

Significance Assessment

East Hill House, Colchester



Significance Assessment

East Hill House, Colchester

Prepared for

Scott Properties

by

The Architectural History Practice Limited

February 2009

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Historical background	2
3. Architectural description	5
4. Architectural and townscape significance	10

Bibliography/Sources	12
----------------------	----

Appendix 1: East Hill House, ground floor

Appendix 2: East Hill House, first and second floor

Appendix 3: East Hill House, front and rear elevation

Appendix 4: Coach House.

Appendix 5: 1907 alterations to Coach House, east elevation

Appendix 6: 1907 alterations to Coach House, ground floor

Illustrations within text

Figure 1: Detail from James Deane's 1748 map

Figure 2: Detail from an annotated plan based on OS map of 1876

Figure 3: Front elevation

Figure 4: Garden elevation

Figure 5: Main staircase

Figure 6: First floor landing ceiling

Figure 7: First floor landing archway

Figure 8: Coach House viewed from first floor of house

1. Introduction

This significance assessment of East Hill House, Colchester has been commissioned from the Architectural History Practice Limited (AHP) by Martin Scott of Scott Properties, to inform the development of proposals for the alteration and improvement of the building, which has passed into new ownership. East Hill House is a fine 18th century town house, listed grade I and located within the Colchester Town Centre Conservation Area.

In 2006 Colchester Borough Council prepared a Development Brief for East Hill House, then in the course of disposal by Essex County Council. The building lies within the regeneration area known as the St Botolph's Quarter, for which a Masterplan has been adopted by the Council. A new Visual Arts Facility designed by Rafael Vinoly is in the course of construction on land to the south, formerly part of the garden of East Hill House and in more recent years the site of a multi-story car park and a bus station. The Development Brief suggests that East Hill House would lend itself to hotel and restaurant use, and makes various recommendations as regards the safeguarding of important historic features and the scope for adaptation and extension.

Proposals for East Hill House are being prepared by Tim Snow Architects with the requirements of this Development Brief in mind, and this significance assessment has been prepared to inform the development of those proposals. It focuses on East Hill House and its attached and immediate curtilage structures. It includes a brief historical study of the House, placing the building within its context in the development of this part of the town, assesses the significance of the building, and identifies those elements which detract from its special interest and which provide an opportunity for enhancement. The report does *not* include a detailed assessment of the garden setting, which is of archaeological importance and is scheduled as an Ancient Monument. Neither does it include an assessment of garden buildings now demolished or in separate ownership (although these are mentioned in passing).

The report has been written by Andrew Derrick, a Director of AHP. From 1987 to 2002 the writer was an Inspector of Historic Buildings for English Heritage, until 1990 in London and thereafter in East Anglia. From 2002 until 2005 he was Assistant Regional Director at the English Heritage Cambridge office. He is a member of the Institute for Historic Buildings Conservation.

2. Historical background

East Hill House was built by George Wegg the Elder, a Tory attorney (d.1745), and its construction required the removal of nine existing houses. The precise date and architect are not known. The list entry describes the frontage as 'early 18th century' and states that the top storey was added by Wegg in about 1742. In his *History of the English House* (1949), Nathaniel Lloyd suggests a date of 1740.

