

# **The George Hotel, Colchester, Essex**

## **Heritage Asset Assessment**



**Leigh Alston MA (Oxon)  
Architectural Historian  
4 Nayland Road  
Bures St Mary  
Suffolk CO8 5BX**

**May 2016**

Leigh A. Alston MA (Oxon)  
Architectural Historian

**4 Nayland Road  
Bures St Mary  
Suffolk CO8 5BX**

Tel. (01787) 228016  
E-Mail: leigh.alston@virgin.net

**The George Hotel,  
116-117 High Street,  
Colchester, Essex**

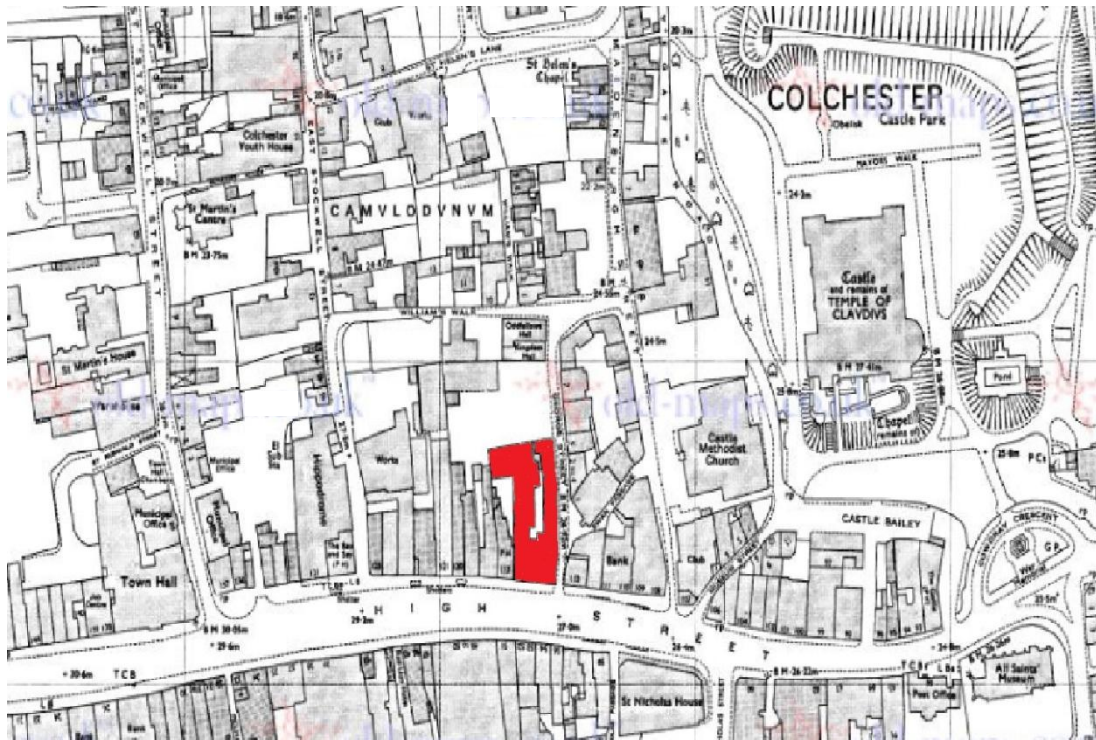
## **Heritage Asset Assessment**

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

### **Summary**

The George Hotel is a nationally important timber-framed medieval inn dating from the latter part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century or very early in the 15<sup>th</sup>, with possibly older cellars beneath. The original inn at 116 High Street is documented from 1494 and is listed at grade II\* (star), but has recently expanded into the adjoining 16<sup>th</sup> century building at no.117 which is separately listed at grade II. Much of the medieval fabric is either hidden by later plaster or missing, but a number of impressive features survive including a rare first-floor open hall that currently forms a stair landing, complete with soot-encrusted timbers and a finely carved crown-post ostensibly from its rebuilt roof (now incorporated into a staircase). A wall painting discovered in 1984 and displayed on the same landing illustrates the exotic nature of the interior in *circa* 1600. A well preserved medieval shop front can be seen in the lounge on the corner of George Street, along with its impressive original ceiling joists, and a 15<sup>th</sup> century gateway is fully exposed in the picturesque inn yard to the rear. The flint-walled cellars extend beneath the entire High Street range with ceilings supported on massive oak joists in a manner usually associated with the 13<sup>th</sup> century and before. According to the listing description they contain two medieval fireplaces and other features which are currently hidden behind late-20<sup>th</sup> century plaster and dry-lining. No. 117 was built early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as an imposing three-storied structure with jettied first and second floors overhanging the street in the latest fashion of its day. The George was also jettied to both the High Street and George Street but probably rose to only two stories initially. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was provided with a new roof and upper storey with double jetties to match its neighbour, but the upper jetty was cut off and the ground floor pushed out into the street when the present Georgian facade was added in *circa* 1800. The new 17<sup>th</sup> century structure stopped short of no.117 to form a passage as shown on a map of 1745, and a western window is now hidden in its roof. The buildings of the courtyard include a medieval range adjoining George Street that was extended in brick in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but date chiefly from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The northern block was added as a kitchen and dance hall between 1933 and 1943, and the bay-fronted extension to the western side of the yard was built at the same time. Given the fragmentary nature of the exposed framing any attempt to reconstruct the inn's medieval layout is inevitably speculative, but more evidence may come to light during any future refurbishment.

## Documentary and Cartographic History



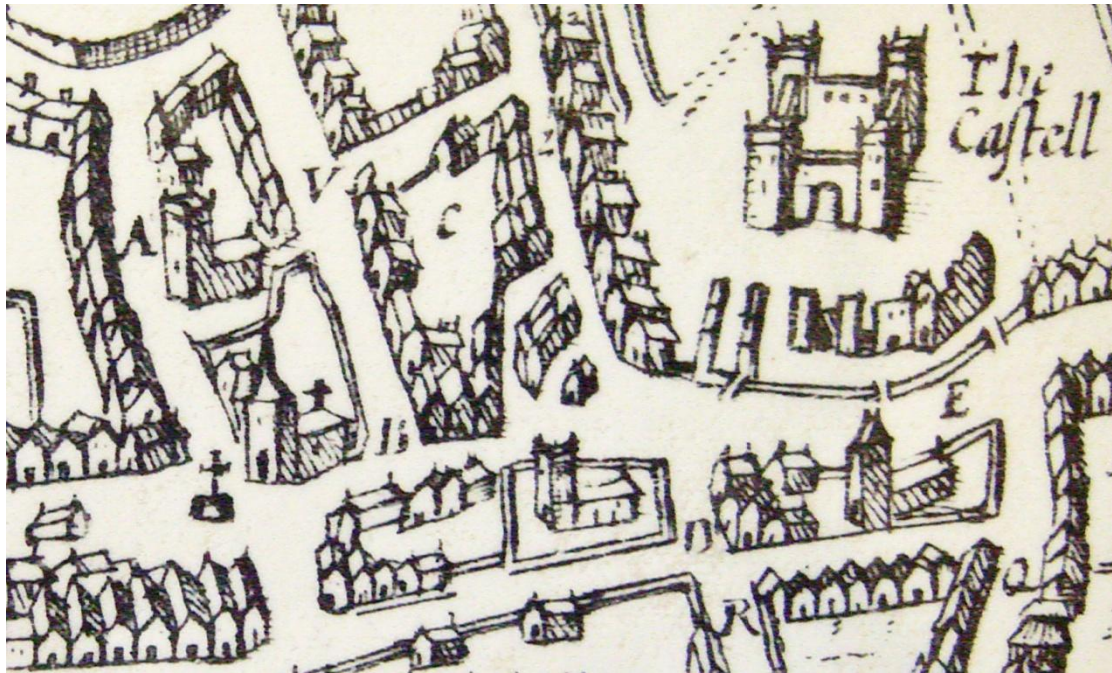
**Figure 1. Location plan highlighting the George in red on the northern side of the High Street with the castle to the east.**

The George Hotel is an important medieval inn adjoining the northern side of Colchester's Roman High Street, close to its Norman castle. Behind its plain Georgian facade the earliest part of the timber-framed building probably dates from the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, although its extensive cellars may be older, but the first known reference to the property as an inn occurs in 1494. A rent of 3d per year for the George was assigned to Alderman Thomas Jopson of Colchester, along with a further 4d for the standard bearing the sign of the George. Inn signs were often charged separately in this way as they encroached on the pavement. The Corporation owed money to Jobson for representing the town in parliament and appears to have waived the rents on his own extensive properties in the town as part payment (George Hotel website, and see *Godliness and Governance in Tudor Colchester* by Laquita Higgs (1998), p. 43; the original reference is from the Corporation's medieval records known as the Red Paper Books). Jopson was almost certainly the George's owner, as well the local M.P. and one of the town's wealthiest merchants. The building may well have been designed as an inn a century before, but in the absence of further documentary research this is impossible to establish with certainty.

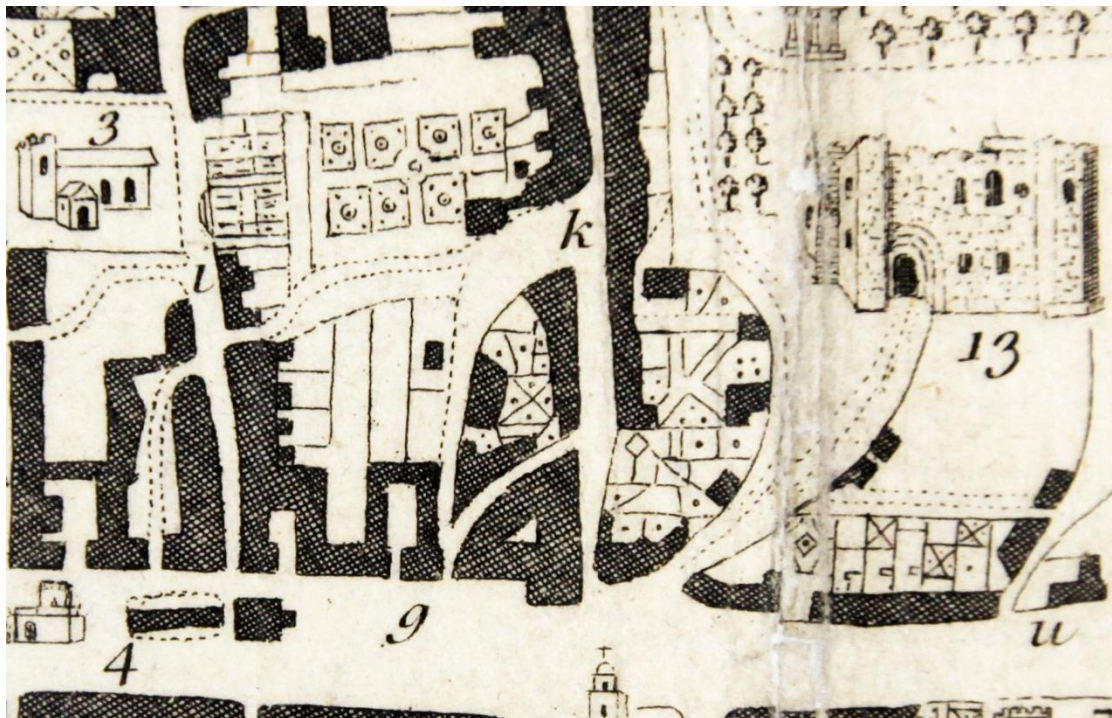
The Victory County History of Colchester notes references to the George in 1551 and 1566, and to a remarkable election dinner for 331 voters in 1617. They filled 'the gatehouse chamber, the rose chamber, the cock chamber, the George chamber, the lower parlour, the kitchen chamber, the street parlour, the hall and the cellar' (ERO D/B5 Ab1/8 roll 19, cited in VCH Essex Vol. IX, 1994). The early-17<sup>th</sup> century inn survives almost intact, albeit largely unrecognisable, and most of these rooms must still exist today. Unfortunately only the cellar can be identified with confidence, although the term 'chamber' normally referred to a first-floor room at this period and the space above the blocked 15<sup>th</sup> gateway between the rear yard and George Street to the east is a possible candidate for the gatehouse chamber – although it could not have accommodated many.



*The ever-changing outline and appearance of the inn is described in the captions to figures 2-15 below.*



**Figure 2.** John Speed's 1610 map of Colchester showing three gabled structures on the site of the George (centre). This map is highly stylised but illustrates the extent to which gables dominated the town's streets at this period. The George's 17<sup>th</sup> century roof probably possessed them. Note the curve of Swan Passage defined by a single building.



