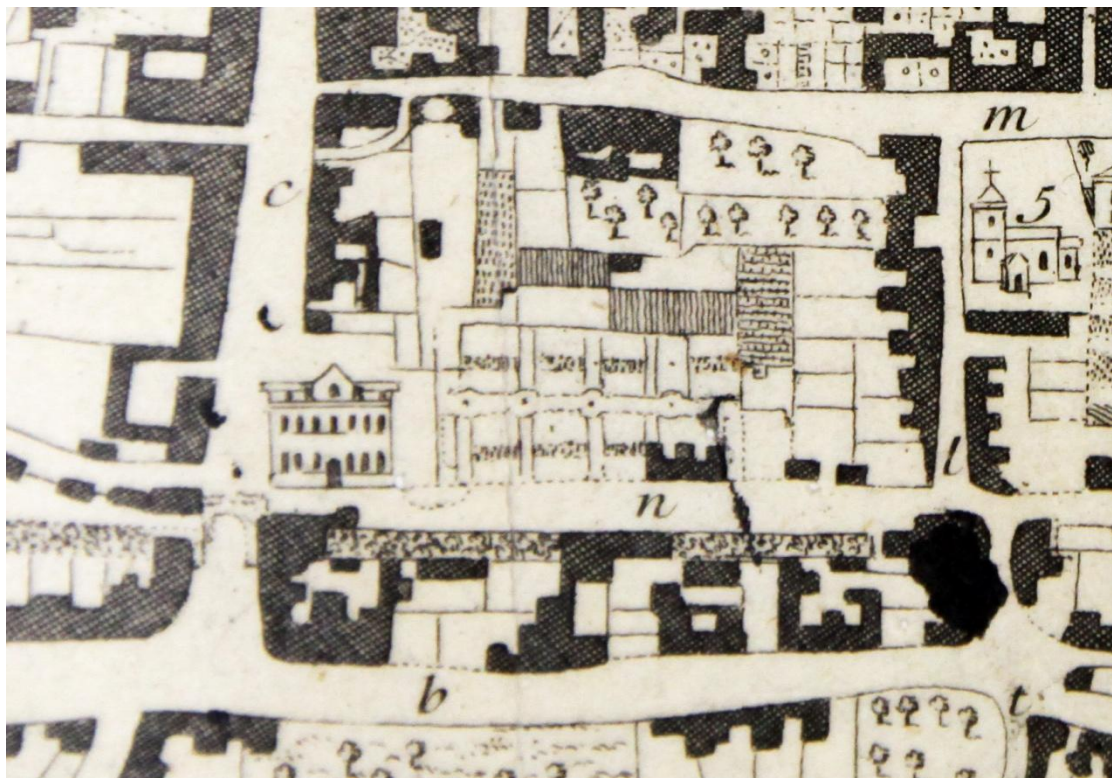


Figure 3. The 1745 'Ichnography of Colchester' surveyed by James Deane and published in Morant's History of Colchester in 1768. c is 'Head Street', n 'Sir Isaac Rebow's Walk', m 'Culver Lane' and l 'Trinity or Shere Gate Street'.



Figure 3a. A detail of the house on the 1745 map, one of only four domestic properties in the town of sufficient importance to be shown in profile. The low attic storey with its large central gable or dormer window is highly unusual, explaining the present recessed roof, and appears to lie above a parapet or cornice. Three windows flank the central axis instead of the two replacements of today. Note the gate on the left, which was demolished in the 1750s, and the town wall shown in plan-section to the south.

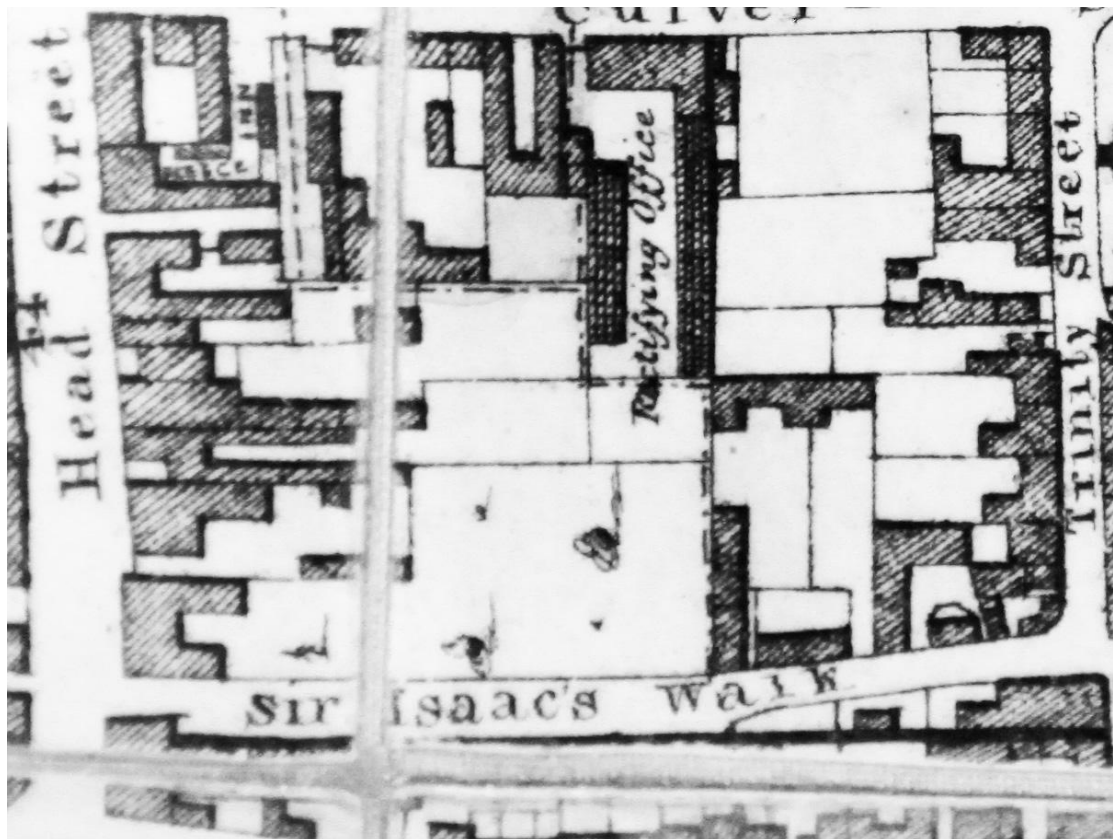


Figure 4. A detail of the Monson map of Colchester in 1848. Rebow House is shown with a simple U-shaped outline adjoining its large garden on the east.

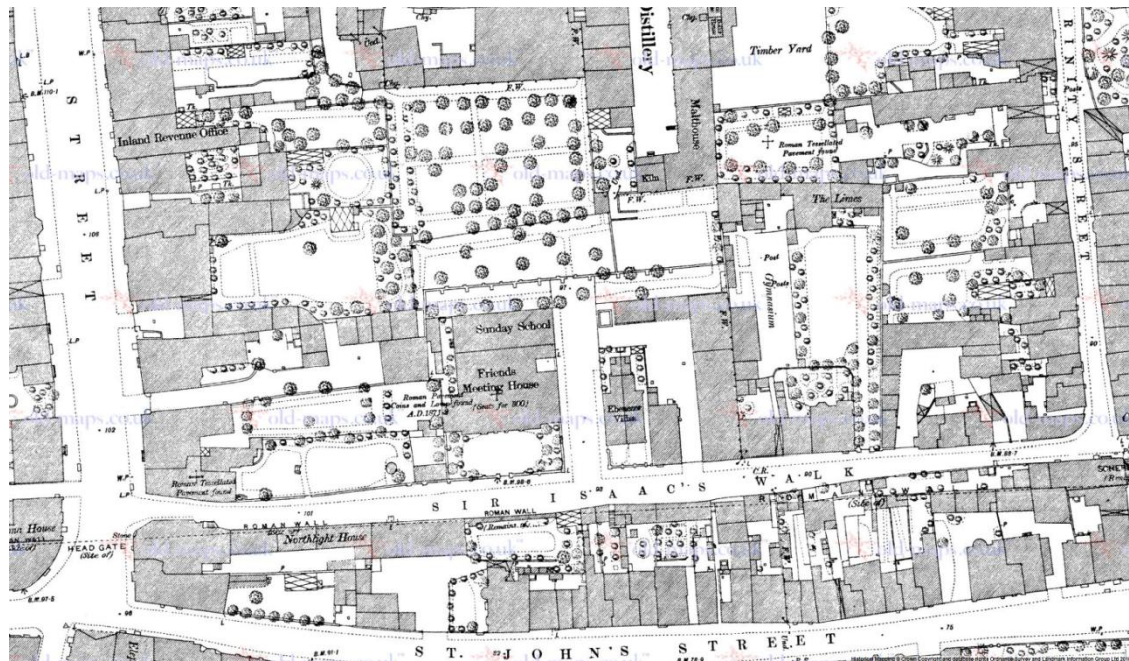


Figure 5
The First Edition 1:500 Ordnance Survey of 1876. The garden of Rebow House had been much reduced in size since 1848, not least by the construction of a Friends Meeting House.