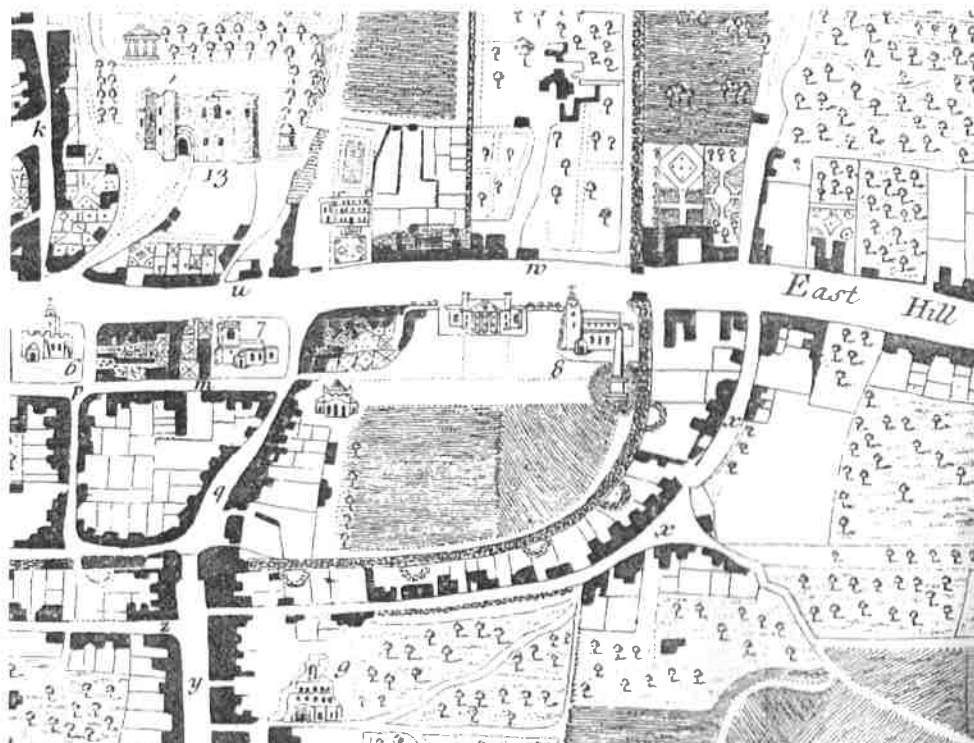


Figure 1: Detail from James Deane's 1748 map (Morant)

The house and its garden are illustrated in Morant's *History and Antiquities of the Most Ancient Town and Borough of Colchester in the County of Essex* of 1748 (figure 1). That map illustration was by the Colchester carpenter and builder James Deane (c. 1699-1765), and Deane is a strong candidate for the design of the house. The list entry for St Martin's House, West Stockwell Street, Colchester (1734), attributes that design, which displays many early 18th century design characteristics, to Deane. To him is also usually attributed the design of the Gothick Summerhouse in the garden of East Hill House (now in the garden of the Minories), and the boundary wall to the east of East Hill House up to St James's church. In 1748 Deane added the west wing to Holly Trees House for Charles Gray M.P., for whom he also carried out adaptations to Colchester Castle in 1760 (notably the dome over the great staircase). In his will, Deane bequeathed his library collection to Gray, including his editions of Serlio and Palladio, Perrault's *Vitruvius* and Batty Langley's *Ancient Masonry*. John Bensusan-Butt has suggested that the design of the segmental doorcase at East Hill House is taken in part from Serlio and in part from the Colchester author William Salmon's *Palladio Londinensis* (first edition 1734), a copy of which was in Deane's possession.¹

¹ Notes deposited at ERO T/P 794/1.

The 1748 map shows East Hill House in its spacious garden setting, previously known as the Berry Field, which extended down to the Roman wall and had not been built on since Roman times. The church of St James the Great lies to the east, and the Castle and Holly Trees House to the northwest. The garden of East Hill House is shown as developed in the 1740s, with an axial walk running east-west terminating to the west with the Gothick summerhouse and in the east to a mound surmounted by an obelisk. The curved boundary wall (on the site of the present Stables and Coach House) marks both the property boundary and the boundary between the parishes of All Saints (to the east) and St James (to the west).

The area of the present road cut through to serve the car park and bus station was developed from the 1750s with warehouses and counting houses for Isaac Boggis, owner of the Minories. The date of construction of the Coach House to East Hill house has not been established, but the building has an early 19th century character and presumably predates 1815, when the then occupant of the Minories demolished the adjoining warehouses and counting house to create a garden area at the side of the property (Bensusan-Butt, 34, see figure 2). Thus was opened up the view of the rear elevation of the Coach House, presumably never intended for display.