**Figure 3.** A detail of the 1745 'Ichnography of Colchester' surveyed by James Deane and published in Morant's History of Colchester in 1768. The George lies immediately above the number 9 ('the high street') and is represented with a rectangular, fully enclosed courtyard entered through a gap in the left-hand side of its street frontage – corresponding with the early-17<sup>th</sup> century window and parterre which survive in the roof. The letter k marks the site of 'St Helen's Lane and ye George yard'.





**Figure 4**

A detail of the Monson map of Colchester in 1848, labelling the 'George Inn' on the corner of the High Street and George Street. The southern entrance of 1745 had disappeared by this date, and the left-hand rear wing had been truncated – no longer meeting the northern range of the yard. A new block of outbuildings that consisted chiefly of stables had been added to the formerly empty land between the inn on the south and William's Walk on the north (see figure 7). The red line marks the boundary of St Nicholas's parish, with the church shown at bottom right.



Figure 5

The First Edition 1:500 Ordnance Survey of 1876. The main courtyard had been extensively remodelled and extended northwards with the northern range of 1848 demolished and the western range to the left either rebuilt or extended. Dotted lines indicate the latter's open-sided eastern elevation as shown in early-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs (figures 13 & 14). The stable forming the new northern end of the yard also appears to have been built since 1848, increasing the length of the older eastern range.

The crossed section of the eastern range marks the arched medieval gateway, and indicates that it was still in use. Note the large covered area behind the street range with an open-sided wall adjoining the courtyard. The vertical line bisecting the inn is caused by a join in two sheets of the map.



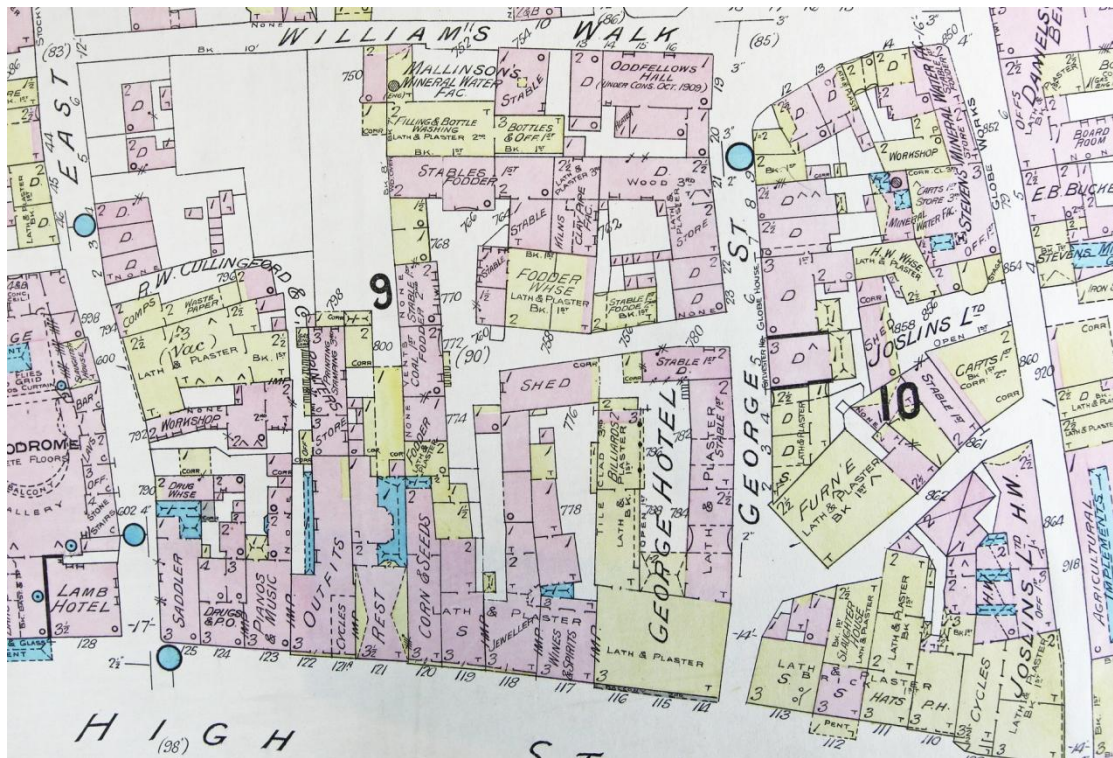


Figure 6. The Goad map of 1909, showing the entire block of land between East Stockwell Street on the west and Maidenburgh Street on the east. Note the group of stables and fodder stores on the site of the present car park north of the inn. This remarkable map was drawn up for the insurance industry by Charles E Goad Ltd., civil engineers, of London N4, and updated at intervals of approximately ten years).

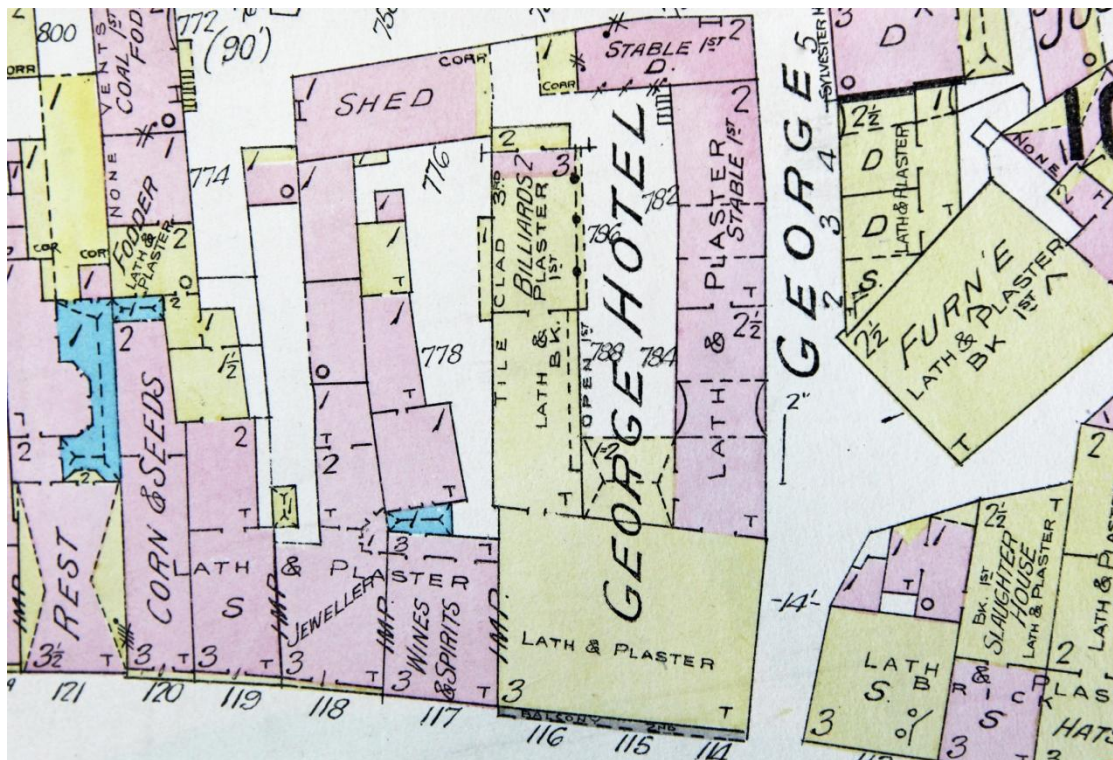
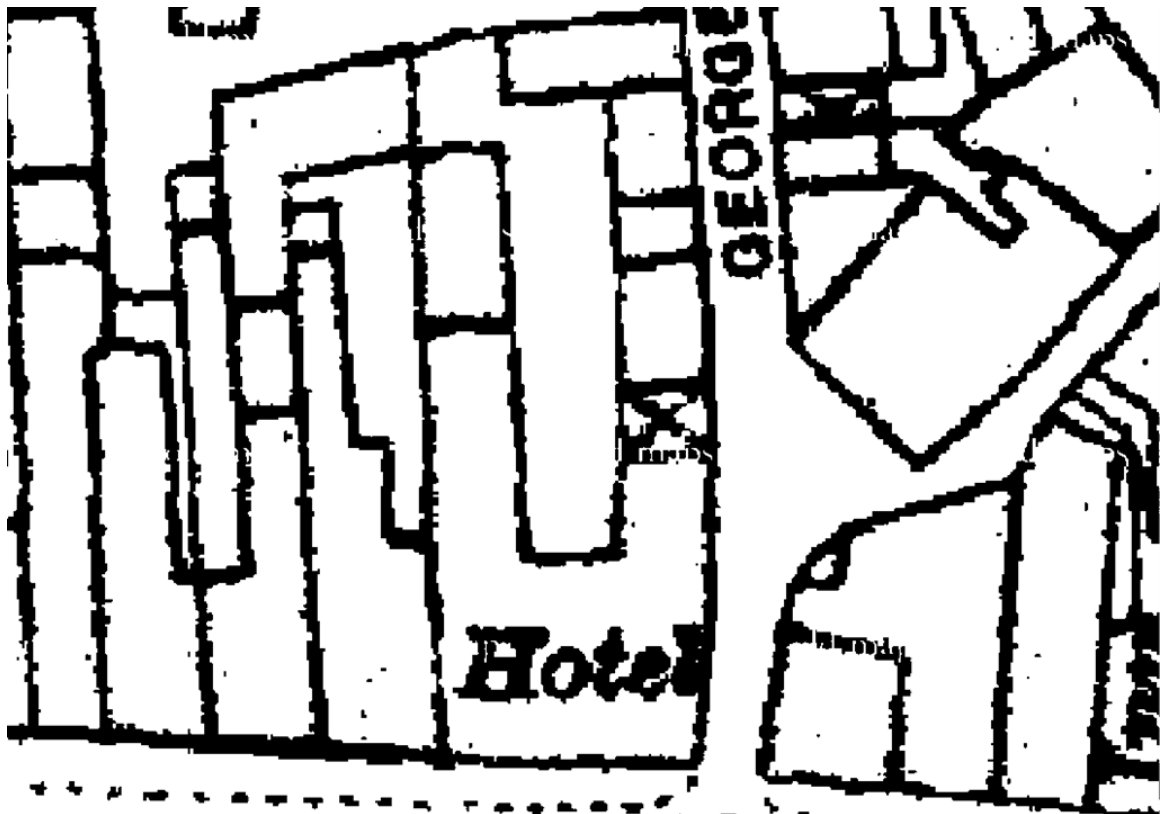
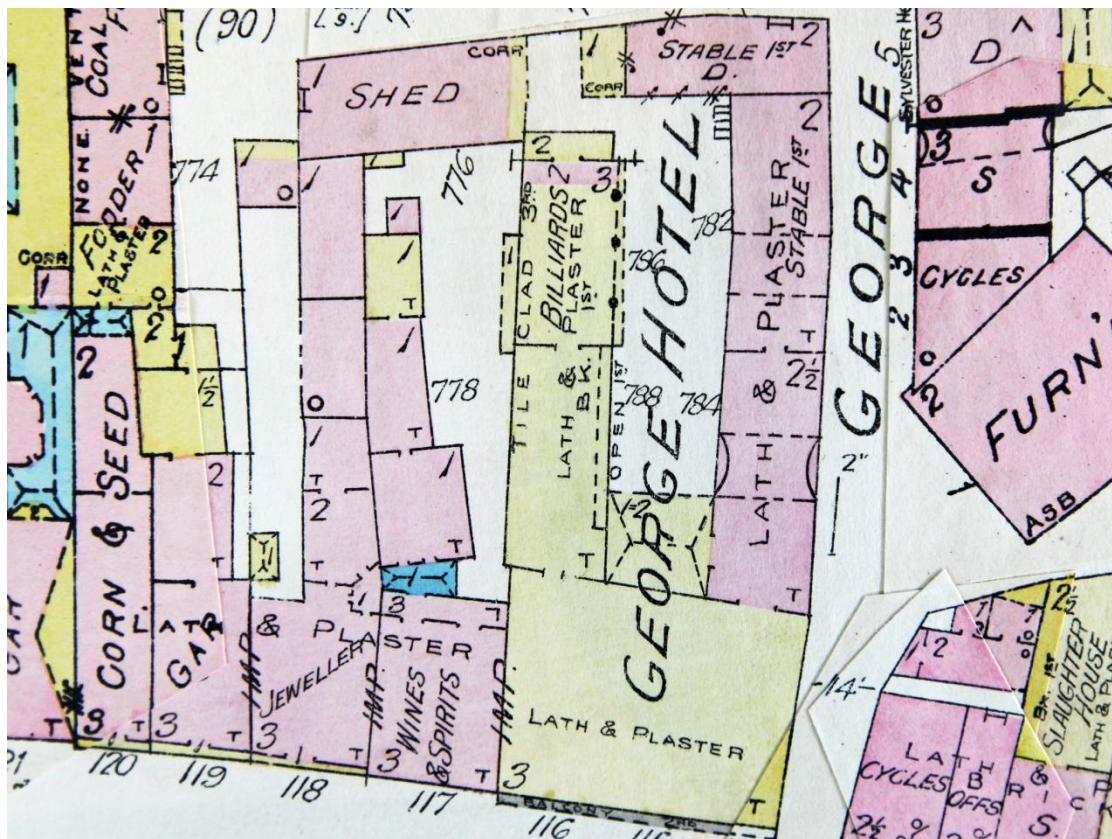


Figure 6a. A detail of the 1909 goad map showing the stable at the northern end of the yard and additional stabling to the rear of the eastern range. The open-sided western range is clearly shown, with a first-floor billiards room to the rear.