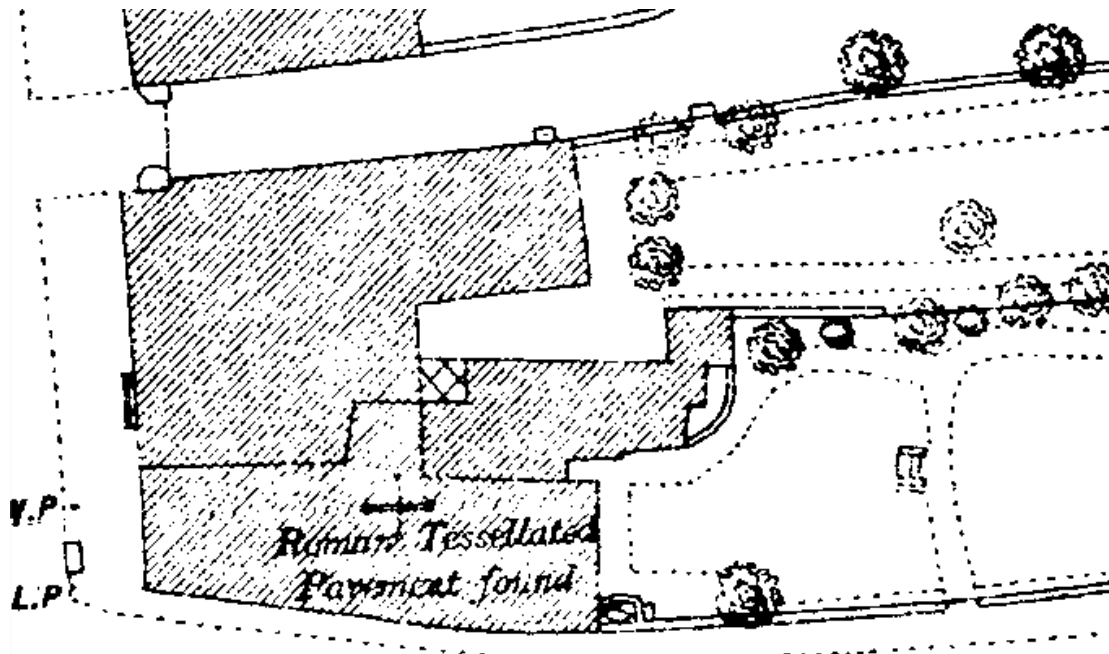


Figure 5a. A detail of the 1876 map. The U-shaped outline of the original building is still clearly recognisable, although part of the remaining flat-roofed rear extension coloured green in figure 18 had been built in the southern angle of the yard since 1848 (but see figure 8, which indicates much of it was later demolished and rebuilt). The cross-hatched area represents a glazed light well or rear porch immediately behind the central stair passage. The building had been divided into two properties following the existing boundary of the charity shop at no.62, and the position of a Roman tessellated pavement is indicated between its staircase and chimney (the latter now converted into a WC). It is unclear how accurate this 'X' is intended to be.

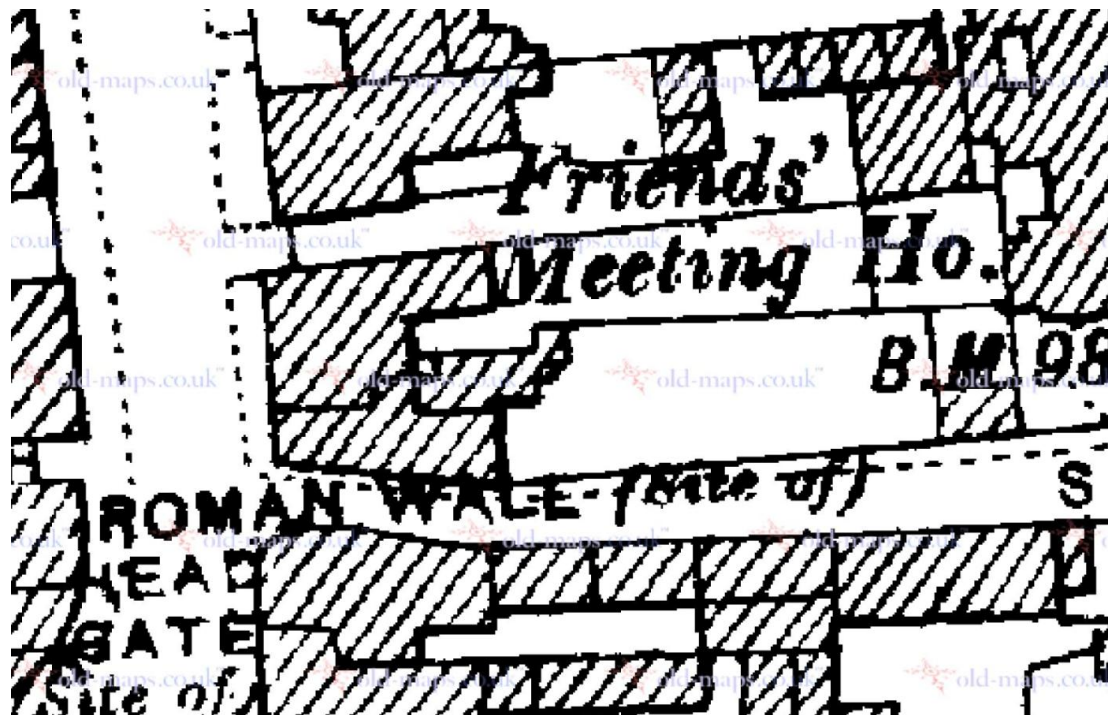


Figure 6. The Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1897, showing an identical profile to that of 1876.

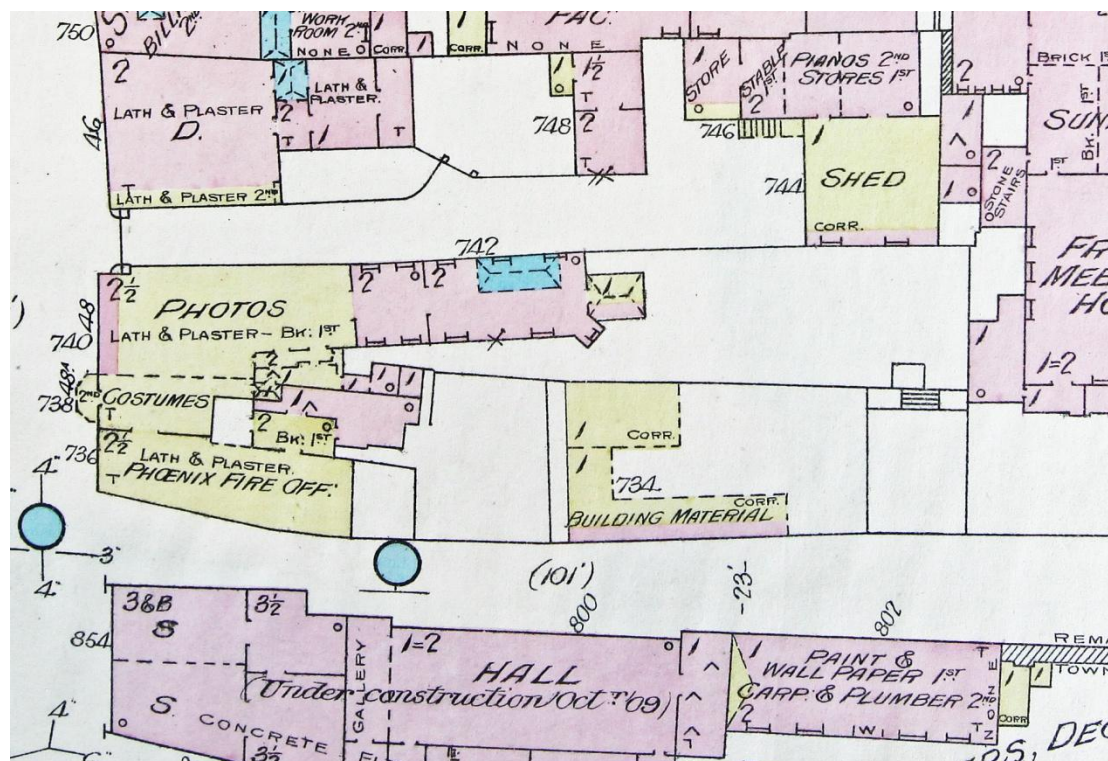


Figure 7. The Goad map of 1909. This remarkable map was drawn up for the insurance industry by Charles E Goad Ltd., civil engineers, of London N4, and updated at intervals of approximately ten years until 1953. (Local Studies Collection, Colchester Library). The brick office range coloured blue in figure 18 had been built since 1897, along with the green structures in the north-western corner of the rear yard, and the property contained three shops much as today: a photographer's shop on the north, a costumers in the centre and the Phoenix Fire Insurance Office on the south.