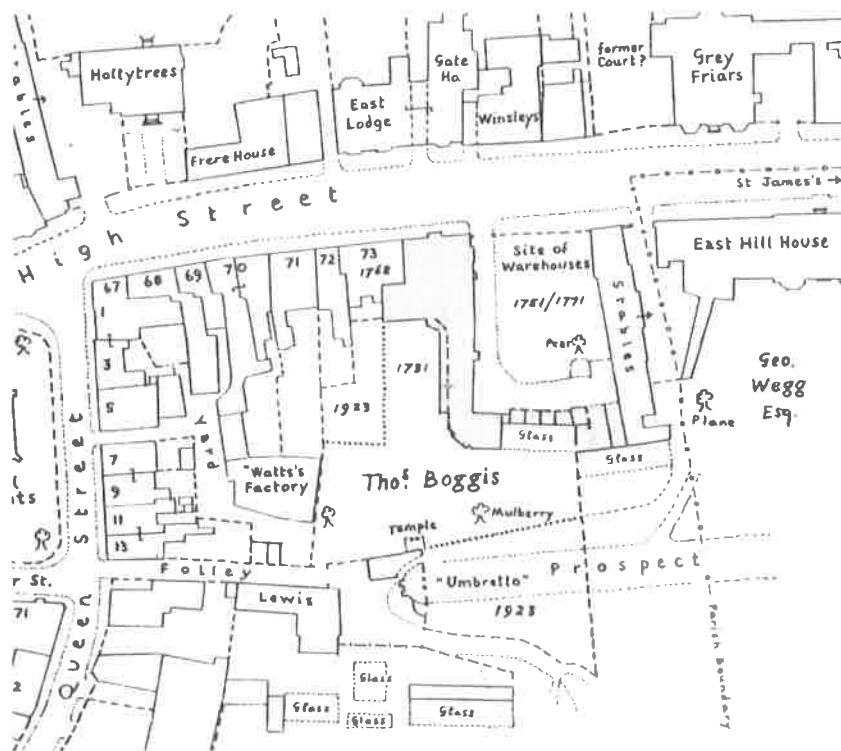


Figure 2: Detail from an annotated plan based on Ordnance Survey map of 1876 (reproduced from *The House that Boggis Built*)

The later history of East Hill House included a period of ownership and occupation by the Round family (principally Margaret Round, widow of the banker George Round, who died in 1857). The fountain set into the boundary wall to the east of the house was given to the town in 1864 by the Rounds.

Drawings in the Essex Record Office show alterations to the Coach House,

approved by the Borough Council in 1907 (Appendix 6 and 7). These drawings are by Henry Everett & Son, Contractors, and were prepared for the then owner, F. R. Round Esq., C.M.G.²

Information on the later history of the house has so far proved elusive. In the 1920s the house became a boys' school and it was later acquired by Essex County Council for use as offices (latterly for social services). In 1960 the Gothic summerhouse was severed from its original garden setting by the construction of the approach road to a new car park and bus station, built on land to the south in 1971-72 after two public inquiries. At the time of writing that area is being redeveloped with a new Visual Arts Facility designed by Rafael Vinoly.

3. Architectural description



Figure 3: Front elevation

East Hill House is listed grade I and the brief list entry reads as follows:

Formerly known as Berryfields. A fine C18 town house with much of its original character preserved. Built in red brick. Early C18 front of 3 storeys (top storey added circa 1742 for George Wegg), 7-window range of double hung sashes with glazing bars in segmental heads; fine central doorcase with segmental pediment enriched frieze and panelled reveals, 8-panel door. Interior has some good features, particularly a fine entrance hall, staircase, panelling and richly decorated and moulded plaster ceilings. The Roman Town Wall forms part of the property boundary.

East Hill House forms a group with All Saints House and Grey Friars.

² ERO D/B6 P63/2455
AHP East Hill House, Colchester
Significance Assessment

The list entry makes no mention of the original flanking wings, which each have three blind brick panels on the street frontage (with inserted windows on the west side) and pedimented returns (figure 3). Neither does it mention the later Coach House to the west or of the former orangery to the east. These are all deemed to be listed by virtue of attachment or falling within the curtilage.

The boundary wall to the east is separately listed in grade II:

C18 wall, extending to St James' churchyard, red brick with stone rustications. Probably by James Deane. Incorporating a drinking fountain with the inscription 'With Joy shall ye draw water 186?'

This wall is matched by a corresponding wall on the west side of the house, which has had later additions built behind it, with the wall punctured by three window openings.