**Figure 7. The 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1923. The cross in the eastern range indicates the medieval gateway remained open.**



**Figure 8. The Goad map of 1933, showing little change since 1909. The covered area to the south of the yard is depicted with hipped gables adjoining the side ranges.**



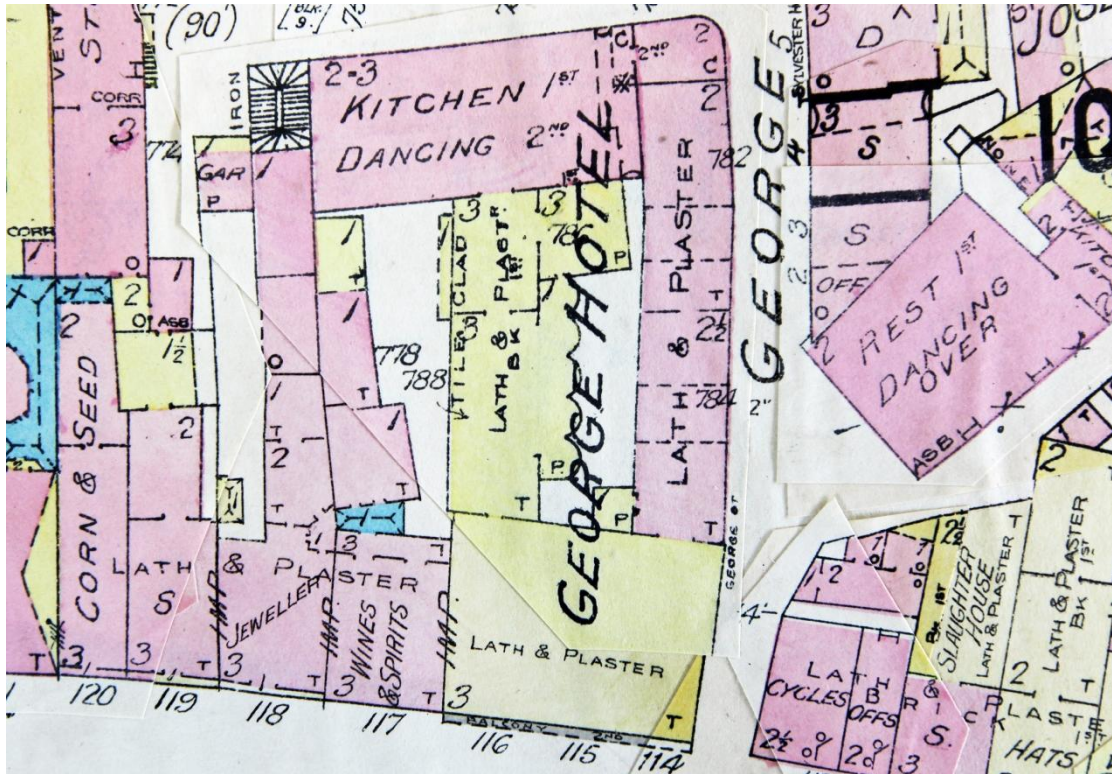


Figure 9. The Goad map of 1943. Another major refurbishment had occurred since 1933 with the northern stable replaced by a large new kitchen beneath a first-floor dance hall. The bay-fronted single-storied extension to the western range had also appeared along with the present rear porch in the yard's south-eastern corner. The medieval entrance from George Street had been blocked.

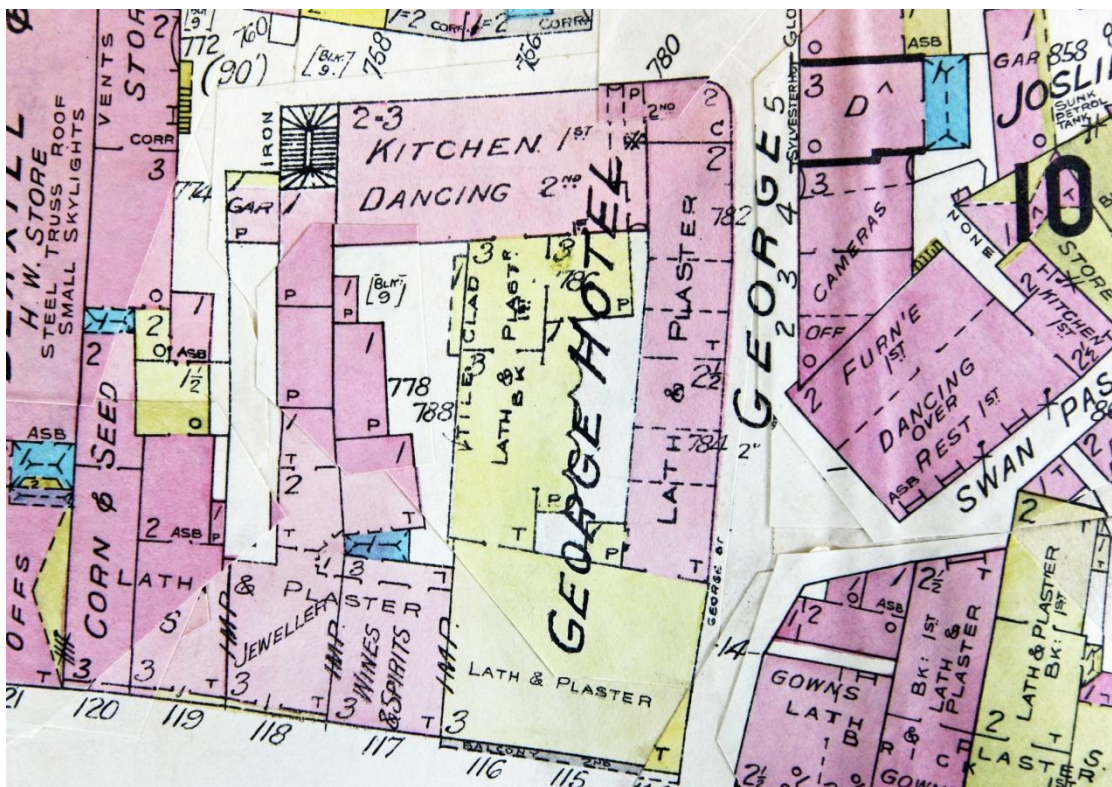


Figure 10. The Goad map of 1954, showing no obvious change since 1943.

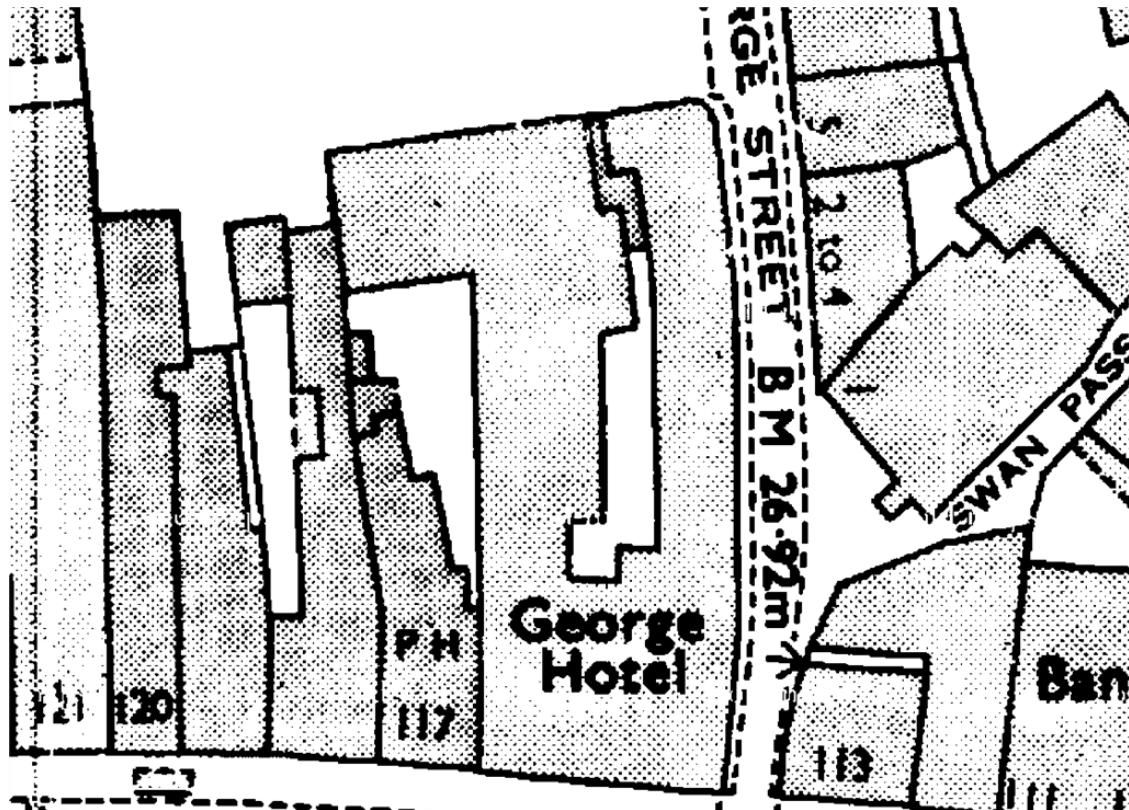


Figure 11. The 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1883. The inn's outline remained much as in 1743 before the next refurbishment of 1884, but the land to the north had been cleared. The flat-roofed function area behind no.117 (now the office) had yet to be built.



Figure 12. Colchester High Street from the east, by W. Bartlett, published in 1831. The George lies to the right of the stage coach, and appears much as today with five windows on each floor and a balcony between the ground and first storeys. The projecting clock belonged to St Nicholas's church, which lay opposite Maidenburgh Street and was demolished by the Church of England in 1955.





**Figure 13**

**The courtyard from the south in the 1920s (judging by the vehicle) showing the stable with its first-floor loft reached by external steps at the northern end of the yard, with the open-sided western wing on the left. Both the stable and the western wing were built between 1848 and 1876 (figures 4 & 5 above).**

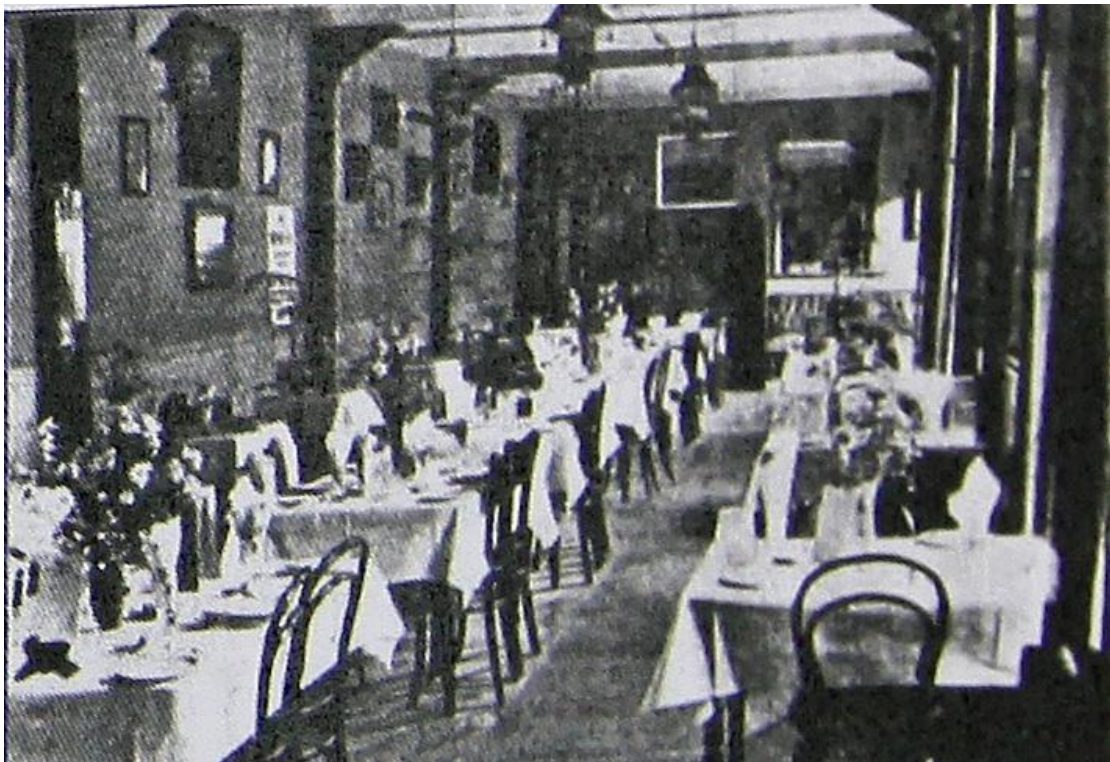
**Note the half-hung stable door on the right.**

**From a photograph on display in the hotel's reception.**





**Figure 14.** The overgrown open-sided elevation of the western courtyard range before the construction of the present bay-fronted single storied extension between 1933 and 1943. There is no trace of the upper storey with its gallery and continuous windows which was presumably added at the same time. From a photograph on display in the hotel's reception (with an overlapping postcard obscuring its top left-hand corner).