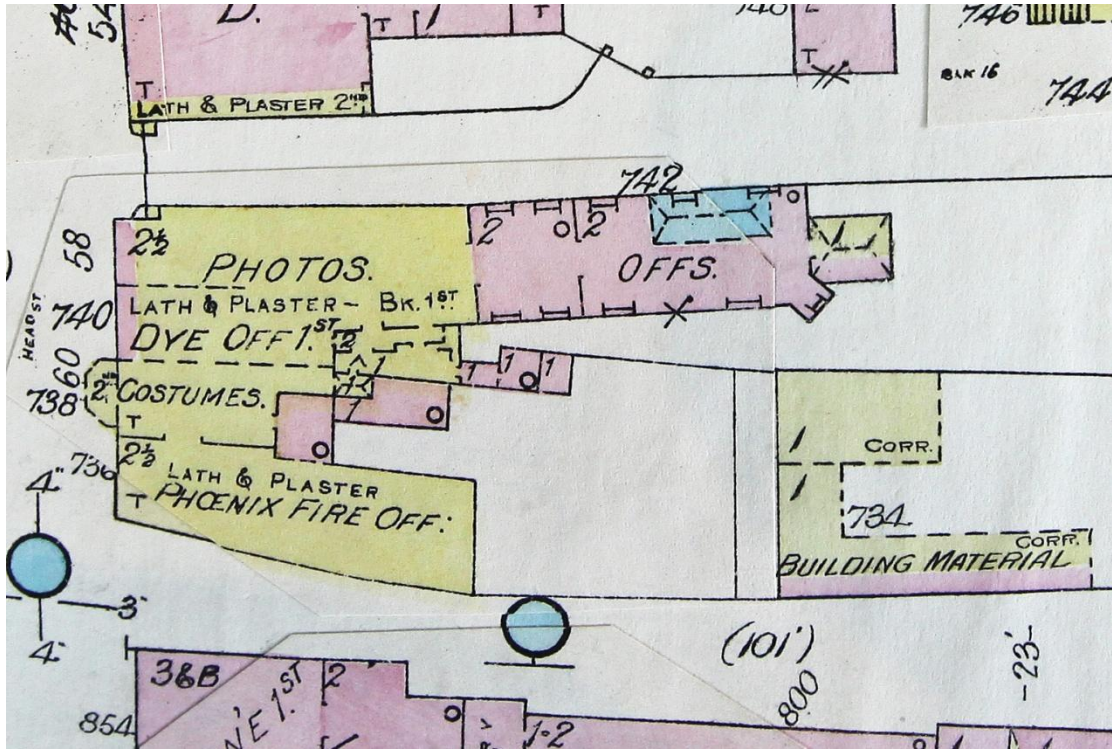


Figure 8. The Goad map of 1929. A Dye Office is indicated on the first floor above the photographer's shop and much of the 19th century extension in the south-western corner of the rear yard had been demolished since 1909. Most of the building is identified as lath and plaster, but the northern shop front is shown in red as brick – as, curiously, is the back staircase which now serves the charity shop. Note the internal door connecting the latter to the central costumer.

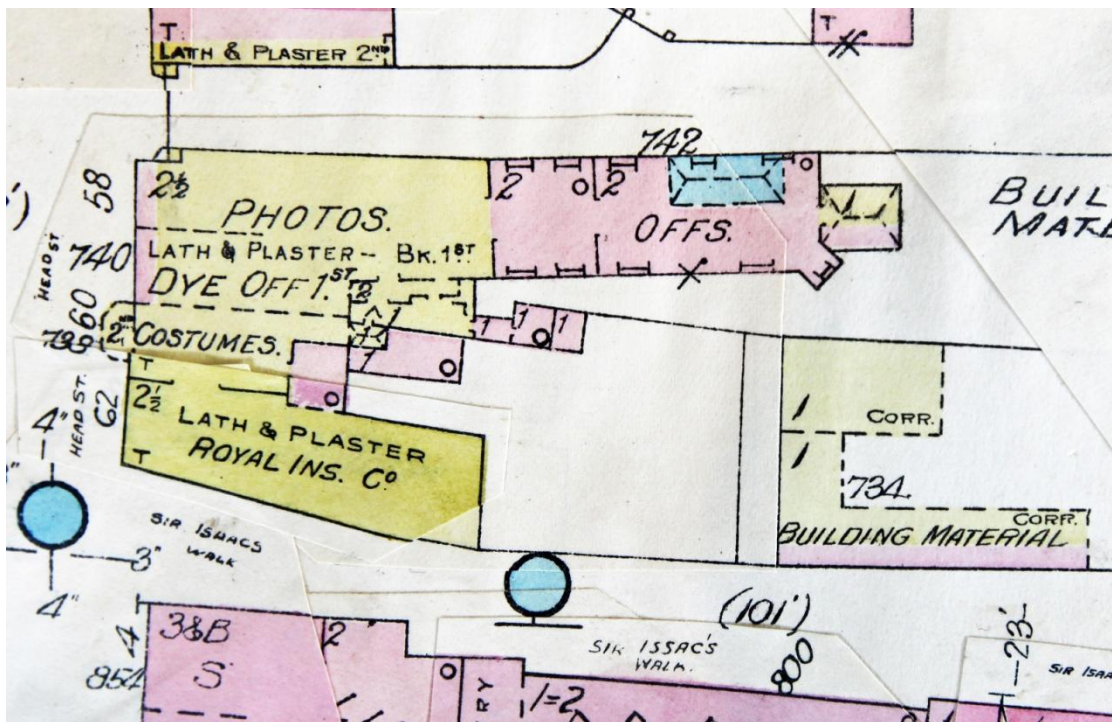


Figure 9. The Goad map of 1954. The Phoenix Fire Office had been translated into the Royal Insurance Company but otherwise little had changed since 1929.

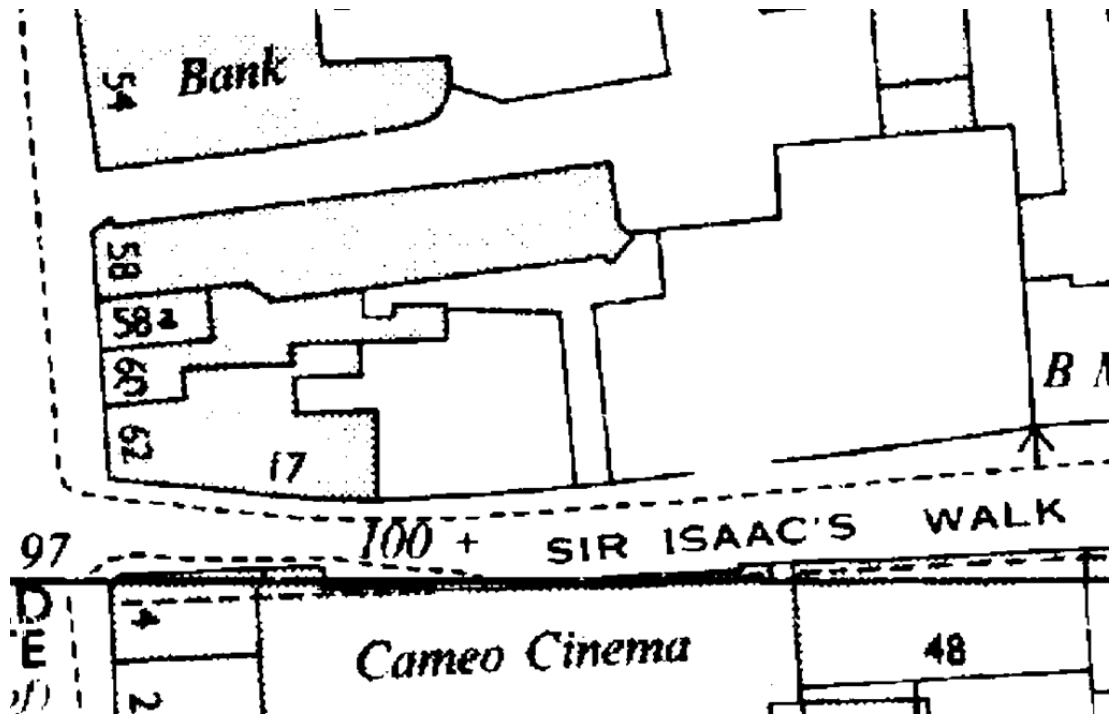


Figure 10

The 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1965. The building's outline remained unaltered but a new commercial property had been inserted at no. 58a (representing the front section of the current print shop). The building materials premises in the rear yard had been demolished (having been built between 1897 and 1909). The property includes no. 17 Sir Isaac's Walk.