Figure 4: Garden elevation

The third storey addition on the front elevation takes the form of a Mansard roof behind a parapet, the lower slope of which is faced in cement render. On the garden elevation (figure 4) the third storey is a sheer storey of brick, with overhanging eaves. There are two full height bay windows on the garden elevation and a plain central pedimented entrance. The ground floor windows in the bays have had their original glazing bar sashes replaced with plate glass sash windows.

Interior

The interior contains rooms of particularly high quality. The front door leads into a spacious entrance hall running from front to back, with a stone flagged floor and original panelled walls with raised mouldings and swags over the doors. On its right is a large late-19th century neo-Jacobean timber

chimneypiece, with inset blue and white Delft tiles depicting biblical scenes.



Figure 5: Main staircase

The doors are of 6 panels and of high quality (mahogany). At the back of the hall is a fine open well mahogany staircase (figure 5), with three turned balusters per tread, elaborately carved tread ends (see front cover), moulded handrail, columnar newel and ramped dado. This leads to a first floor landing with a high-relief, robustly modelled plaster ceiling (figure 6), moulded wall panels and a wide archway on the landing (figure 7) leading on to the first floor accommodation.



Figure 6: First floor landing ceiling



Figure 7: First floor landing archway

Returning to the ground floor, the main reception rooms give off the entrance hall to the left. Giving off to the right from a panelled lobby is a large reception room, currently subdivided, with delicate plaster decoration of a more Rococo character than that over the main stair. Beyond this is the double height space of the ballroom, also with fine plaster ceilings of Rococo character, as well as a late 19th-century Jacobethan timber chimneypiece (possibly incorporating original elements), pedimented and richly carved overdoors, panelled dado etc. This is the finest room in the house. It leads onto the former orangery, a 19th century structure with a decorative wrought iron roof structure. Its outer walls, presumably originally partly or wholly glazed, have been reclad with a plaster finish and sash windows.

The rooms giving off the right hand side of the hall include two panelled rooms front and back (that at the front with a fine original timber chimneypiece with integral overmantel) and a flight of stairs down to a small cellar. Beyond this was the service accommodation, an area much altered and added to, and containing little of interest.

The first floor contains a suite of panelled bedrooms, several of them subdivided with modern partitions. Many of the original doors have been upgraded for fire protection, and one or two are missing. In the first floor of the original side wing on the west side is a partition wall composed of re-assembled timber framing of unknown provenance.

The second floor does not contain any internal features or fittings of particular significance. One curious feature is the floor, laid directly over the original floor boards, with some furring pieces for levelling.

Chief among the ancillary buildings is the Coach House, of early 19th century character. The main elevation of the central two-storey element facing towards the house has a hipped slate roof with eaves, a projecting central bay,

also with a hipped roof, and a large lunette window, first floor band and infilled openings below. Lower ranges extend to right and left, that to the right containing an original stable door with baluster ventilation in the arch.



Figure 8: Coach House viewed from first floor of house

4. Significance

This section is to be read in conjunction with the coloured plans and elevations attached at Appendix 1-4.

Significance is essentially a hierarchical concept, using descending levels of value. These follow guidelines established by James Semple Kerr (*The Conservation Plan*, 1996), which have been adopted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and others. The levels of significance adopted here are:

- *Exceptional* - important at national to international levels, reflected in the designations of scheduled monuments, grade I and II* listed buildings. Buildings of exceptional significance are not usually susceptible to significant change, other than the removal of negative features where appropriate.
- *Considerable* - important at regional level or sometimes higher, e.g. grade II listed buildings and registered parks and gardens. Considerable care is needed in the adaptation of such buildings and areas.
- *Some* – of local to regional significance e.g. a building or structure that is included in a local (non-statutory) list or makes a strong contribution to a conservation area. The normal presumption is that such buildings and structures should be retained, although there is usually scope for adaptation.
- *Little* – of limited heritage or other value. The removal or adaptation (as appropriate) of such buildings or features is usually possible, provided that an appropriate record is made, care is taken to avoid damage to adjoining historic features or underlying archaeology, and the relevant area is carefully made good.
- *Negative or intrusive* features, i.e. those that actually detract from the value of the site or area. Wherever possible removal of these features is to be encouraged, provided that care is taken to avoid damage to adjoining historic features or underlying archaeology, and the relevant area is carefully made good.