**Figure 15.** A photograph of the 'newly appointed dining room' from a newspaper advertisement of 1927. This represents the modern dining area in the western range, viewed from the south, before the addition of the bay-fronted extension to the right. The narrow width relates to the recessed wall adjoining the yard (to the left in figure 14).





**Figure 16.** A photograph of the finely carved medieval crown post incorporated into the 19<sup>th</sup> century staircase, published in the Royal Commission Survey of North-East Essex in 1922. The Commission described it as king post following a convention that changed in the 1950s when a new term was introduced to distinguish different types of post that had hitherto shared one name. The crown post has since been incorporated into a partition and is less conspicuous (illus. 23).



**Figure 17.** High Street facade from a Royal Commission photo dated 1929. Note the large-paned Victorian sash windows which have since been 're-Georgianised'.

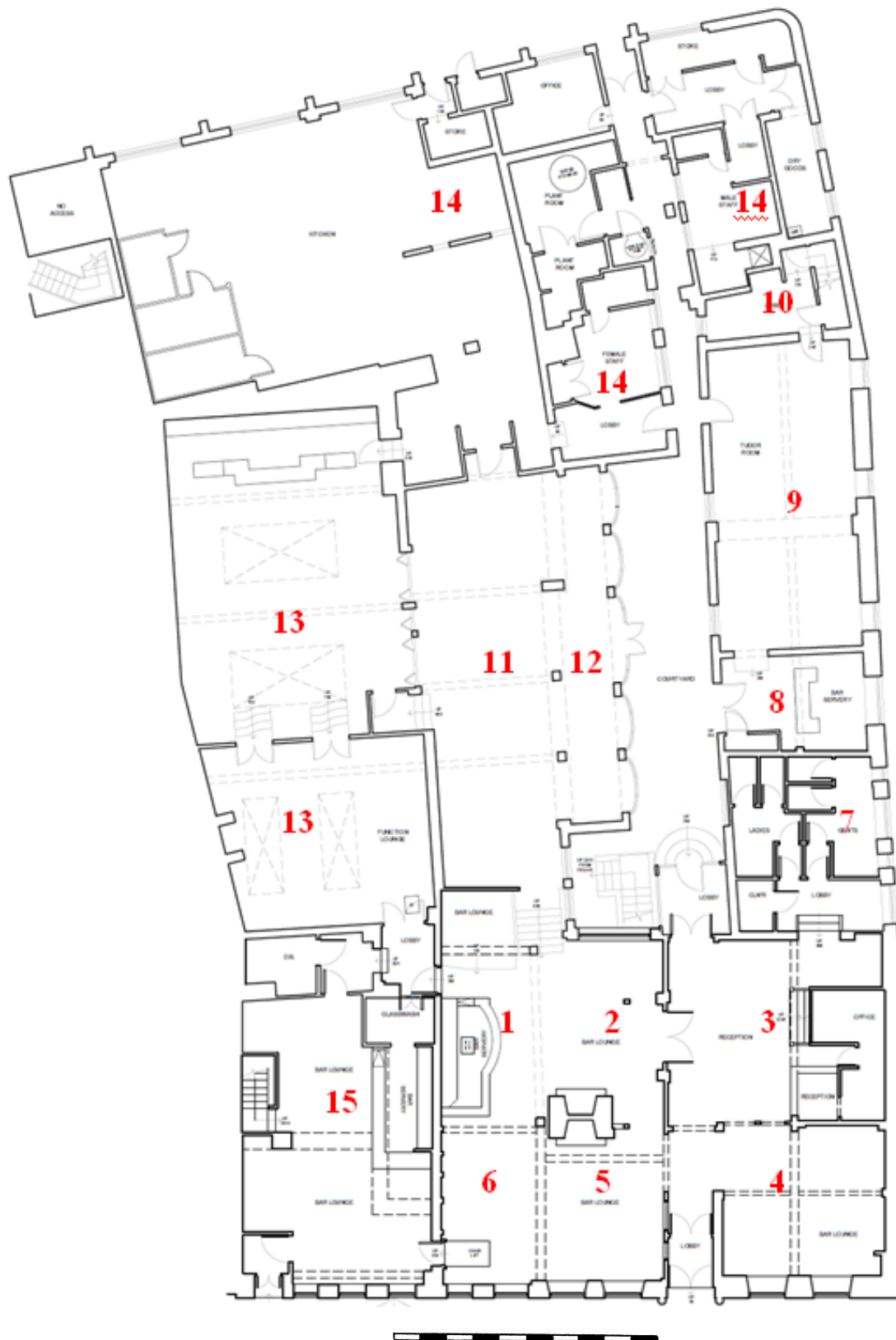


**Figure 18**

**The George Street gateway from a photograph possibly of 1929 in the archive of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments of England (published online). (The adjoining photograph of the High Street facade in the same collection is dated 1929.)**



## Building Analysis



**Figure 19**  
Ground floor plan identifying each historic area with a number for ease of reference in the text and photographs (see key below). First and second floor areas are referred to as 1f and 1f2 respectively. Scale in metres.

## Key to figure 18 (Description of historic fabric)

### 1. Late-14<sup>th</sup> parlour wing (largely rebuilt)

This area is occupied by the main bar on the ground floor (illus. 18), with rooms 201 on the first floor and 401 on the second. It appears to have formed a two-bay cross-wing initially, with widely spaced studs at intervals of 27 inches adjoining the first-floor hall (2f). Its top storey is a later addition with unpegged stud mortises in its roof-plate. Much of its ground-floor structure may have been removed to accommodate the yard entrance shown in 1745 (figure 3), and without further investigation it is unclear which of the two buildings the exposed timbers adjoining no.117 belong to.

### 2. Late-14<sup>th</sup> century hall

The historic fabric of this space is hidden by later plaster on the ground floor, but the stair landing on its first floor is a medieval open hall that was initially open to its roof and heated by a bonfire-like open hearth as described in the Appendix on p.42 (illus. 21). This appears to have been an exceptionally rare first-floor open hall, rather than a normal example with a hearth on the ground floor. It extended to 13 ft in length (on an east-west axis) and an impressive 21.5 ft in width, and consisted of two unequal bays: a narrow 'low-end' bay of 4 ft to the east and a 'high-end' bay of 9 ft to the west. A finely carved octagonal crown-post on the dividing tie-beam, which spanned its width, is now incorporated into the stair balustrade. This crown-post may have been designed for the building but if so it has been moved from its original position in the centre of the hall and now lies just 4 ft from its front wall. A fragment of a fine late-16<sup>th</sup> or early-17<sup>th</sup> century wall painting found in a nearby room is now displayed on the stair landing. The upper floor is an addition of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or later and now lies beneath a shallow-pitched softwood roof of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. Late-14<sup>th</sup> century service range

This part of the medieval building contains the hotel's principal Victorian staircase, built in the Mock Gothic style (i.e. in imitation of a 17<sup>th</sup> century stair), and its original configuration is uncertain (illus. 16). It was originally jettied to George Street, with an overhanging first floor, as indicated by the truncated ceiling joists which still rest on the jetty plate (visible on the stair landing), and may have contained additional shop windows matching those to the south (area 3). It is likely to have been divided into two rooms, as in area 4, with the eastern section roofed as a cross-wing at right-angles to the High Street as indicated by the timbers of its rear (northern) wall which are visible from the adjoining roof of area 7 (illus. 27). The roof of the western section, however, lay parallel to the High Street as shown by the tie-beam and wall framing exposed in the adjoining first-floor hall (to the left in illus. 21). The stud pegs above this tie-beam are confined to its centre, indicating the slope of its missing original roof. The upper storey is an addition of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or later. The original joists of the ground floor ceiling have been removed, presumably to raise its height, as empty mortises can be seen in the mid-rail adjoining area 2. In contrast to the widely-spaced studs of the western wall, those of the northern wall are more closely spaced at intervals of approximately 12 inches where they are exposed in the roof of area 7, and the eastern structure adjoining George Street may therefore represent a slightly later addition to the hall range.

### 4. Late-14<sup>th</sup> century shop

The lounge on the corner of the High Street and George Street preserves a fine and rare medieval shop front facing George Street and an original ceiling of heavy sectioned, waney-edged joists with centre-tenons of typical 14<sup>th</sup> and early-15<sup>th</sup> century form (illus. 13 & 14). This area was initially divided into two narrow rooms, each of 10 ft in length against the street, with the studs of the missing central partition now indicated only by empty mortises and a groove for wattle-and-daub in the ceiling. It was jettied to both the



High Street and George Street, hence the ceiling's diagonal 'dragon beam'; the High Street wall has been pushed out, increasing the depth of the room, but the overhanging upper wall to George Street has been cut off (presumably to avoid further narrowing of the narrow street). The shop front consists of a wide window with corner brackets in which goods could be displayed and sold from a counter along with an entrance door between pegged original jambs on the north (left). The corner brackets flanking the door are recent insertions matching the originals to the right. Another shop window is likely to have faced the High Street. This shop was probably an independent unit, leased separately, with no internal connection to the rest of the inn. The western room may also have formed a shop but a straight stair rose against its northern wall from the back of the hotel's entrance passage to the chamber above, as shown by a fully-framed stair trap in the ceiling. The framing of the first floor is hidden, and the top floor lies beneath the 17<sup>th</sup> century roof described under area 5 below.



**Illus. 1**

**The High Street frontage showing the elegant late-Georgian facade of the inn to the right (i.e. of the late-18<sup>th</sup> or – more probably – the early-19<sup>th</sup> century). The sash windows are later replacements, as indicated by the 'horns' projecting downwards from the lower rails of the upper sashes (a feature introduced in the late-19th century). Figure 17 shows large Victorian panes of glass. The 17<sup>th</sup> century roof behind the parapet terminates in a gable window above the letter 'T' indicating a former gap between this point and the neighbouring three-storied jettied early-16<sup>th</sup> century building hidden behind no. 117 to the left (illus. 28-31). The map of 1745 shows this as an entrance to the courtyard. No. 118 on the extreme left (El Guaga) is yet another three-storied early-16<sup>th</sup> century structure and preserves a fine original roof in the unlit attic room behind its high parapet. Nos. 117-118 may have dwarfed the George until its top storey was added in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The new roof projected further into the street and the facade was jettied at both the first and second floors, matching the nearby Red Lion Hotel, before the ground storey was pushed out and the upper jetty cut off by the Georgian remodelling.**

## **5. Front lounge and entrance passage, possibly added in the 17th century**

There are no exposed medieval timbers in this part of the building (illus. 17), which lies beneath a late-16<sup>th</sup> or – more probably – an early 17<sup>th</sup> century roof structure of butt-purlins which consists largely of re-used timber including some elements of carving (illus. 32). The timber-framed western gable of this structure is exposed on the first and second floors (in rooms 503 and 307), and represents an external wall with an intact original window in its roof (illus. 28 & 29). Area 5 may have formed a yard adjoining the High Street in front of the inn, between the projecting eastern range (4) and the adjoining property on the west (15). The latter now consists of a well-framed early-16<sup>th</sup> century structure of three storeys with each of its two upper floors jettied to the south (i.e. no. 117). The stair in the north-western corner of the adjoining medieval range (area 4) may have risen from this yard, perhaps immediately adjacent to the inn's original entrance. Many medieval halls were recessed behind their respective streets in this way. Alternatively – and perhaps more probably – a medieval structure on this site may have demolished in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or lie hidden behind the Georgian facade. It seems unlikely that the medieval cellar would have been built beneath a yard. The 17<sup>th</sup> century roof extends across area 4 as well as area 5, and is part of a major remodelling which saw the addition of a jettied third floor matching that of no. 117. The upper jetty was cut off by the Georgians, and the front rafters of the 17<sup>th</sup> century roof once projected by approximately 18 inches over the High Street but have been truncated by the present parapet.