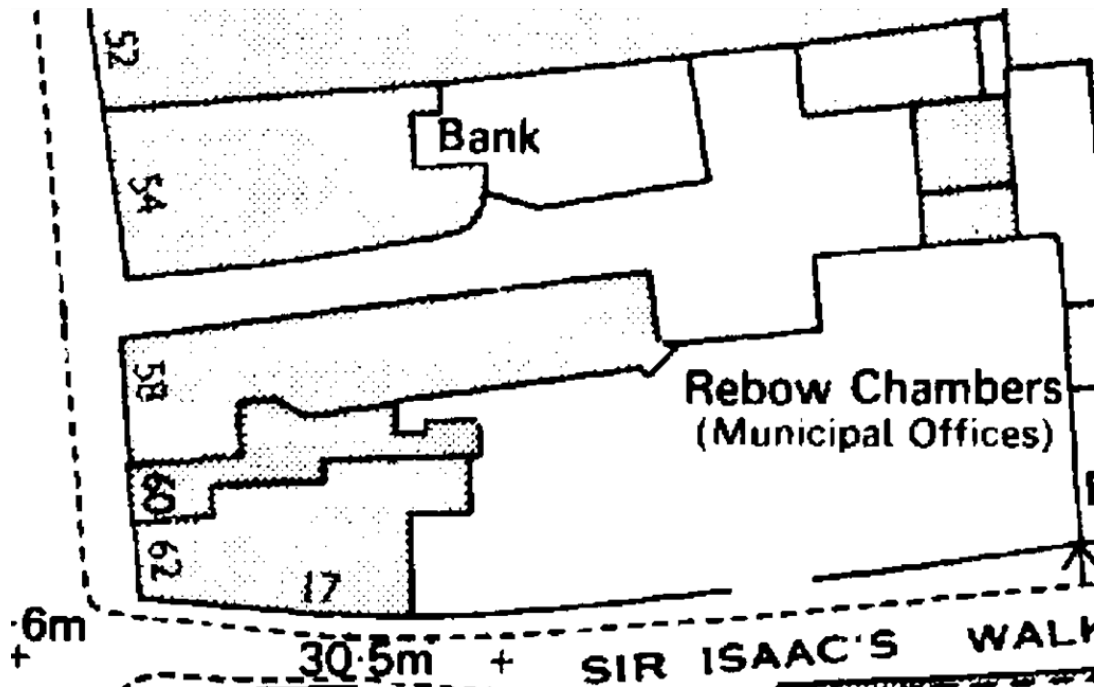


Figure 11

The 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1983. The flat roofed red-brick sheds with twin blue doors had been added since 1965 (as shown in the centre in Illus. 3 below).



Figure 12

A detail of the fine late-19th or early-20th century terracotta ‘blue plaque’ on the front of the house which is an historic feature in its own right (shown to the left in illus. 2). Isaac Rebow was on familiar terms with William III, perhaps because of their shared Dutch ancestry, and Morant confirms all three of the king’s visits cited here. He may have dined in the principal reception room on the upper storey, which was remodelled in the early-19th century, or in the large front room of the charity shop.



Figure 13. An early photograph of Head Street dated *circa* 1865 and published in the VCH History of Colchester. The original is in Colchester Museum.



Figure 13a. A detail of the *circa* 1865 photograph. The house is annoyingly obscured by traffic – then as now - but a rusticated door surround is visible beneath the oriel window with two sash windows to its right and what appear to be two others to its left. There is no indication of shop facades. The rustication of the door surround is typical of the late-17th and early-18th centuries and was probably reflected in the original windows. Note the moulded string course of which only a fragment now survives on the southern wall.



Figure 14. A printed photographic postcard entitled ‘opening of Colchester Electric Tramway 28th July 1904’. A shop front had been added to the left of the oriel window since 1865.



Figure 15. A photographic postcard of the same view posted in May 1911, with the arched windows and entrance of the southern shop much as they remain today. This shop front was added after *circa* 1865 as its doorway replaced the right-hand sash window shown in figure 13.



Figure 16. The house photographed in 1921. The original rusticated door surround still survived beneath the central oriel, and note the presence of at least five pots on the left-hand chimney which has since been removed entirely (presumably serving back-to-back fireplaces on both the ground and first floors with another in the attic). The central chimney in contrast contains a single flue to heat the first-floor reception room. The presence of a first-floor recruiting office on the right may relate to the Votes For Women graffiti in the attic (illus. 32). The original glazing of the lower sashes of the first-floor windows was still intact at this date. (Royal Commission archive.)



Figure 17

The house in 1951. The first-floor rooms to the left remained in use as a hairdressing salon until recently, which explains their exotic decor. A third shop front had been added to the centre of the building since 1921, destroying the original rusticated door surround, but the two chimneys remained intact. The original glazing bars of the lower first-floor sashes had been replaced with plate glass. Note the small shop window to the extreme left which appears to project at an angle into the vehicle access; this has since been replaced by a copy of the two main windows.

(Royal Commission archive.)

Building Analysis

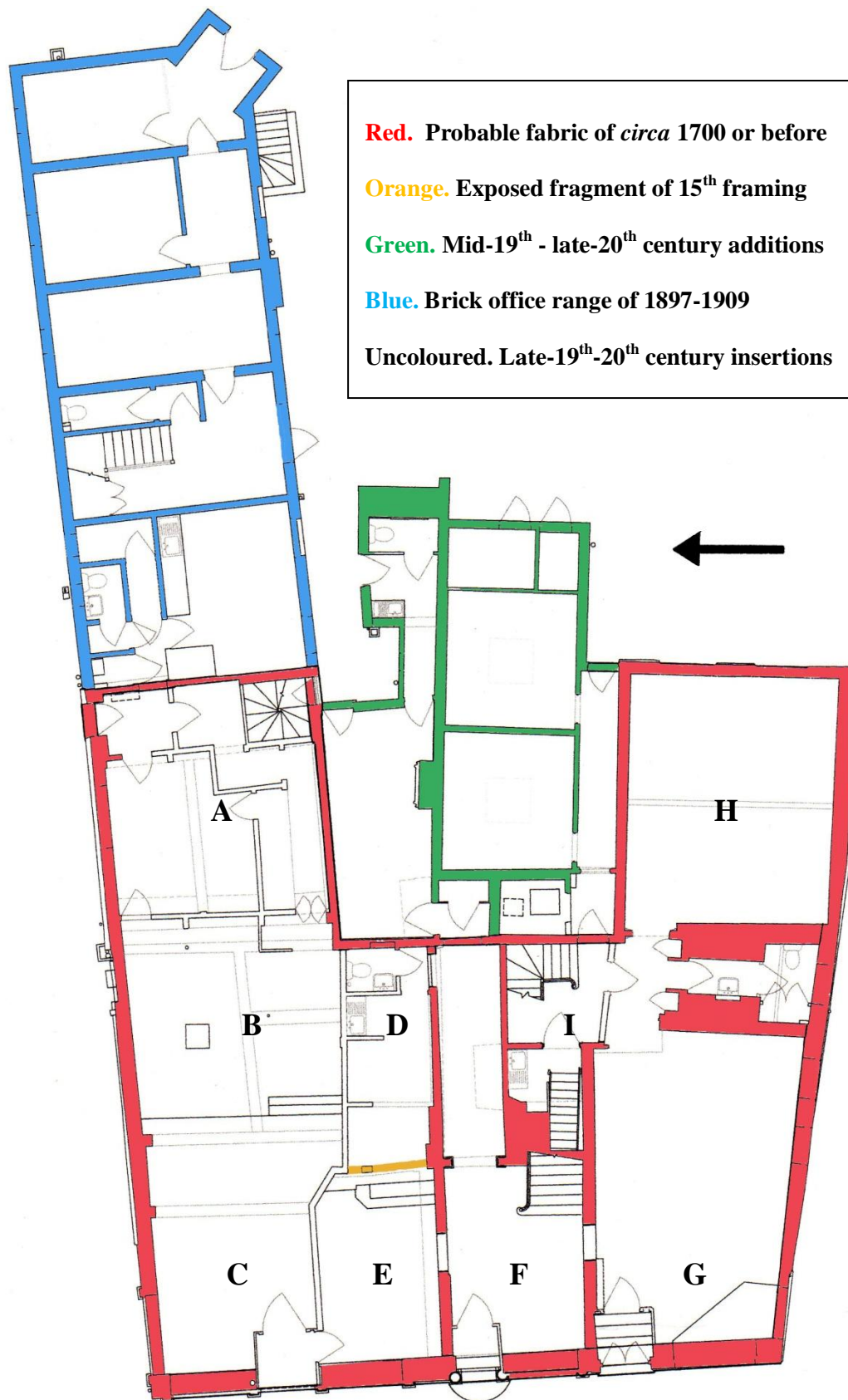


Figure 18. Colour-coded historic ground-floor plan based on a survey by Randalls.