Architectural and historic significance

East Hill House is one of the finest architectural manifestations of the recovery of the Colchester economy in the early 18th century after the depredations of the Civil War. It is listed as a building of special architectural and historic interest in grade I, and as such belongs to a very select group comprising only about 2% of listed buildings. These buildings are defined as 'of particularly great importance to the nation's built heritage: their

significance will generally be beyond dispute'.³ As such, the building is of *exceptional* architectural and historic significance.

However, not all elements of the building are of equal significance, and in order to inform the development of proposals for the conversion of the building, each of these elements has been assessed (see plans attached at appendix 1-4). Broadly, the following hierarchy is suggested:

- *Exceptional*: The original construction, plan form and fitting out (panelling, doors, chimneypieces, staircase, plasterwork, stone flag floors etc).
- *Considerable*: The 1742 second floor addition, non-original but nevertheless elaborate chimneypieces.
- *Some*: The Coach House (exterior) and the former orangery (interior).
- *Little*: The late 19th and early 20th century additions on the west side of the house, interior of the Coach House, external casing of the former orangery.
- *Negative/intrusive*: Modern internal partitions and fire doors/panels, augmentation to staircase handrail on first floor landing, non-original windows in the street elevation on the west side of the house, plate glass sash windows to ground floor bays on garden elevation.

Townscape significance

East Hill House /is prominently located at the bottom of the High Street where it meets East Hill, and lies within the Colchester Town Centre Conservation Area, designated in 1968 (that is, very soon after the 1967 Civic Amenities Act enabled the designation of conservation areas by local authorities). Formerly known as Friars Street (on account of the old Blackfriars), the part of High Street from All Saints' Church to the site of the old East Gate is lined with a series of major town houses of 16th to 18th century date, all listed. These include on the north side:

- Holly Trees, now part of the Castle Park and a museum, a fine red brick house of c. 1717, extended in 1748;
- Gate House and East Lodge (nos.83/84), a picturesque 17th century group with a gabled frontage and rusticated plasterwork;
- Winsley House, an early 18th century timber framed and plastered house;
- Greyfriars, a mid-18th century red brick town house with substantial but respectful early 20th century additions;
- Hillcrest and All Saints House, late 18th century red brick town houses.

On the south side, the setting of East Hill House includes

³ PPG15 *Planning and the Historic Environment* para.3.6

- ❑ Nos. 68-73, a group ranging in date from the 17th to the mid-19th centuries;
- ❑ The Minories (no.74), an early 16th century timber framed house, remodelled in 1776;
- ❑ At the rear of the Minories, a Gothick summerhouse, formerly in the garden of East Hill House;
- ❑ To the east of East Hill House, and just inside the site of the former East Gate, the church of St James, 12th century in origin and with a 15th century tower. Like many early buildings in Colchester, the church incorporates re-used Roman brick.

As the Conservation Area Character Appraisal points out, the frontages of these buildings are not continuous, but they are visually tied together by boundary walls, railings and trees, which together make an important contribution to the character of the street. The one highly negative element in the streetscape is the wide gap created between East Hill House and the Minories for the approach road to the car park and bus station.

East Hill House is the largest of all of these town houses, and the appearance it presents to the street is relatively unaltered (the most regrettable change perhaps being the formation of windows in the side wing and boundary wall on the western side). With its boundary wall to the east, it is an element in the townscape of *exceptional* significance.

Finally, the Coach House is less prominent in the townscape, being set back from the road behind the boundary wall. However, the removal of the buildings previously attached to the east (as long ago as in 1815) and, more significantly, the creation here of the access route to the bus station and car park, has given its rather utilitarian rear elevation a townscape prominence that was not originally foreseen. The shallow hipped roof however makes a positive contribution to the local scene. Overall, the Coach House is considered to be a building of *some* townscape significance, while the modern curved wall in front of it framing the approach to the land at the rear is of *little* significance.