## **6. Early-20th century shelter-shed and loose box**

The south-western corner of the hotel lounge formed a gateway to the rear yard as recently as the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and is shown as such on James Deane's map of 1745 (figure 3). The medieval structure to the rear (1) was presumably partly demolished, at least on its lower storey, in order to facilitate access, although a gatehouse may have existed in this position from the outset. The presence of a 13 ft-wide gap in the High Street frontage is confirmed by the 17<sup>th</sup> century window in the roof above area 5, as described above, and by external plasterwork to both the eastern side of no. 117 (area 15) and the western side of the 17<sup>th</sup> century gable. The latter retains a section of 'basket-weave' parquetry with a plain border above the window. The ceilings of rooms 503 and 307 on the first and second floors respectively are also later insertions designed to span the gap, with their principal joists supported by secondary internal posts (illus. 25 & 26). The ceiling of room 503 consists of re-used timber and includes a supporting post with a finely carved head of a bearded man. The carving is part of the post, rather than an applied feature, and was in the hotel's kitchen when it was mentioned by the Royal Commission in 1922. It was presumably used to replace an earlier post when the hotel was subsequently remodelled, but the location of the 1922 kitchen (or whether the post was *in situ* there), is uncertain.

## **7. 15<sup>th</sup> century rear wing**

The area of the ground-floor WCs behind the hotel's reception is a 15<sup>th</sup> century extension to the earlier building which retains its original crown-post roof – the only remaining medieval roof in the building (illus. 27). The framing of its ground and first-floor rooms is thoroughly hidden, but the roof is accessible from the adjoining attic room (room. 106). The heavy braces of the utilitarian, plain crown-post are typical of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as opposed to the thin braces of the 16<sup>th</sup>, but cannot be dated more closely. The timbers of the adjoining slightly higher structure to the south (3) are not weathered and the two buildings may not be separated by more than a few years. The upper storey was jettied to George Street but this has been cut off, as indicated by the truncated rafters of the eastern wall.





**Illus. 2. The eastern elevation to George Street with an original Georgian triangular door pediment. The white area appears to have part of the original late 14<sup>th</sup> century building with the shop front shown in illus. 13 to the left. Its jettied (overhanging) first storey has been cut off, as has the jettied second storey of its 17<sup>th</sup> century upward extension. The roof timbers of the present roof gable at top left have been truncated.**

#### **8. 15<sup>th</sup> century gateway**

Area 8 forms a medieval gateway linking George Street to the courtyard. Although structurally separate from the adjoining 15<sup>th</sup> century range on the south (7) this may relate to a need for greater height to admit vehicles and the two may be contemporary. The chamber over the gate was jettied to the street, as indicated by bracket mortises at the tops of both gate posts, but this has been cut off. Mortises are visible at the bottoms of both posts for large foot-braces that projected out into the street to stabilise the structure in the absence of a ground sill and to protect the posts from turning carts. The courtyard elevation lacked foot-braces and was not jettied, and the roof was rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. All four corner brackets of this gateway are original, fully pegged and tenoned to the posts, and represent rare survivals, particularly as the gateway remained in use as recently as the 1930s (figures 8 & 18).

#### **9. Brick range adjoining George Street**

The range of brick buildings to the north of the gatehouse may conceal earlier fabric but appears to consist of 18<sup>th</sup> century brickwork laid in Monk Bond (i.e. two stretchers between each header, illus. 9). Part of the elevation to George Street is concealed by plaster lined in imitation of ashlar (illus. 4). The roofs were rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with re-used timber, and the lower storeys have been extensively remodelled since they were depicted as stables on the pre-1943 Goad maps and illustrations (figures 8 & 13).

#### **10. Brick range to north of George Street**

The narrow ground-floor stair lobby forms the northern end of the pre-20<sup>th</sup> century hotel, as indicated by its exposed brickwork to George Street. Its fabric probably extended further north to meet the stable at the northern end of the courtyard, as shown on the Goad maps, but was truncated when the new kitchen and dance hall (14) was built between

1933 and 1943 (illus. 4). The northern end of the George Street range beyond this point consists of 20<sup>th</sup> century brickwork with Crittall windows and a distinctive rounded corner first shown in 1943 (figure 9).

#### **11. Western courtyard range (dining room)**

The western range of the courtyard acquired its present proportions between 1848 and 1876 on the site of a shorter range shown on the Monson map of the former year (figures 4 & 5). The dining room may represent the remains of the earlier building, but no fabric appears to pre-date the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The exposed ceiling joists of the ground floor all contain pegged mortises for two vertical posts indicating the space was originally divided into a series of narrow bays and probably formed a cart lodge open to the yard. The 1876 map shows only a shallow open section with a recessed wall, indicating that it had been enclosed when a new cart lodge was built to the north in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The latter is shown to the left in figure 13, supported by iron posts, and the Goad maps locate a billiard hall on the first floor. Most of this northern cart lodge was destroyed when the kitchen range was built between 1933 and 1943, although its southern end may survive to the north of the dining room – thoroughly disguised by modern dry-lining. The dining room was described as newly refurbished when photographed for a newspaper advertisement in 1927 (figure 15). The second floor of this range, with its eastern corridor lit by continuous windows, is an addition of 1933-43 in the Georgian style which is conspicuous by its absence from photographs of the 1920s (figure 14).

#### **12. Bay-fronted flat-roofed extension to western range**

The bay-fronted flat-roofed extension to the dining room was part of the major refurbishment between 1933 and 1943 which included the addition of the kitchen and dance hall to the north of the courtyard (illus. 7 & 8). It replaced the open-sided elevation depicted on the Goad map of 1933 and photographs of the 1920s (figures 8, 13 & 14).

#### **13. Flat-roofed post-1983 function lounge behind no.117**

The flat-roofed function room was built behind no. 117 on the site of series of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century outbuildings in or soon after 1984 (illus. 6 & 20). Ownership of no. 117 is understood to have merged with that of the hotel in 1982. The black-painted beams of its interior are false.

#### **14. 20<sup>th</sup> century northern block**

The northern range of the courtyard was built as part of a major refurbishment between 1933 and 1943, replacing the stable shown in photographs of the 1920s (figures 13 & 14). The brick structure on the corner of George Street and the car park dates from the same period, as does the projecting block in the angle of the kitchen and dining room (containing rooms 205 & 407). The Goad maps demonstrate that the lower storey was designed as a spacious new kitchen, which it remains today, and the first floor as a large dance hall which has since been converted into bedrooms. Many original metal-framed Crittall windows still survive, and contrast with the red-brick second floor which was added in or soon after 1984 (illus. 5).

#### **15. Adjoining property at 117 High Street**

Until 1982 the adjoining property at 117 High Street was in separate ownership and operated as a Public House. The building is listed at grade II as a 16<sup>th</sup> century structure in conjunction with no. 118 to the west, with which it appears to be integral despite different 19<sup>th</sup> century facades. Both properties contain high-status timber frames with closely spaced studs and rose to three storeys with jettied first and second floors. The roof of 117 has been rebuilt and contains room 310 of the hotel, but a remarkable original structure which combines crown-posts, wind-braced butt-purlins and queen posts survives in 118. Normal roofs would contain only one of these. The ground storeys are understood to contain evidence of original shop facades. A brick cellar beneath 117 consists largely of



19<sup>th</sup> century brickwork but a section of 16<sup>th</sup> or early-17<sup>th</sup> century brickwork with a fragmentary arched niche is preserved in its northern wall (immediately to the left on entering). The timber-framed eastern wall of this building is exposed in bedrooms 503 and 307 (illus. 25 & 26), but the extent to which any original fabric survives on the ground floor is unclear.



**Illus. 3. The eastern range facing George Street, built in several stages. The section to the left of the gateway (7) is a 15<sup>th</sup> century addition retaining its original crown-post roof (illus. 27), while the gateway – only blocked in the 1930s – is either contemporary or a slightly later addition with a rebuilt roof (8). Both structures have lost jetties and the gate posts contain mortises for foot-braces that projected into the street. The two structures of different heights to the right of the gate are of rendered brick, probably of the 18<sup>th</sup> century but with 19<sup>th</sup> century roofs (9 & 10).**

### **Cellars beneath areas 1-6**

A large medieval cellar lies beneath the entire High Street range, extending to 48 ft in length by 38.5 ft in width and divided by a 2 ft thick central spine wall. Its ceiling is supported by two ranks of five massive oak binding joists, each approximately 14 ins square, with flat-sectioned common joists of 8 ins by 6 lodged on top. The use of lodged joists resting on top of the principals, rather than tenoned to their sides, is a technique normally found only in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and before, so the cellars may be exceptionally early features which pre-date the inn above. Medieval cellars with timber as opposed to vaulted stone or brick ceilings are rare, however, and it may be that lodged joists were considered stronger and more appropriate in areas without readily available stone even during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A smaller cellar of identical construction survives beneath Rebow House in Head Street Colchester, complete with tenoned brackets resting on stone corbels which project from the flint-rubble walls. The original wall fabric at the George is almost entirely hidden by 20<sup>th</sup> century render and dry-lining, but also consists of flint-rubble with no obvious sign of brickwork where it remains exposed beneath the modern stair which descended from the front lounge (area 5). This render dates from the late-20<sup>th</sup> century conversion of the front cellar into a ‘carvery’ (i.e. a dining area), which according to the historic notes issued by the hotel to visitors occurred ‘around 1979’. The cellar is likely to

have been accessible from the street initially, but any evidence of original access points is hidden or lost.

The front and rear ranges are linked by a doorway with a two-centred (pointed) arch which pierces the spine wall. The plaster of this 13<sup>th</sup>-century style arch is modern, but a small area of decay appears to have exposed stonework beneath and it may be genuine. The survey of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments of England published in 1922 describes rubble walls and a doorway in the dividing wall with chamfered jambs and a 'two-centred head of brick' – which for some reason it dates to the early-16<sup>th</sup> century (when much flatter arches of three or four centres were fashionable). The commission also notes that 'in the same wall are two fireplaces with four-centred heads and each with a vent hole above the arch; there are also two early-16<sup>th</sup> century niches in the cellar, one with a two and one with a four-centred head.' 'Medieval cellars with fireplaces' are also specifically mentioned in the listing description of 1950 (which is otherwise uninformative), but these remarkable fireplaces are sadly no longer apparent, although a pair of recesses resembling relieving arches are visible in the rear side of the spine wall beneath the lounge chimney. Quite how a cellar fireplace could possess a 'vent' is difficult to imagine.

The front (southern) range of the cellar differs slightly from the rear, with a uniform set of chamfered binding joists, all with bracket mortises. The rear joists are less uniform, with some lacking mortises, although it is unclear whether these are earlier or later in date. The rear range is now sub-divided into various storage compartments but was originally slightly wider than its southern counterpart at approximately 20 ft as opposed to 15 ft, although the latter appears even narrower today as its southern wall has been built out in what appears to be brickwork where the dry-lining allows access. This corresponds with the different widths of the timber-framed rear range above (areas 1-3) which extends to a total of 22.5 ft (exceptionally wide for a medieval hall) and the front range of 18 ft. The presence of an ostensibly medieval cellar beneath areas 5 and 6 suggests that contemporary buildings occupied the ground above, despite the lack of any obvious evidence, although it was not unknown for cellars to extend beneath yards and streets.

## **Historic Development**

The George Hotel is an important medieval building with a long and complex history of expansion and alteration. Impressive elements of its timber frame are exposed within its numerous rooms and roof spaces, but most of the original structure is either lost or hidden by later plaster – making detailed analysis largely a matter for speculation. Many ostensibly early timbers are in fact 20<sup>th</sup> century insertions, particularly on the ground floor, which are nailed in place rather than tenoned and pegged in the medieval tradition. The property can be likened to a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle with 800 pieces missing and an extra 100 pieces from other puzzles – and no illustration on the box. The following account summarises the development of the timber-framed building but does not comment further on the later yard ranges, and is intended to be read in conjunction with the key to figure 19 and the captions of the various figures and illustrations.