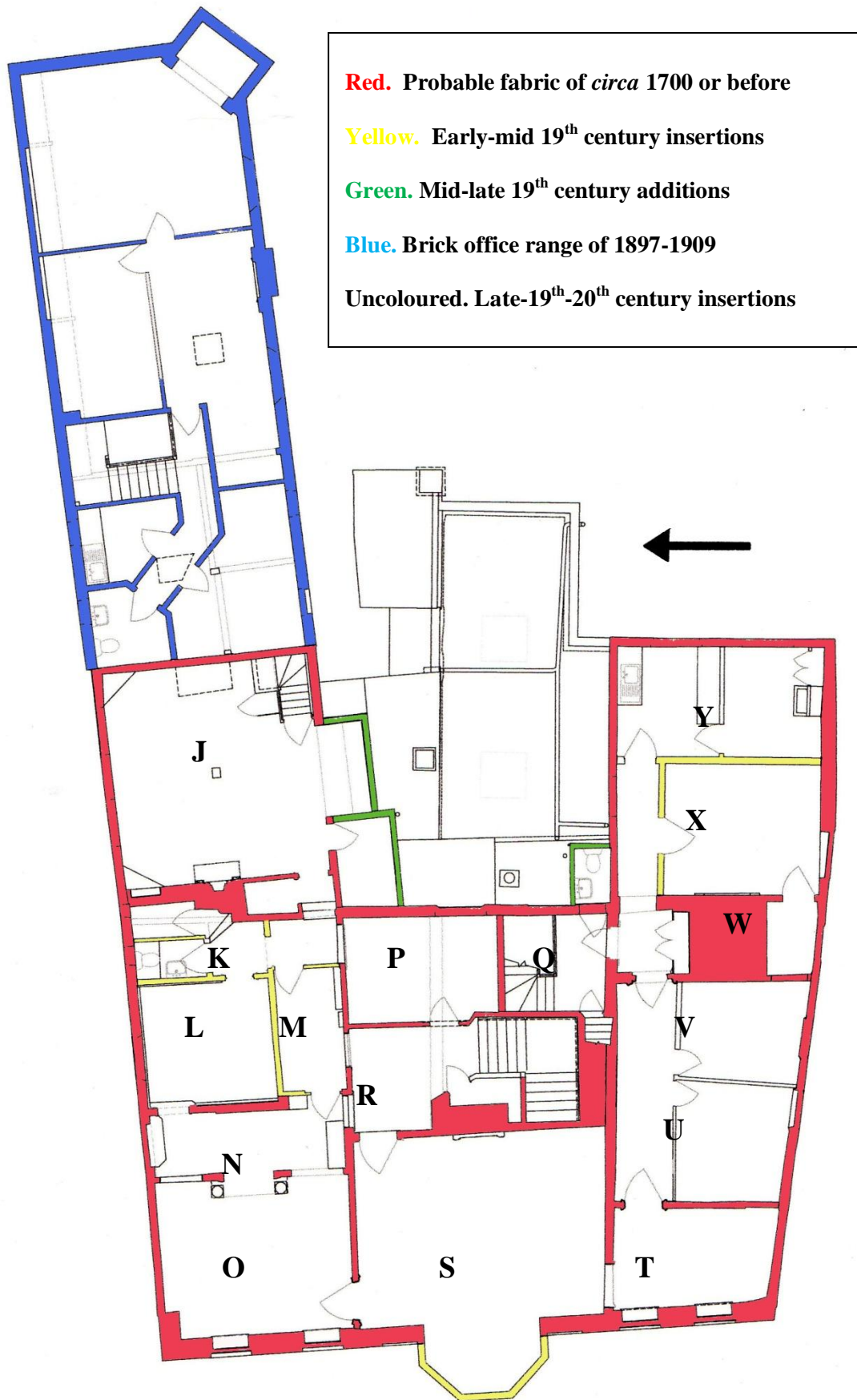


Figure 19. Colour-coded historic first-floor plan based on a survey by Randalls.

Listing

Rebow House is listed at grade II* and described in the Schedule of Listed Buildings as a 'large late-17th century house with a medieval cellar and an 18th century front' (Images of England no. 116989). The interior is said to have 'some late-17th century features' but no further details are offered, and the building's 'star' status appears to derive from its known link with the Rebow family, 'one of the richest and most important in the town', and the fact that 'Sir Isaac Rebow is said to have entertained William III here'. This description is broadly accurate, although the present facade with its central oriel window may represent a remodelling of the early-19th century rather than the 18th, and its ground-floor shop facades are additions of the late-19th and 20th centuries (as shown in figures 13-17 above). Even without its royal associations the property would merit listing at II* on the basis of its medieval cellar, fine 18th century staircase and extensive remains of late-17th century panelling on its upper storey.



Illus. 1

The Head Street facade, with Sir Isaac's Walk on the right. The parapet is divided from the tiled roof by a wide section of flat leadwork which reflects the unusual attic storey depicted in 1745 (figure 3). The present first-floor windows to Head Street were renewed in the early-19th century but the recesses of two of the original seven windows are still visible on each side of the central oriel. These windows were much taller than their replacements, and would have created a highly imposing display. The two first-floor windows of the southern gable to the right preserve their original proportions, although their sashes have been renewed. The shop fronts to the left and right of the building date from the end of the 19th century, and were not present in 1865 (figure 13), but the central shop beneath the oriel was added between 1921 and 1951 (figures 16 & 17). The internal floor level is indicated by the red paintwork which coincides with the ceiling in the medieval cellar: the number of entrance steps necessary to reach this level diminishes from right to left as the ground slopes upwards. The chimneys shown in 1951 have been removed. Note the fragment of moulded string course above the southern shop window; this formerly extended along the entire Head Street facade and could be restored as far as the oriel window to enhance the building's appearance.

Possible Medieval Fabric

The fabric of the walls is almost completely hidden by plaster, both inside and out, and it is possible that parts of an older structure are hidden within the 17th century building. The majority of the fabric appears to be timber-framed behind a facade that consists at least in part of rendered brick, but a fragment of medieval framing is visible in the central print shop (dividing areas D & E in figure 18). As shown in figure 20 and illus. 8, this consists of a 15th century doorway with only the left-hand (northern) half of its arch intact and evidence of a missing partition which apparently projected to the front and rear of its remaining jamb. The position of this doorway in the middle of the medieval cellar seems unlikely (see figure 21), but while it may have been moved from elsewhere it coincides with the similar late-17th century arch adjoining the main staircase in a manner that suggests it remains *in situ* (illus. 9). If nothing else, this feature serves as a warning that more medieval framing may lie hidden in almost any of the walls highlighted in red in figures 18 and 19. The existing structure of the main roof is typical of the late-17th century, with two tiers of butt-purlins and much second-hand timber (illus. 30), as is that of the few exposed areas of fabric in the upper walls (e.g. illus 24), but this leaves ample scope for earlier material to survive at lower levels.