Bibliography/Sources

Bensusan-Butt, J.: *The House that Boggis Built*, Manor Press Ltd, n.d.
 Bettley, J. and Pevsner, N.: *The Buildings of England: Essex*, Yale, 2007
 Colchester Borough Council: *Development Brief for East Hill House, Colchester*, May 2006
 Colvin, H.: *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 1978
 Morant, P.: *The History and Antiquities of the Most Ancient Town and Borough of Colchester in the County of Essex*, 1748, reprinted 1970
 J. Mansell Jagger: *Colchester Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal, Study Area 4*, for Colchester Borough Council, 2007
 Victoria County History: *Essex, Volume IX*, University of London, 1994

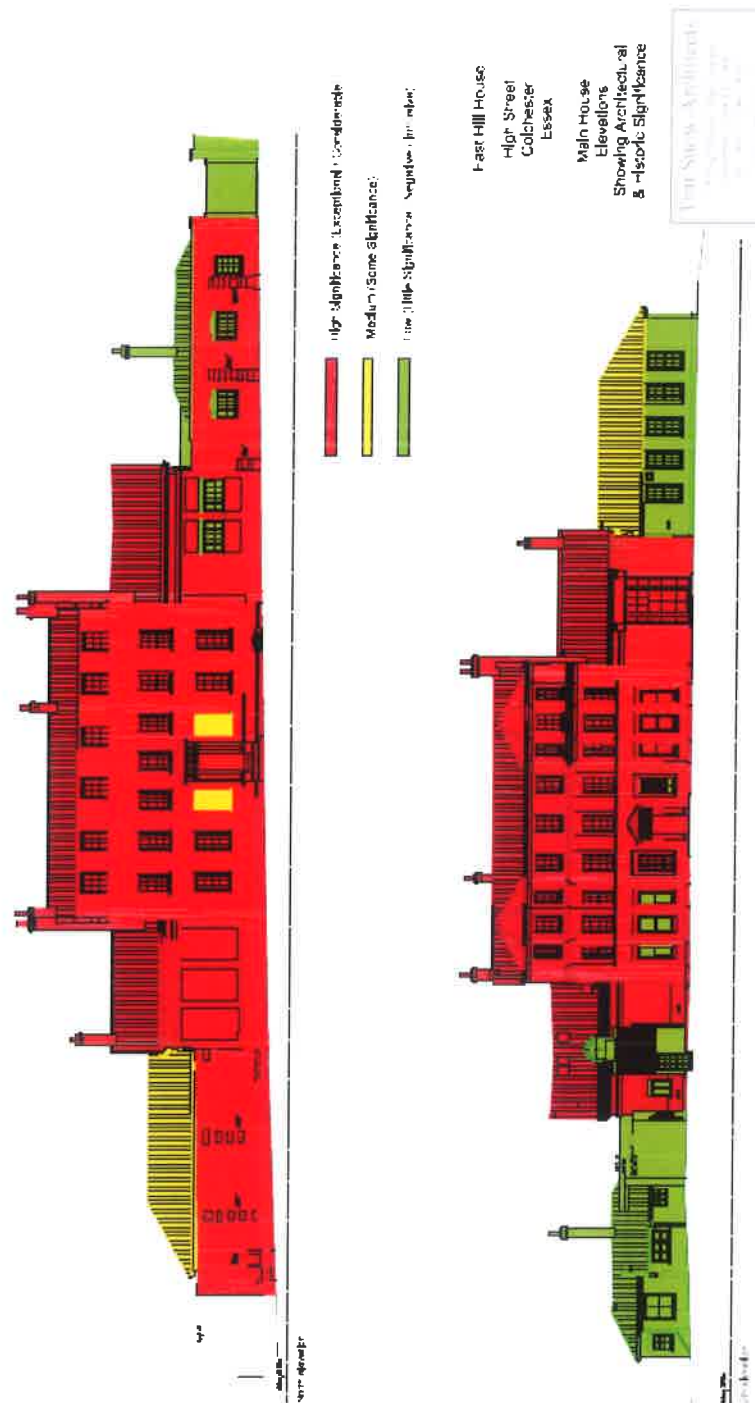
AHP East Hill House, Colchester Significance Assessment



Appendix 2: East Hill House, first and second floor



Appendix 3: East Hill House, front and rear elevation



Appendix 4: Coach House



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



- High Significance (Exceptional / Considerable)
- Medium (Some Significance)
- Low / No Significance (Negative / Intrusive)