### **The first-floor hall**

Two key areas of the medieval building can be recognised with relative ease: an open hall to the rear of the hotel's main lounge and a shop in its front right-hand corner (areas 2 and 4 in figure 18). The great majority of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Britain reflect the three-part plan described in the Appendix of this report (p.42), with a central hall flanked by a parlour on one side and a service (storage) room or rooms on the other. Most halls were



heated by bonfire-like open hearths in the absence of chimneys, and were open to their roof timbers in the manner of barns. The first-floor stair landing above area 2 was a smoky hall of this kind, and crystalline deposits of medieval soot can still be seen on the original timbers adjoining the staircase and on the few original timbers which survive in the opposite wall adjoining area 2f (i.e. room 201) – as shown in illus. 21. The original clay wattle-and-daub between the vertical timbers (studs) of the eastern wall to the left is typical of the region and would have been hidden by a thin layer of lime plaster.



**Illus. 4. The George Street frontage showing the junction between the worn 18<sup>th</sup> century brickwork in Monk Bond (9 & 10) and the new work of the 1930s (i.e. between 1933 and 1943) to the right of the diagonal pipe. The upper courses of the 18<sup>th</sup> century brickwork were renewed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 1980s addition is visible above (14).**

The nature of the framing indicates a date in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century or possibly (but less probably) the very beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup>. The timbers are relatively narrow and widely spaced, at intervals of 27 ins, emphasising the pattern created by the braces which curve downwards from the central stud. More closely spaced studs became fashionable from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with a typical late-15<sup>th</sup> century structure of any quality boasting more oak than wattle-and-daub. The stud spacing of the opposite wall to the right in illus. 21 is identical, although only a single stud behind the room sign appears to remain *in situ* with the positions of the others indicated by mortise pegs in the horizontal timber above. Where a standard 14<sup>th</sup> century hall might extend to 20 ft in length against the street by 18 ft in width this example is unusually short at 13 ft and unusually wide at 21.5 ft internally. Width is an indication of quality and status, but street frontage was expensive even in the Middle Ages.

The hall is divided into two unequal bays by a tie-beam which spans the width of the structure but is now hidden by modern boxing. The beam is clearly in its original position as it retains a curved brace against the front wall (partly obscured by a door in illus. 21) with a mortise for an identical brace in the back wall adjoining the courtyard. The medieval roofs of eastern England were usually supported by posts which rose from the centres of their tie-beams, often with finely carved capitals and bases as they were highly conspicuous features in the most important rooms of the house. The crown-post in this instance is certainly finely carved, but is

not central, lying just 4 ft from the front wall, and therefore cannot be *in situ*. It may have belonged to the hall, although it is more typical of the 15<sup>th</sup> than the 14<sup>th</sup> century and could have been moved from elsewhere. The hotel contains a number of decorative timbers that are known to have been moved or imported in this way, including the carved head shown in illus. 25.

Where almost all open halls are at ground level, with ceilings inserted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the example at the George appears to have been built on the first floor from the outset. This is indicated by the unusually small, high braces to the tie-beam and the presence of what appears to be a pegged mortise for an original ceiling joist just above the present floor level in the rear post. The arch-braces of ground-floor hall often rise from beneath their inserted ceilings. First-floor halls are very rare, but other examples have been discovered in Colchester and they are generally associated with expensive commercial locations where lower storeys were leased as shops and owners or tenants lived upstairs. The social orientation of the space in this instance is unclear, with contradictory evidence: most halls possessed ‘high’ ends where their owners sat at meal times (much like a traditional school hall), and ‘low’ ends adjoining an entrance passage and service rooms, as illustrated in the Appendix. The large hall windows were placed towards the high end to light and ventilate the high table and the tie-beam usually lay closer to the low end to accommodate the windows and allow high-table guests to admire the decorative open truss (i.e. the crown-post and braces). The tie-beam at the George is just 4 ft from the wall that resembles a standard high-end, with a distinct lack of central service doors, yet narrow bays of this kind typically contained low-end cross-passages. The windows evidently lay in the wider bay of 9 ft to the west, which strongly suggests the high-end lay in this direction.

The hall may not have been directly linked to the first-floor room on the east, which could have been reached by the medieval stair in area 4, and probably formed a self-contained domestic unit with no need for its own service rooms. The room to the west may have formed a parlour bedchamber linked to the hall, perhaps with a gateway on the ground floor (as suggested by the position of the inn’s entrance in 1745), and the hall was probably reached by an external stair to either the front or rear which opened into its eastern corner. The ground-floor may have contained additional shops or even another hall of higher status heated by a dedicated chimney. If the structure was designed as an inn the latter is more likely, but whether or not the hall adjoined the High Street or lay behind additional structures above the front range of the cellar is an open question. Unfortunately such is the dearth of evidence that any one of several alternative explanations can be adduced with equal lack of confidence.

### **The medieval shop**

There is clear evidence of at least one and possibly two narrow medieval shops on the corner of George Street and the High Street, each 10 ft long against the latter and approximately 16.5 in depth (area 4). They were originally jettied to both streets, with fashionably overhanging (jutting) upper storeys, but where the George Street overhang has been cut off the lower wall of the High Street was pushed outwards to increase the depth of each space. The two rooms have been combined to create the present lounge but empty stud mortises for the missing central partition are visible in the intact medieval ceiling. The square-sectioned waney nature of these joists with centre-tenon joints is consistent with the late-14<sup>th</sup> century date suggested for the hall – but there is no guarantee the two structures are precisely contemporary. Later 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century joists are normally smaller and of better quality timber (without ‘waney’ edges), reflecting the greater availability of oak in the area after major landscape changes in the wake of the 14<sup>th</sup> century plagues. The moulded beam against the northern wall is a re-used timber that ignores the original partition and was probably inserted to disguise the removal of the back wall.



The window of the shop (to the right in illus. 13) is typical of its period, when shops operated in the same way as modern market stalls with items displayed and traded through their unglazed windows rather than bought inside. The rebate above the opening is likely to have housed the edge of a vertically hinged shutter, or possibly formed a groove with the addition of a nailed strip of wood to secure the upper edges of internal night shutters. The arrangement of the door to the left is less standard, occupying a good deal of space that might have been used for display. In most cases medieval shop doors are very narrow with the rest of their external walls open to the street.

Shops of this kind were often 'lock-ups', rented to traders and lacking internal communication with the rest of their buildings. The western unit contains a trap for a stair rising against its back wall from the hotel's entrance passage, and it is tempting to interpret this space as the service room of a hall and cross-passage in area 5. Such a passage would have continued into area 3 and served the low-end of another hall with the same orientation as the first-floor hall in area 2. This level of complexity is certainly consistent with a major inn, where multiple halls were typically combined with multiple shops, but once again any precise analysis is speculative in the absence of more evidence.



**Illus. 5. The rear (northern) elevation from the car park on the site of the demolished stables. The painted ground and first storeys date from the 1930s, retaining their metal-framed Crittall windows, while the brick upper storey was added in 1984 or later. The green-painted structure to the left also dates from the 1930s. The ground floor originally housed the kitchens while the well-lit first floor was a dance hall (figure 9).**

### **The 17th century High Street range**

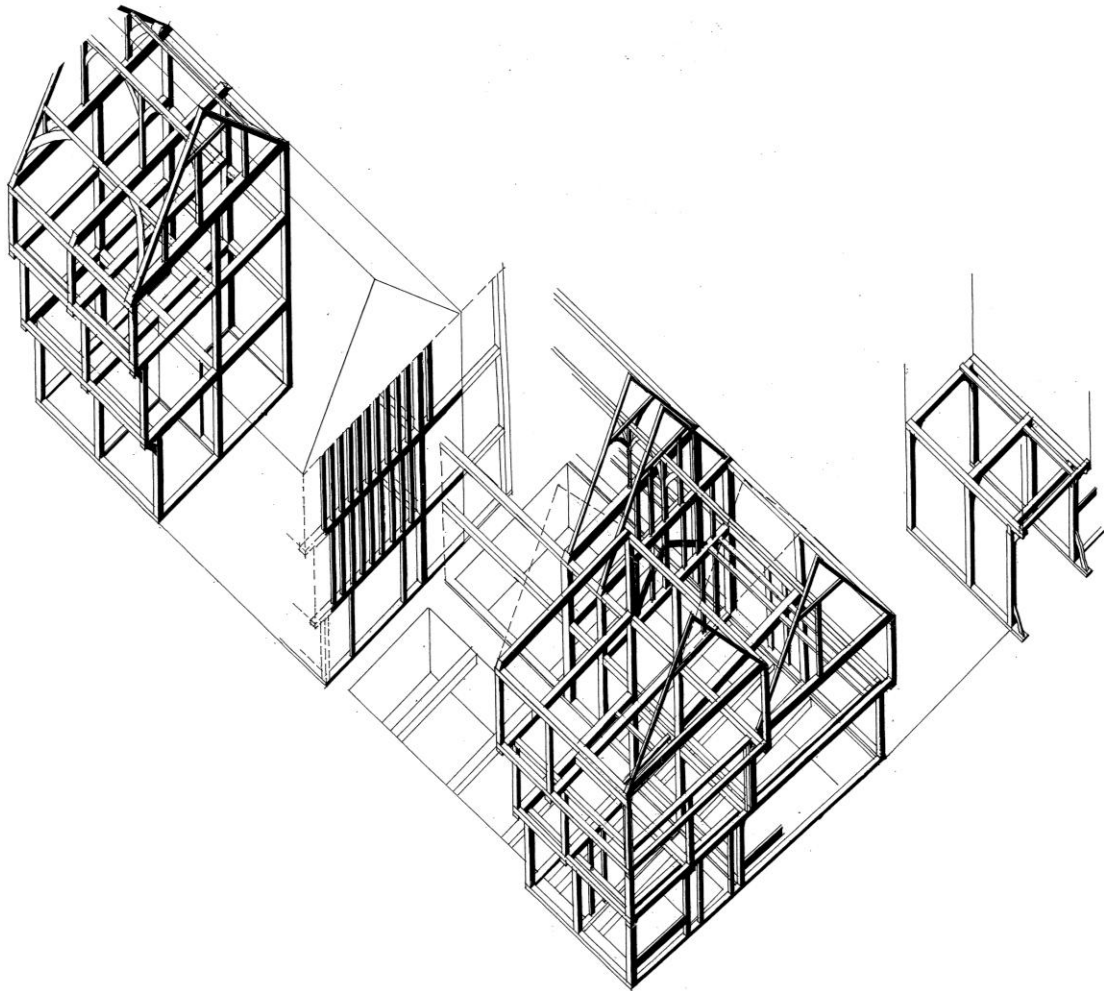
Apart from the gateway in the rear wing adjoining George Street the third area of the building that can be understood with some confidence is the roof over the High Street range. This represents an addition of the late-16<sup>th</sup> or more probably the early-17<sup>th</sup> century and was part of a major refurbishment that transformed the inn's external appearance in much the same way as the present Georgian facade would have done two centuries later.

The new roof consists of re-used timber from older buildings, many of which began life as rafters in a crown-post type roof (without sooting), and is supported by two tiers of butt-purlins which interrupt the rafters. It extends over the late-14<sup>th</sup> century structure (4) at its eastern end and terminates in a gable window 13 ft short of no.117 to the west, confirming the evidence of the 1745 map that a passageway formerly existed here (area 6). It once continued further into George Street, as shown by mortises for truncated purlins, and would have covered the jetty of a new second storey projecting beyond the original medieval jetty of the first floor. The High Street elevation was also jettied on both floors as the southern rafters have been cut off approximately 2 ft from the point at which they would have met the front wall. The Georgians evidently pushed out the first floor jetties and cut off the second to achieve the present uniform facade of *circa* 1800. The 17<sup>th</sup> century roof may well be contemporary with the wall painting found on the first floor (illus. 22), and is likely to have possessed multiple roof gables facing the High Street in the fashion of its day – although there is no longer any obvious evidence of these. The use of second-hand timber even in the external western gable suggests the frame was plastered and pargeted rather than exposed to view – in contrast to the medieval structure. With the exception of the George Street extension (7 & 8) the various gabled roofs to the rear of the High Street range appear to date only from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and consist chiefly of machine-sawn softwood. The lack of any pre-17<sup>th</sup> century framing in areas 5 and 6 suggest the new 17<sup>th</sup> century structure either replaced whatever might have stood above the front cellar hitherto or was inserted into an empty yard between no. 117 and area 4. A distinct lack of weathering to the timbers of no.117 strongly suggests they were not exposed to the elements for a century or more, as would have been the case if nothing lay alongside; the original surfaces of the wall studs are so well preserved in room 307 on the second floor that their original incised carpenter's Roman numerals are still clearly visible. They would have been protected by external plaster from the early-17<sup>th</sup> century, but such is the extent of preservation that any missing medieval street range may even have risen to three stories rather than just two.