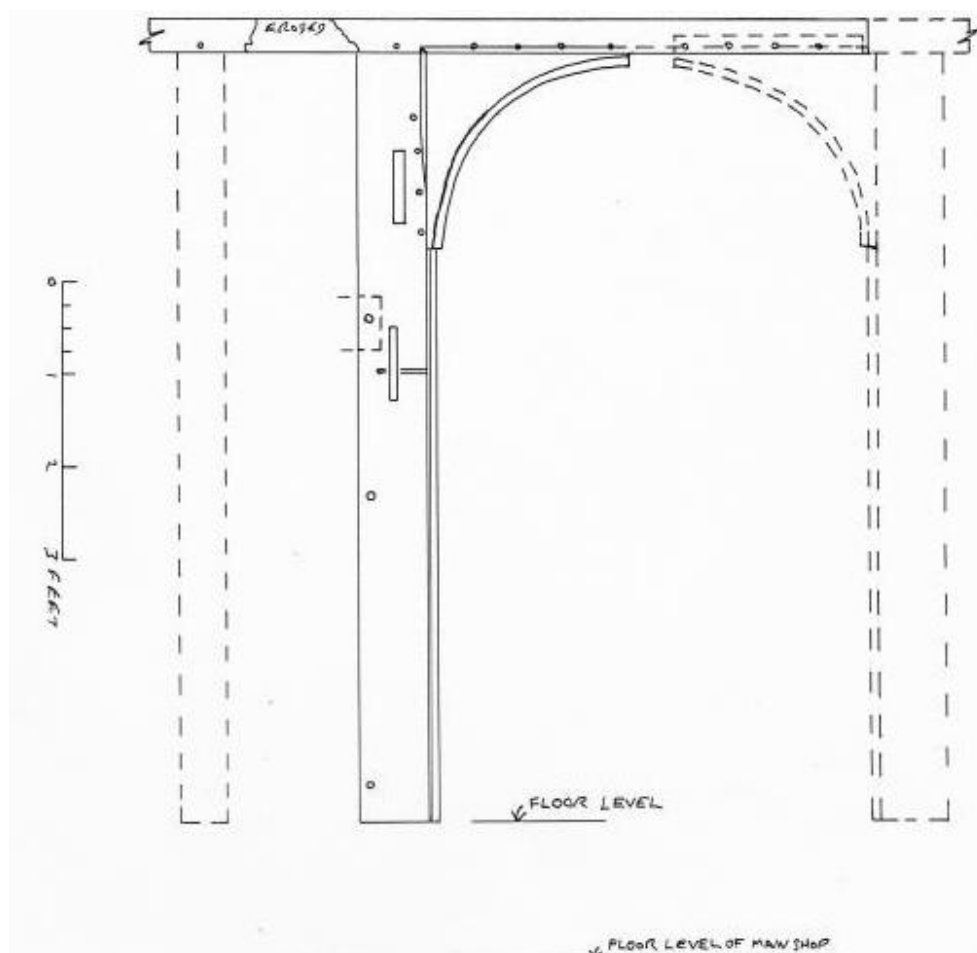


Figure 20. Drawing by Richard Shackle of the western elevation of the medieval doorway exposed in the print shop between areas D & E and coloured orange in figure 18. Empty mortises in the left-hand jamb relate to a missing partition which extended to front and rear. The rear edge of the arch is not chamfered, suggesting it was approached from the direction of Head Street. The area of erosion at top left appears to represent fire damage. This arch coincides with the late-17th or 18th century arch to its right (illus. 9) and may be *in situ*, but this is impossible to prove without exposing more of the building's wall fabric. (Published online by Colchester Historic Buildings Forum.)

The Medieval Cellar

An impressive medieval cellar, possibly of unusually early origin, lies beneath the front part of the house (figure 20 and illus 4-7). It extends to 18.75 ft from front to rear (5.75 m) with flint-rubble walls and a ceiling of largely concealed flat-sectioned joists lodged on massive binding joists of approximately 16 inches in width by 15 in depth. These binding joists are supported by equally massive 9-inch thick braces that appear to have been tenoned to wall pieces resting on stone corbels projecting from the walls. The main timbers are hollow-chamfered and the manner of the ceiling's construction, with its common joists resting on top of the binding joists rather than tenoned to their sides, is usually found only in the 13th century and before. Cellars with identical ceilings survive beneath the George Hotel in the High Street, however, and it is possible that this archaic technique continued into the 14th or 15th centuries in positions such as this where strength was paramount.



Figure 21. Ground plan by Randalls indicating position of medieval cellar in yellow.

The best preserved section of cellar is reached by a modern stair from the St Helena Hospice charity shop which occupies the right-hand wing of the building (area I in figure 18). This section consists of three equal bays of 9.25 ft (2.8 m) and is divided from the rest of the cellar by a 19th century red-brick partition beneath the central print shop, as indicated by the blue lines in figure 21. The cellar was not inspected to the north of this point, but is understood from photographs to contain identical flint-rubble walls, corbel blocks and binding joists – albeit in less complete condition. The northern cellar projects further to the rear, possibly as the result of a later extension, and is divided by a modern wall of cement block-work from the bay beneath the print shop).



Illus. 2

A detail of the fine Regency-style oriel window showing the Greek Key border of its panelled soffit and the tall recesses of the blocked original first-floor windows to left and right. This version of the Greek Key incorporates a swastika, and was a popular motif in the early-19th century long before the motif acquired more sinister overtones. The original entrance door beneath this oriel boasted a rusticated surround in typical William & Mary/Queen Anne style (figures 13 & 16), but this was destroyed by the present shop front. The lower glazing bars of the early-19th century sashes were sadly replaced by sheet glass between 1921 and 1951 (figures 16 & 17).

The front wall of the southern section is dry-lined with modern plasterboard, but limited investigation suggests it was partly or wholly rebuilt in brick during the 17th century, with wide access chutes or vents penetrating to the pavement (one of which is indicated by blue cross-hatching in figure 21). The cellar ceiling lies approximately 2 ft above the pavement at the building's southern end, necessitating the four internal steps at the charity shop's entrance, but this difference in levels is almost completely eroded by the upward slope of the hill on the north. The central point of the cellar coincides with the first-floor partition between the two arches discussed above (i.e. the 15th century door and the 17th century arch adjoining the main staircase), and it is possible that a single shared cellar lay beneath two identical medieval tenements with mirror-image layouts – their entrance passages adjoining in the centre. The scale and quality of the cellar indicates a building of high quality, but multiple tenements

were often built to a high standard by their affluent landlords. Such an interpretation is, admittedly, highly speculative.

Later alterations to the cellar also include the insertion of an arched block of 17th century brickwork which was clearly designed to serve as a foundation for the chimney adjoining the main staircase immediately above. The relieving arch in this brickwork has been provided with a panelled door to serve a small strong-room. A similar block of brickwork lies in the northern cellar beneath the missing chimney that formerly divided areas B & C. In more recent years a concrete floor has been inserted together with the partitions of a storage cupboard in the southern cellar's north-western corner, and a brick supporting pier has been built under the southernmost binding joist as shown to the left in illus. 4.



Illus. 3

The rear yard, showing the two cross-wings with hipped gables divided by a variety of late-19th and 20th century flat-roofed extensions. The red-brick range on the right was built as office accommodation between 1897 and 1909 (figures 6 & 7). The most recent

Pevsner refers to ‘two gables at the rear with jettied first floor supported on carved brackets’, but this is not mentioned in the listing description and appears to be an error (2007 edition, revised by James Bettley).

The 17th century house:

Changing External Appearance

The existing Head Street facade with its fine oriel window is an alteration of the late-18th or (more probably) the beginning of the 19th century when flat-bottomed oriels of this kind became fashionable. A very similar example can be seen nearby at Bridge House in Middleborough (adjoining North Bridge). The two sash windows on each side were inserted at the same time to replace pairs of original windows which matched the taller windows in the southern gable shown to the right in illus. 1. These tall, narrow proportions are typical of the William and Mary/Queen Anne periods of *circa* 1700, and are the only original window apertures in the building – although the windows themselves are replacements. The recessed outlines of two further original windows are still visible beside the oriel, matching the 1745 illustration of the house in figure 3 which places three windows on each side of a uniform

central window with the principal entrance beneath. This entrance door had a ‘rusticated’ surround of projecting chamfered blocks of stone - or plaster imitating stone – again in the fashion of *circa* 1700. The present shop facades were not added until the end of the 19th century as illustrated by figures 13-17, and the rusticated door survived into the mid-20th century.

The most unusual feature of the facade is the extent to which it projects by approximately 6 feet beyond the main roof to create the ‘leads’ shown in illus. 33. There is nothing to indicate this is the result of a later extension and the arrangement reflects the shallow attic storey with its large central dormer of 1745. Such a facade would have been highly abnormal in its day, and was presumably created by linking a series of lean-to dormer windows which rose vertically from the leads. The butt-purlin above the present access hatch is neatly chamfered and stopped in the late-17th century style to suggest it was always intended as a doorway and it may not be fanciful to imagine Sir Isaac Rebow and even William III exhibiting themselves to the townsfolk from this vantage point.



Illus. 4

The medieval cellar showing the exceptional scale of its ceiling timbers, with a 9 inch thick brace supporting a joist of 16 inches by 15 which extends to over 18.5 ft in length. The underside of this joist is 7.5 ft above the modern concrete floor, and the fabric of the rear (eastern) wall on the right consists of flint-rubble with no evidence of the brickwork that might be expected after the 14th century. The block of red brick in the background supports the early-19th century chimney which now heats the reception room behind the oriel window (S), and may have been designed for a larger chimney in the original house of *circa* 1700.