East Hill House
High Street
Colchester
Essex

Coach House
Ground &
First Floor
Showing Architectural
& Historic Significance

Tom Sawley Architects
100, Colchester Road
Colchester, Essex CO1 1JL
Tel: 0206 200000
Email: info@sawleyarchitects.co.uk

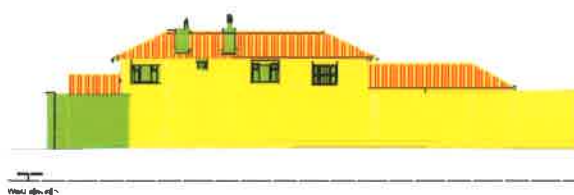
Project No: 552/S/H3



- High Significance (Exceptional / Considerable)
- Medium (Some Significance)
- Low / No Significance (Negative / Intrusive)

East Hill House
High Street
Colchester
Essex

Coach House
Elevations
Showing Architectural
& Historic Significance



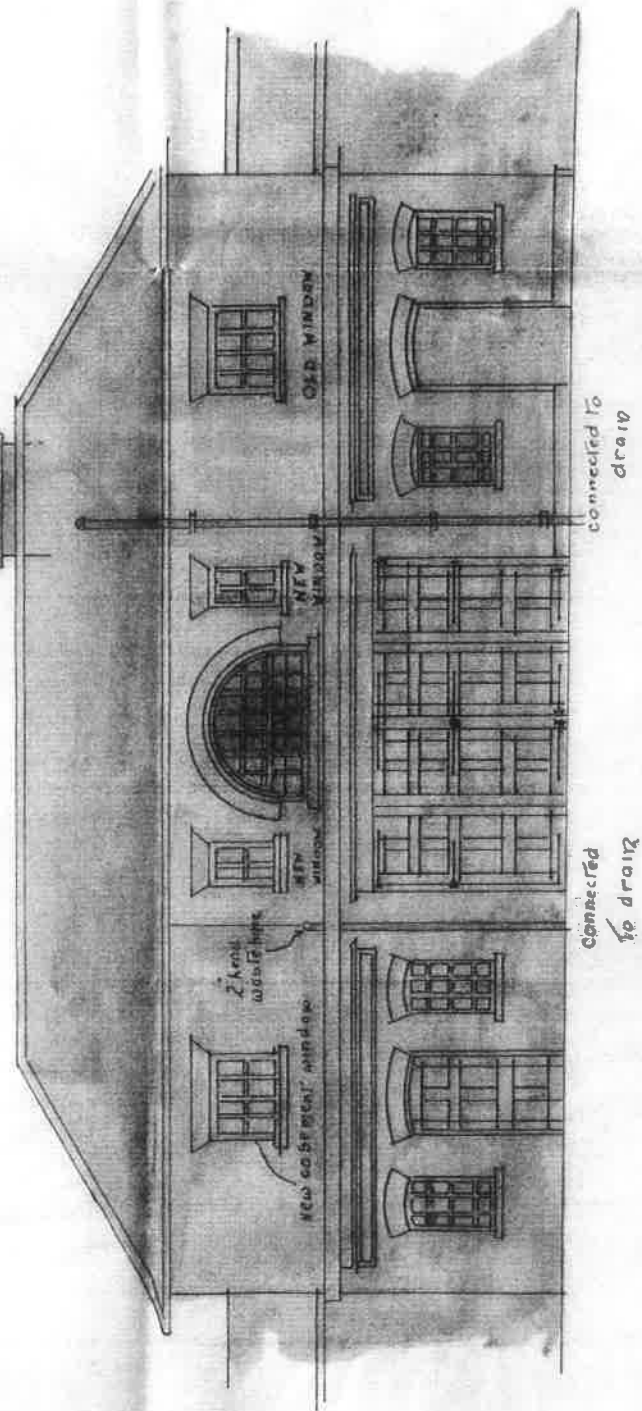
Appendix 5: 1907 alterations to Coach House, east elevation

EAST HILL HOUSE COLCHESTER

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS TO STABLES FOR F.R. ROUND ESQ. C.M.G.

SCALE EIGHT FEET = ONE INCH

3 NEW FLUES FOUR NEW POTS



Appendix 6: 1907 alterations to Coach House, ground floor