**Illus. 6. The flat-roof of the function room of 1984 or later (13) looking south to the early-16<sup>th</sup> century structure of nos. 117 (left) and 118. No. 117 is understood to have been purchased by the owners of the George in 1982, thereby facilitating its westward expansion. The slate-roofed pebble-dashed western range of the courtyard on the left was first built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (after 1848 and before 1876) but its upper storey is not shown in early-20<sup>th</sup> century photographs (figures 13 & 14) and was presumably added in the 1930s, albeit in a more traditional style.**





**Figure 20**

A reconstruction drawing by D. F. Stenning, formerly Essex County Council's historic building's officer, showing a bird's eye view of the timber frame from the corner of the High Street on the left and George Street on the right.

This drawing was made on the basis of a partial survey and omits a number of features including the 15<sup>th</sup> century crown-post roof which links the George Street gateway on the right to rest of the building. Note the foot-braces to the gateway and the door and sill of the corner shop window. The rear range of the inn (area 3) is shown as gabled to George Street but evidence in its northern wall suggests it was either three-storied or more probably gabled towards the High Street. The corner shop may also have been gabled towards the High Street before the second floor and roof were added in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The drawing omits the bay or cross-wing at the western end of the first-floor hall (area 1) and shows the octagonal crown-post in the centre of the hall's tie-beam. The High Street range of the cellar is less narrow than depicted here and it is likely that it lay beneath another range of buildings rather than an open yard – particularly as the closely-spaced studs of no.117's gable are not weathered. The double-jettied structure to the extreme left represents no.118 with its exceptional early-16<sup>th</sup> century roof – which may have extended to no.117. The ground-floor timbers of no.117 are omitted as there is no firm evidence for their arrangement where they adjoin the inn (i.e. against areas 1 & 6).

## Historic Significance

The George is an important but tantalising medieval building that fully justifies its ‘starred’ listing. It preserves a number of major historic features such as its rare first-floor hall, shop front and exceptionally large cellars, but its precise original layout is difficult to reconstruct given the limited extent to which the framing is exposed elsewhere – particularly on the ground floor. More evidence is likely to survive within the walls and ceilings of the historic areas (1-8 in figure 18), and may come to light during any future refurbishment. The remaining buildings of the rear courtyard are significantly later in date and of more limited historic value, although the external brickwork of the former stable range to the north of the medieval gateway (9-10) retains considerable character despite its many alterations. Perhaps the greatest significance of the George is the extent to which it illustrates the scale and complexity of medieval inns in the heart of a major town. The great majority of commercial buildings of this kind were entirely rebuilt in the 16<sup>th</sup> century or later, and even fragmentary examples of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries are nationally rare.



**Illus. 7. The courtyard seen from the south, with the 15<sup>th</sup> century gateway (8) on the right and the bay-fronted flat-roofed extension of 1933-1943 to the formerly open-sided mid-19<sup>th</sup> century western range on the left. The latter's top storey, with its Georgian-style continuous windows, was probably added at the same time. The tall block in the rear is also part of the 1930s kitchen range, shown in 1943 but not 1933 (figures 8 & 9).**

*Leigh Alston is a building archaeologist and architectural historian who lectures on the analysis and recording of timber-framed structures in the Department of Archaeology at Cambridge University, but also undertakes commissions on a freelance basis for the National Trust and various county archaeological units. He co-founded the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group in 1993 and served as Chairman for 13 years. Publications include 'Late Medieval Workshops in East Anglia' in 'The Vernacular Workshop' edited by Paul Barnwell & Malcolm Airs (Council for British Archaeology and English Heritage, 2004) and the National Trust guidebook to Lavenham Guildhall.*

**Additional photographs follow on pp. 29-41**



### **Additional Photographs (pp. 29-41)**



**Illus. 8. The courtyard seen from the north , with the bow-front extension of 1933-43 on the right and the flat-roofed porch of the same date in the rear. This porch replaced a much larger, open-sided structure which filled the width of the yard and protected the external entrance to the cellar.**



**Illus. 9. The brick structure at the northern end of the courtyard's eastern range (9), with the gateway on the right. The brickwork is laid in Monk Bond (two stretchers between each header) and may date from as early as the late-17<sup>th</sup> century, but has been much altered. A stable door opens into the ground storey in figure 13.**





**Illus. 10.** The front (southern) section of the cellar viewed from the east, showing its massive 14 inch square ceiling joists with mortises for missing brackets at both ends. These brackets were presumably supported by missing corbel blocks in the walls. The 1922 Royal Commission describes two fireplaces with four-centred heads and ‘vent holes’ above their arches in the central spine wall on the right, along with a door beneath a two-centred brick arch that presumably equates to the present pointed doorway. The original wall fabric is now hidden by modern plaster and dry-lining.



**Illus. 11.** The southern wall of the cellar showing the 20<sup>th</sup> century staircase descending from the lounge above (area 5). This staircase is understood to have been blocked during the most recent refurbishment in the 1990s. The glazed niche in the original flint-rubble wall to the left exposes layers of archaeology which may include a Roman gravel pavement but not the reputed Boudiccan destruction layer.





**Illus. 12.** A detail of the ceiling in the rear (northern) half of the cellar, viewed from the east (in the maintenance workshop). The common joists are lodged on top of the principal joist rather than tenoned to it, in a manner usually found only in the 13<sup>th</sup> century or before. Some of the rear principals contain bracket mortises but others don't.



**Illus. 13.** The fine late-14<sup>th</sup> or early-15<sup>th</sup> century shop front in the eastern wall of the corner lounge (4). The right hand section was an open arched window, now with a later central post, and the two vertical studs on the left are the jambs of a blocked door. The two left-hand corner brackets are modern copies of the originals on the right. The moulded rail on the left is a re-used timber similar to others in the roof and the front wall on the right was formerly jettied but has been pushed out into the High Street. The roughly hewn, square joists are typical of the Middle Ages and are rare survivors in Colchester.





**Illus. 14. The ceiling of the lounge on the corner of the High Street and George Street (4) viewed from the east. The central supporting beam is modern (possibly a boxed RSJ), but empty mortises for a missing original wall dividing the corner shop from another narrow room are visible immediately in front. A blocked trap is visible in the bottom right-hand corner for an original stair rising from the modern passage (illus. 15).**



**Illus. 15. The hotel entrance seen from the High Street to the south. The timbers on the right are false but are likely to occupy the position of an original wall with a door to the left opening onto a staircase (the trap of which is shown in illus. 14). This area now lies beneath the 17<sup>th</sup> century roof but may have formed a medieval cross-passage.**





**Illus. 16.** The hotel's reception area (3) showing the Victorian Mock Gothic staircase on the left and the entrance passage on the extreme right. This area formed part of the medieval structure and must have been sub-divided, but has been much altered and concealed. The cut-off ends of the jettied ceiling joists adjoining George Street are visible above the staircase, and both posts on the right appear to be later insertions.



**Illus. 17.** The front lounge showing the central 15<sup>th</sup> century-style fireplace resting on the spine wall of the cellar. Whether this chimney contains any early fabric is unclear. This area (5) lies beneath the 17<sup>th</sup> century roof with a window above the brown-painted ceiling beam on the left, and the area occupied by the bar (6) beyond was an open passage linking the High Street to the rear yard as shown in 1745 (figure 3).





**Illus. 18.** The main bar seen from the east. This area (1) may have formed a medieval parlour, with a dividing wall beneath the brown-painted ceiling beam at top left, but has been much altered. The wall behind the bar adjoins the neighbouring early-16<sup>th</sup> century structure at no. 117, but without further investigation of the fabric it is unclear whether its widely spaced studs are *in situ* or later insertions.

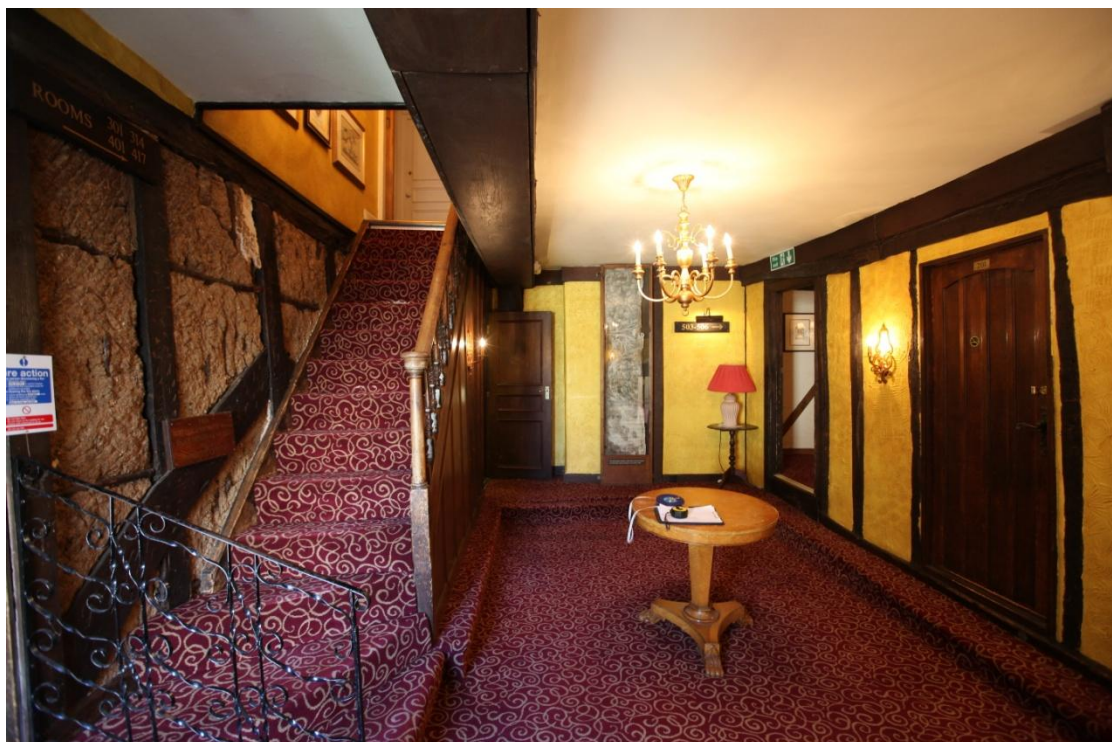


**Illus. 19.** The dining room in the western range (11), seen from the north with the bow-fronted extension of 1933-43 (12) on the left. This range dates from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (1848-1876) with no evidence of the smaller, earlier structure which occupied its southern end. Each ceiling beam contains two mortises for vertical supporting posts, suggesting this space was designed as an open cart lodge divided into narrow bays.





**Illus. 20.** The flat-roofed function room behind no. 117, seen from the north. This part of the inn was added in or after 1984 and its black-painted beams are not genuine.

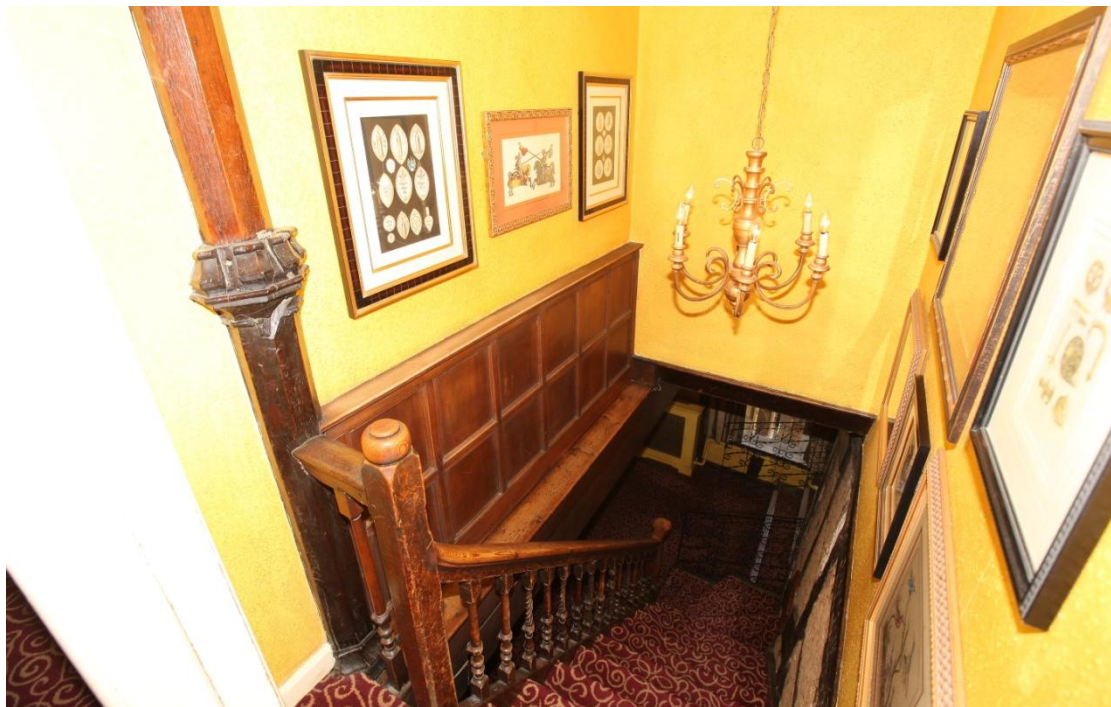


**Illus. 21.** The narrow late-14<sup>th</sup> century first-floor open hall (2f) seen from the north. This area was open to its missing roof and heated by a bonfire-like open hearth – presumably on a stone or tile base. The timbers on the left, complete with original wattle-and-daub, are still encrusted with soot, as is the tie-beam and the one original stud which survives *in situ* to the right. The tie-beam in the ceiling is boxed in, but supports the crown-post in illus. 23. This beam is supported by a small original arch-brace to the south (partly hidden by the door in the centre), with evidence of another to the north. Medieval first-floor halls of this kind are exceptionally rare and of great historic importance.