Internal Layout

Like its fenestration and door surround, the internal layout of the house reflected the newest fashion of the late-17th century with a central entrance hall and staircase flanked by a drawing room on one side and a dining room on the other. The doors connecting these rooms to the staircase are now blocked but can still be seen in illus. 9. The larger of the two rooms lay to

the right and was probably the main dining room (G), with a pair of smaller withdrawing rooms (B & C) divided by a missing chimney and probably a kitchen to the rear (A) – although any precise analysis is hampered by the lack of original ground-floor fireplaces and the rear room of the southern wing may have contained the original kitchen instead. The main staircase rose to a spacious first-floor reception room (S) in which a major political figure such as Sir Isaac Rebow could have entertained guests with balls and banquets. The southern bedrooms were reached separately by a more private back staircase (I/Q), although a blocked door links the narrow chamber at the front (T) directly to the reception room.



Illus. 5

A view from the north of the brace in illus. 4 showing the original wall piece to which it is tenoned and pegged, with concave chamfers to all three timbers. The wall piece now rests on a later post and it is unclear whether the rear wall was provided with stone corbel blocks to match the front. The flint rubble wall of the southern gable is visible in the rear.

Panelling and Fireplaces

Despite extensive alterations and commercial conversions over the years the house preserves an impressive array of panelling, fireplaces and other decorative features, with evidence of at least two and probably three major phases of refurbishment between *circa* 1700 and the mid-19th century. Extensive panelling and door surrounds of the late-17th century with distinctively rounded bolection mouldings, cornices and large panels can be seen in the principal first-floor rooms of both wings (i.e. L, O, T, U & V, as shown in illus. 14-17 & 20-23), with less expensive contemporary wainscoting in the two rear rooms (J, X & Y, illus. 25-26). A small area of panelling also survives in the south-eastern corner of the southern ground-floor room (G) with a moulded cornice to the rear (H). A good bolection-moulded stone fireplace remains in the rear first-floor room of the northern wing (illus. 25-26), although the side of its flue is broken, and another has been re-used in the late-19th century flat-roofed extension in the angle of rooms A & D (illus. 11). The fireplaces in the southern bedrooms (X & V) are blocked and may conceal early grates, but the ground-floor fabric of the same chimney has been excavated to create a WC –perhaps allowing fire surrounds of some kind to survive

behind the plaster of the remaining walls. The panelled partition between the front ‘dressing room’ of the southern wing (T) and its neighbour on the east (U) contains a quantity of re-used 17th century-style panelling with small panels, and a similar section adjoins the modern stair which descends to the cellar.

Staircases

The mouldings and balusters of the two staircases are identical but appear to represent a refurbishment of the mid-18th century. The main staircase is a fine example of its kind with open string courses and scroll-carved brackets in a style that is highly unlikely to pre-date the 1720s and may be several decades later (illus. 10). The earliest known open-string staircase is famously the Queen’s Stair in Kensington Palace, built in the early 1690s, but this is combined with much heavier balusters and posts. If Rebow House was indeed built in its present form in or about the 1690s, with which the oldest panelling is fully consistent, and therefore visited by William III, its two staircases must be secondary. The first-floor stair landing (R) is also a later insertion as the partition containing a Regency-style arched window which divides it from the room to the rear (P) is completely ignored by an earlier moulded cornice. The staircase would have been old-fashioned by the beginning of the 19th century, however, when the Greek Key cornice and the simple fireplace of the main reception were added along with the oriel window. Confusing as this may seem, it was common for high-status houses such as this to be upgraded with every generation to meet the ever-changing dictates of domestic fashion. In general, the flat-sectioned door surrounds associated with the staircase are likely to be secondary and the bolection-moulded surrounds original.



Illus. 6

A detail of the principal joist in illus. 4 showing the common joists lodged on top rather than tenoned to its sides. Lodged joists of this kind are normally found in the 13th century and before, but may have been used here at a slightly later date to maximise strength. There is nothing to guarantee that any individual common joist has not been replaced.



Illus. 7

The cellar beneath the central entrance, with a 20th century partition adjoining the brick chimney foundation on the left. The latter is pierced by an arched storage recess with an ostensibly original boarded door of *circa* 1700. The front (western) wall on the right is concealed by 20th century dry-lining (i.e. plasterboard) through which medieval stone corbels project to support the ceiling braces. Identical corbels are visible in the northern section of the cellar beneath the party shop.

Later Sub-division

The central room of the northern wing was subdivided in the 19th century, with the modern areas K and M partitioned from the original L. The boarded internal cladding of the cupboard in this room's north-eastern corner preserves an area of impressive 18th century floral wall paper that gives an impression of the elegant decor of its period. It may be possible to accurately date this paper with specialist analysis (illus. 24). The rear room of the southern wing was divided at the same time to create areas X and Y, while its counterpart to the front seems to have survived intact until the insertion of a corridor and partition in the mid-20th century to form areas U and V. The northern wing has been extensively altered on its lower storey, not least by the removal of the chimney between areas B and C, and the present partition between the print shop (D-E) and the party shop (A-C) is unlikely to pre-date the building's late-19th century commercial conversion. It is not clear that any original ground-floor partitions survive in this part of the structure but this cannot be established with certainty in the absence of further investigation (i.e. the removal of plaster and dry-lining).

Attic

The partitions of the attic rooms appear to date only from the 19th century and were heated by at least one fireplace as indicated by the number of chimney posts shown in figure 16. An area of pencilled graffiti to the right on climbing the stair includes the image of a masculine smoking woman in military uniform beneath the words 'Votes for Women' and above what appears to read 'One of the KP Nuts' (illus 32). This may be linked to the presence of a recruiting office in the adjoining first-floor rooms (illus. 16) but the meaning of the latter

phrase is unclear. The ‘KP Nut’ brand was not introduced until 1952, according to the company website, and although ‘KP’ was used in WWI to describe menial kitchen duties (kitchen patrol) it appears to have been confined to the American Army.

Historic Significance

Rebow House is one of the most important historic buildings in Colchester and fully warrants its ‘star’ listing. There is no reason to suppose it is not the house visited by William III between 1693 and 1700, as claimed by Philip Morant just a few decades after the events, although in its present form it must have been newly built at the time. Large areas of high-quality internal panelling survive from that period on the upper storey, along with at least two bolection-moulded stone fireplaces, but other high-quality fixtures and fittings such as the impressive staircase were inserted as part of later refurbishments. The Head Street facade is almost unrecognisable from that depicted in 1745 but boasts a particularly fine Regency-style oriel window and remains a highly conspicuous feature of the town. The medieval cellar is among the largest and best preserved of its kind in the country, retaining several original ceiling braces unlike its nearby counterpart at the George Hotel, and the building’s plastered walls may preserve more of the tantalising medieval framing exposed in the print shop.

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Additional photographs follow on pp. 27-39

Additional Photographs (pp. 27-39)



Illus. 8. The 15th century doorway in the print shop (D-E) with the partition adjoining the central entrance hall (F) on the right. A missing bracket formed a medieval arch, and mortises in the remaining left-hand jamb indicate the presence of a missing timber-framed wall that extended both to the front and rear. At 17 ft behind the Head Street facade this may represent a cross-passage, but it is impossible to determine whether more early framing is hidden in the later walls or even whether this fragment is *in situ*.



Illus. 9. The central entrance hall with its fine staircase and blocked doors opening into the print shop on the left and the charity shop on the right. The arch in the centre lies immediately beside the 15th century doorway in illus. 8 above, and may conceal another.



Illus. 10. A detail of the fine main staircase showing its moulded handrail and the decorative brackets of its open strings. This is highly unlikely to be as early as *circa* 1700 but is typical of the second quarter of the 18th century.



Illus. 11. The narrow room in the flat-roofed extension to the rear of the main stair passage (F), seen from the east. This room was added between 1897 and 1909 but the bolection-moulded stone fire surround on the left dates from *circa* 1700 and was probably moved from elsewhere in the house. The wall on the right consists of modern dry-lining and the Goad plans indicate doors opening into the adjoining photography shop (now the party shop).



Illus. 12. The front ground-floor room of the charity shop (G) from its Head Street entrance, showing little evidence of historic fabric. A small section of wainscot is exposed in the far right-hand corner, adjoining Sir Isaac's Walk, and the false ceiling may conceal moulded cornices. The rear wall may contain a blocked fireplace.



Illus. 13. The rear ground-floor room of the charity shop (H), seen from the east, with a good moulded cornice that probably survives from the original building. A tile hearth projects from the chimney in the centre but its fireplace is either hidden or removed and a WC now occupies the position of its chimney.



Illus. 14. The narrow first-floor room at the front of the charity shop (T), still lined with panelling of *circa* 1700, which probably served as a dressing room or lobby for the larger main bedroom to the right (U/V). The blocked original door in the centre opens into the main reception room with the oriel window (S). The panelling of the Head Street facade on the left was designed for taller sash windows than those of today.



Illus. 15. The first-floor lobby at the head of the back staircase (Q), seen from the rear (east). The fine bolection-moulded door surrounds, panelling and cornice are all consistent with *circa* 1700, but the partition on the far left, which forms the present corridor, is a 20th century insertion.



Illus. 16. The southern wall of the narrow first-floor cupboard adjoining the chimney between the two principal first-floor rooms in the charity shop (W). The original moulded cornice of *circa* 1700 turns outwards, indicating that a missing oriel window projected into Sir Isaac's Walk.



Illus. 17. The fine bolection-moulded panelling and first-floor fireplace to the west of the central chimney in the charity shop (now in the manager's office, V). The door on the right opens into the cupboard shown in illus. 16 above (W). This is the only original chimney not to have lost its external stack, although it now contains a WC on the ground floor. Panelling of this period was invariably painted and early pigment may survive beneath the modern surface.



Illus. 18. The back stair in the charity shop (I/Q), with identical balusters and mouldings to the main staircase but lacking its open strings. The attic rooms are reached by a separate stair from the landing on the right. The presence of two 18th century stairs of this quality illustrates the exceptional status of the house.



Illus. 19. The spacious first-floor reception room at the head of the main staircase, with the early-19th century oriel window to the left. This room was entirely refurbished when the window was added, with a contemporary fire surround on the right, plain wainscot and a Greek Key cornice (now much filled with paint).



Illus. 20. The Head Street facade of the front first-floor room, above the party shop to the north of the reception room (O), showing its intact cornice and panelling of *circa* 1700. The small horizontal panels above the present windows are later insertions, and the original windows would have risen to the ceiling.



Illus. 21. The rear wall of the front room above the party shop (O). The narrow bay between the two door surrounds was designed for a chimney with back-to-back fireplaces, but sadly this was entirely removed after 1951 (figure 16 shows five chimney pots, of which one - perhaps a later addition – probably served the attic room). The cornice steps forward to respect the missing fireplace, but the broken pediment and columns are modern set dressing for a hair salon that formerly occupied the premises.



Illus. 22. The central first-floor room above the party shop (L), looking west towards the missing chimney with the outline of a second fireplace to the left. The panelling to the right appears to survive from *circa* 1700 but the wall on the left is a later insertion with sections of applied panelling that interrupts the fire surround. This space formed a single large room initially (i.e. K, L & M).



Illus. 23. The WC and boiler cupboard to the rear (east) of the central room above the party shop (K), showing the original panelling of the northern wall which continues from the room in illus. 22. The cupboard appears to be a 19th century insertion, but the WC is modern.



Illus. 24. A detail of the north-eastern corner of the boiler cupboard in illus. 23, showing an area of well preserved printed wall paper that may survive from *circa* 1700 and is certainly no later than the mid-18th century. Remains of a missing lath-and-plaster ceiling are visible at its upper edge. The few exposed wall timbers in this space contain unpegged mortises and show evidence of re-use, as expected in *circa* 1700. There is no visible medieval fabric at this level of the building.



Illus. 25. The spacious rear room above the party shop (J), seen from the east, with wainscot and a fire surround of *circa* 1700. An ostensibly original door is hidden behind the modern corner piece on the right, which would have opened into the cupboard in illus. 23. The lean-to bay window to the left is a 19th century slate-roofed addition.



Illus. 26. A detail of the fine bolection-moulded stone fireplace and wainscot in the rear first-floor room of the northern wing (illus. 25). The coal grate and barley-twist columns are 19th century insertions but are themselves of historic interest. The shelf is a relatively recent addition on re-used brackets.



Illus. 27. The roof structure above the rear room of the northern wing (J) showing a plastered cupboard adjoining the truncated chimney. The main roof in this part of the building was rebuilt in the 19th century but the direction of the rafters above the cupboard indicates that it was formerly at right-angles to its present axis and would have terminated in a north-facing gable.



Illus. 28. The lath-and-plaster partitions in the attic of the Head Street range, seen from the north. The broken wall to the left and the patched ceiling relate to the missing chimney shown to the left in figure 17. The access to the lead roof detailed in illus. 29 below is visible in the rear to the right.



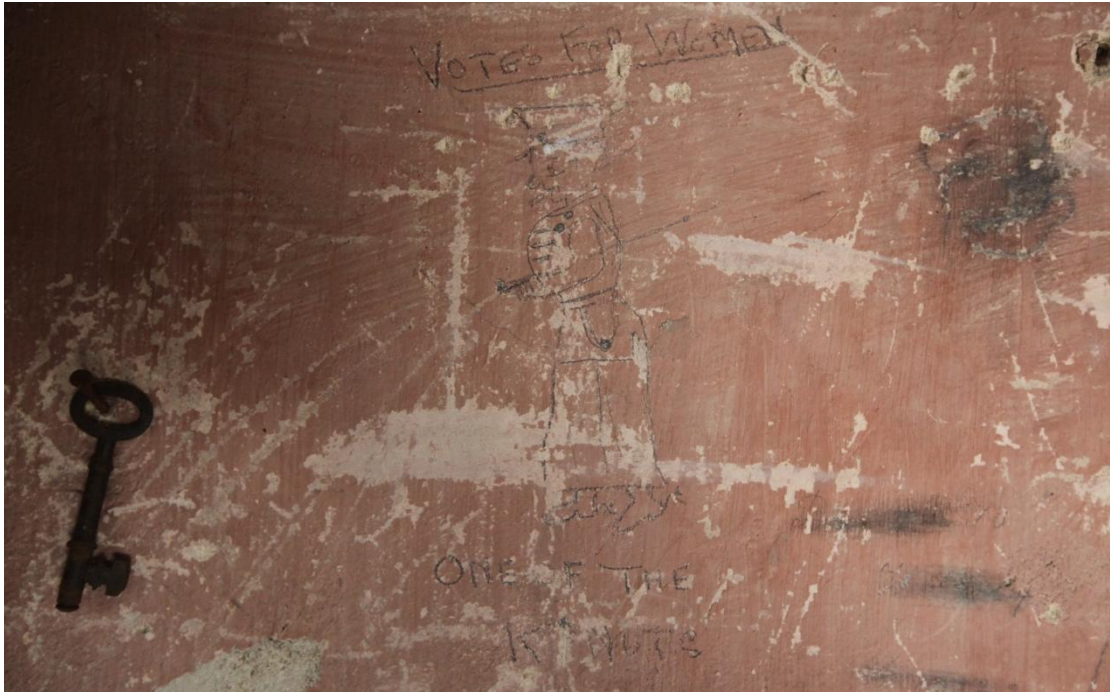
Illus. 29. A detail of the roof purlin adjoining the present access door to the lead roof adjoining Head Street, with an original chamfer which suggests this area was occupied by a similar dormer window or access from the outset. This is only such chamfer in the front elevation, although some of the equivalent purlins are either hidden or renewed.



Illus. 30. The roof structure of the Head Street range, looking south towards the chimney of the main first-floor reception room which has been truncated below the ridge. The collar is Saltire-braced to the principal rafters, with two tiers of linear butt-purlins and copious re-used timber. The collar at the top of this image is a re-used early-17th century window lintel with impressions of ovolo-moulded mullions, but may be a later insertion.



Illus. 31. The entire roof truss shown in illus. 30 above, with the lower butt-purlin to the left and the joists of a missing plaster ceiling. Most of the plasterwork in the attic appears to date only from the early 19th century, but the collar contains a pegged central mortise that may have secured the axial joist of an original ceiling.



Illus. 32. A detail of the pencilled graffiti on the plaster partition to the right of the attic stair landing. The inscription reads ‘VOTES FOR WOMEN’ above the figure of a woman in army uniform with a swagger stick and a cigarette in her mouth. The text beneath appears to read ‘ONE OF THE KP NUTS’, presumably referring to army KP duties (Kitchen Patrol). This part of the building was a recruiting office when photographed in 1921 (figure 16).



Illus. 33. The wide area of flat roof between the Head Street parapet and the tiled roof, showing the present access hatch on the left. An area of leadwork can be seen in the rear but the majority appears to be covered only in felt (possibly concealing lead). This unusual arrangement corresponds with the building’s depiction in 1745 with a low attic storey beneath a shallow roof; this was presumably achieved by adding a false vertical wall to the front of the rafters to create – in effect - a continuous dormer.