**Illus. 22.** A detail of the late-16<sup>th</sup> or (more probably) early-17<sup>th</sup> century wall painting displayed in a cabinet on the stair landing (illus. 21). The foliate design with cherubs in black and white (a style known as grisaille) is typical its period, and would have covered the room like wall paper. It is understood to have been found in 1984 in the adjoining room (presumably 502 or possibly 201), where more survives behind modern dry-lining.



**Illus. 23.** The medieval crown-post on the tie-beam of the first-floor hall (left), photographed from the later upper storey to the south. This would have supported the missing medieval roof but is not central to its tie-beam, which spans the hall of 21.5 ft internally, lying just 4 ft from the southern wall, and therefore cannot be *in situ*. The top section is modern. See figure 16.





**Illus. 24. A detail of the carved crenellated capital of the crown post. This is a fine piece of medieval carving which may be contemporary with the late-14<sup>th</sup> century hall but is also consistent with a 15<sup>th</sup> century date. It is not *in situ* and there is no guarantee it was not re-used from elsewhere like many other timbers in the inn.**



**Illus. 25. The carved late-medieval or early-16<sup>th</sup> century corbel block which is integral to the post supporting the main east-west ceiling beam of room 503 in the southern range (6f). In 1922 the Royal Commission wrote ‘On the ground floor the kitchen has a ceiling-beam with a curved brace resting on a corbel carved with a bearded head’. The kitchen may have been the area beneath the first-floor hall (2), which is likely to have been the principal room of the medieval inn. The ceiling of room 503 is a later insertion consisting almost entirely of re-used timber and appears to occupy the ‘gap’ of 1745. The incised patterns in its plaster are modern.**





**Illus. 26. The closely spaced early-16<sup>th</sup> century studs of the eastern wall of room 307 on the upper storey – immediately above room 503 (6f2). This wall belongs to the adjoining high-status three-storeyed building at no. 117, and the room's inserted ceiling is supported by a later stud resting on its horizontal rail. The end of a jetty-plate is obscured by the chest of drawers to the right, and the roof gable above retains traces of external pargeting (illus. 31) so this room was formerly a gap in the street. The studs are not weathered and Roman carpenter's numerals are still visible at the foot of each.**



**Illus. 27. The plain 15<sup>th</sup> century crown-post in the southern section of the eastern range (7) showing the heavy studs and either the mid-rail or tie-beam of the earlier structure (3) in the rear (but not the roof-plate as studs survive both above and below).**





**Illus. 28. The blocked window in the internal western gable of the 17<sup>th</sup> century roof above the High Street range (i.e. above area 5 on the ground floor, looking east to area 6). The roof structure of staggered butt-purlins consists largely of re-used timber, with the rafters interrupted by the purlins. The feet of the rafters have been truncated by the present High Street wall on the left and originally projected by approximately 18 inches further – forming a jettied second storey. The boarded channel on the right contains modern pipes.**



**Illus. 29. A detail of the blocked 17<sup>th</sup> century window with its two original chamfered mullions *in situ*. The tenoned mullions appear to be plainly chamfered externally as well.**





**Illus. 30.** The exterior of the gable shown in illus. 28, looking east from the later clasped-purlin roof above area 6 on the ground floor, with the blocked window in the centre. The lime plaster is decorated with a basket-weave pattern which pre-dates the blocking of the window and was clearly exposed to the street as indicated in 1745 (figure 3).



**Illus. 31.** The timber-framed wall of no. 117 from the roof above area 6. The plaster of this wall was also exposed to the street but is not decorated with pargeting. Instead it appears to be covered in a thick layer of brown paint – or dirt. The roof of no. 117 beyond is a later reconstruction visible in the attic room above no. 308.





**Illus. 32. A detail of a re-used carved mid-16<sup>th</sup> century window sill in the 17<sup>th</sup> century roof above room 305 (area 4f2). An apparently naked figure is holding a scroll of leaves. The roof contains many other re-used timbers, including sections of roll-moulded cornice similar to that of area 4 on the ground floor, but no others are carved.**

## Appendix

### The Standard Room Plan of Medieval and Tudor Houses

Although identical houses are rare, almost all domestic buildings constructed between the mid-13<sup>th</sup> and the early-17<sup>th</sup> centuries reflect the same room layout (see accompanying diagram). Until the opening decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the only heated space in a typical house comprised an open hall with an open hearth akin to a bonfire burning on its floor. In the absence of a chimney the hall, as its name suggests, was open to its roof in the manner of a barn to allow smoke to escape through the roof covering and through tall, unglazed windows which rose from normal sill height to eaves level. The hall was a communal space with little or no fixed furniture, and was used as a dining room, a dormitory for household servants and apprentices, and as a kitchen and general purpose working area at varying times of the day. The hall was also designed to display the wealth and status of its owner, and at meal times was arranged like a modern college dining hall, with the head of the household sitting with his immediate family behind the 'high table' at one end, while his servants and employees were arranged in order of precedence at secondary tables along the side walls. The lower an individual's status in the household, the further he sat from the 'high' end of the hall. The high table was often raised on a platform or dais, but contemporary references to the high and low ends of houses relate rather to social than physical hierarchy. Halls were usually divided into two structural bays, separated by a pair of principal posts carrying a tie-beam that spanned the walls at eaves level, with the great windows in the high-end bay towards the dais. Fixing pegs for the high-end bench, which was often attached to the wall, can sometimes be seen in surviving examples. The front and back doors of the house (which often stood open for ventilation purposes) lay opposite each other at the low end of the hall, forming a cross-passage that was partly screened by boarded partitions to exclude the weather.

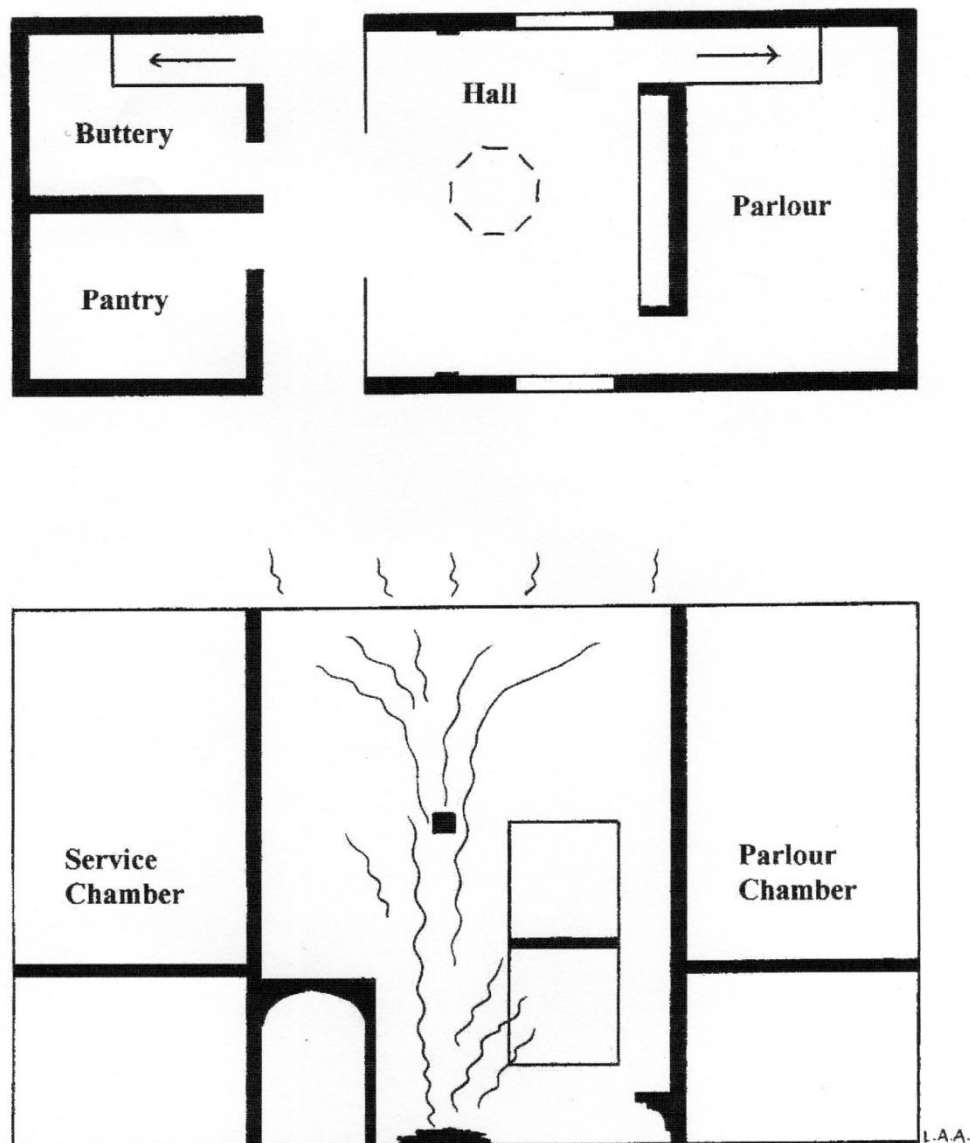
The open hall in the middle of the typical medieval house was flanked by additional rooms that were usually floored over. Beyond the high end of the hall lay a single room known as a parlour, that served as the main bedroom for family members and guests and contained at least one bed (perhaps consisting of nothing more than a straw mattress) and perhaps a few pieces of furniture that normally included a storage chest. The parlour was entered by a door to one side of the high-end bench, and sometimes a second door on the opposite side of the bench opened onto a stair to the solar (upper room) above. Medieval living took place primarily on the relatively warm ground-floor, and the two solars of the house were used chiefly for storage purposes. An increasing demand for domestic privacy during the later 16<sup>th</sup> century saw the provision of additional bedrooms on the first floor, and the 'parlour chamber', as the room over the parlour came to be known, was often provided with its own fireplace. Principal bedrooms, used more and more for sitting and entertaining as well as sleeping, remained downstairs until well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Beyond the low end of the hall lay two service or storage rooms termed butteries and pantries (or collectively as 'spences', i.e. dispensing rooms). As their names suggest, these were used for storing wet and dry goods respectively, and represent the household larder. The front service rooms of town houses often contained shops, and the buttery sometimes served as a dairy in rural contexts. Two doorways lying side by side in the middle of the low-end wall gave access to these rooms, usually in conjunction with a third door against the back wall that opened onto a stair to the service chamber above. Although the original arches of these doorways have frequently been removed, their position may be revealed by the distribution of peg holes used to secure the mortise and tenon joints of the wall timbers.

The tripartite plan described here is found in both large manor houses and small peasant cottages in the countryside, but is sometimes condensed in towns where houses consisting of only a hall and subdivided parlour (or occasionally a hall with service rooms) may be found. Houses of high status might also possess rear courtyards, containing additional



accommodation or perhaps bake-houses and workshops, but rarely add to the tripartite arrangement in their main ranges. Rectangular houses under a single roof are common, but more ostentatious town houses frequently contain their parlour and service rooms in relatively expensive cross-wings with jettied gables built at right-angles to their halls. From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century chimney stacks were inserted into open halls, and new houses built with ceilings throughout, but the standard layout endured. By the end of the same century fireplaces were typically provided in parlours as well as halls, and often the parlour chamber was also heated (but rarely the hall chamber). Not until the second quarter of the 17th century did the cross-passage plan begin to disappear from new houses, to be gradually replaced by a number of different layouts of which the 'lobby-entrance', where the main door opens into a narrow 'lobby' in front of a chimney stack between the hall and parlour, was the most common.



### The Standard Medieval House Plan

Some elements of the George are likely to have reflected this layout, albeit in reverse with the service bay to the right of the hall. The present entrance may well have formed a cross-passage with service rooms and shops on the right and one or more halls on the left.