



23-25 High Street Marlow Buckinghamshire

Historic Building Investigation and Recording



July 2008

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23-25 High Street, Marlow

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Prepared by: Simon Underdown
Position: Project Officer - Buildings Archaeology
Date: May 2008

Checked by: Julian Munby
Position: Head of Buildings Archaeology
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Approved by: Julian Munby Signed.....
Position: Head of Buildings Archaeology
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Oxford Archaeology
Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES
t: (0044) 01865 263800 e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk
f: (0044) 01865 793496 w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk
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23-25 HIGH STREET, MARLOW,

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Historic Building Recording**SUMMARY**

Recording of the historic fabric revealed at 23-25 High Street Marlow during redevelopment was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology. This followed a trial trench evaluation in the rear yard of the property.

The property originally consisted of two timber-framed structures located on the high street frontage of long burgage plots in a medieval market town. Firstly a two bay open hall building at the south end of the frontage and later a single bay floored building adjacent to the north, both with queen strut and clasped purlin trusses supporting ridged roofs aligned parallel to the street. A large proportion of the timber-framing survives on the first floor but the southern truss of the south building has been replaced by a brick wall. The north building has no surviving southern truss and may have been built against the north building but this is not certain.

The two buildings were later connected by a doorway cut through a truss and the roof of the north building was raised to match the south one. A floor was inserted in the south building perhaps in the later 16th century.

In the late 18th or earlier 19th century the front walls were replaced with a unified and higher brick facade with parapet and sash windows. At around the same time a new higher front slope was added to the roof and new extensions with ridged roofs at right angles to the main roof were added to the rear, a small south gable being the earliest of these (possibly an earlier phase). The first floor rooms were raised by cutting off the medieval common rafters at collar level and ceilings were inserted at that height. The rear (east) wall was heightened with additional framing but elements of the medieval wallplates are and some early wattle and daub infill panels are preserved within it.

The rest of the early infill of the framing has gone although there are grooves for staves in the ties and collars of the southern trusses. All the trusses contain later studwork for supporting lath and plaster and some of this consists of reused hardwood including some ovolo moulded 17th century window jambs and a few other moulded pieces. This studwork was probably originally an 18th century insertion possibly prior to the heightening of the roof and walls and was extended largely in softwood in the 19th century as part of those major alterations.

On the ground floor less early fabric survives. The only evidence of the early framing is a main post at the north-east corner of the south building, a plate supporting the floor of the north building adjacent to this post has a rebate for a doorhead showing the location of an early rear entrance.

1 INTRODUCTION**1.1 Location****1.2 Commission and scope of work**

- 1.2.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Garrett, McKee, Tebbot & Wells Ltd., on behalf of Comland Ringlead Ltd., to undertake historic building recording

at 23-25 High Street, Marlow, in relation to applications for the refurbishment of the exiting street frontage buildings, demolition of rear buildings and the construction of new dwellings (Planning Application No. 07/5218).

- 1.2.2 A brief was set by the Buckinghamshire County Council Archaeological Officer, requiring that building recording be undertaken should any historic fabric be revealed during stripping out works on the property (BCAS 2007). OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) showing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OA 2008.1). This followed an archaeological evaluation consisting of a single trial trench in the yard at the rear of the property (OA 2008.2). The building recording was commissioned after the rear additions had been demolished and the building stripped out.

1.3 **Location, geology and topography**

- 1.3.1 The town of Marlow is located approximately 6 km south of High Wycombe (Fig. 1) on the north bank of the River Thames. The development site consists of two adjoining shop fronts, and is located centrally within the town. The site is bounded to the south-west by the High Street and by commercial and residential properties on the other three sides. The site is on level ground at approximately 35 m above OD. The site lies on the boundary between the Taplow Terrace gravel to the north and the Flood Plain gravel terrace to the south. Both these deposits are overlaid with alluvium (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no. 255).

1.4 **Designations**

- 1.4.1 The buildings are not statutorily listed but are contained within the Marlow Conservation Area and are also on a non-statutory 'local list' which was prepared by the DoE at the time of statutory list fieldwork in 1972 (Wycombe District Council).

1.5 **Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 1.5.1 There is little evidence for pre-Saxon activity in the near vicinity, with only a small number of finds, mostly material dredged from the Thames, being recovered. Marlow is first documented in 1015; by the time of the Domesday survey the estate had passed from Saxon Earl Algar to Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror, and consisted of a sizable population of 35 villagers, 23 smallholders and 1 slave (Morris 2004). Burgage rights were granted by 1183 along with the right to hold a market, and the settlement subsequently developed into a prosperous market town. The market owed its importance to its location on the high road between Reading and High Wycombe and its position on the River Thames. The hundred rolls of 1278-9 names almost 200 Marlow burgesses (Brown and Hunt, 1994). A medieval hospital (The Hospital of St Thomas) is associated with the town and is thought to be located along 'Spittal Street'.
- 1.5.2 An excavation in 1996 at the Whitbread Brewery site on the opposite side of the High Street revealed settlement evidence from the 11th century onwards, whilst a small number of earlier pottery sherds suggest that occupation may have begun as

early as the 10th-11th centuries (Bonner, 1996). A more recent evaluation to the rear of 25-27 High Street by Thames Valley Archaeological Services revealed a number of post-medieval pits, chalk walls and a small quantity of medieval pottery (TVAS, 2006).

- 1.5.3 The OA evaluation of May 2008, at the rear of 23-25 High Street, revealed layers of post-medieval occupation deposits cut by a chalk block lined feature. This is a probable well, or possibly a cess pit, which had been reused as a rubbish pit in the 19th/20th-centuries. No evidence for any earlier periods, including any possible structures was observed.
- 1.5.4 The site is within Area 1: the medieval core (Fig 2), as defined in the Marlow Conservation Area Character Study (Wycombe District Council). This mainly constitutes the area of The High Street, Spittal Street and West Street, laid out in burgage plots and with an interesting variety of surviving buildings including several with timber-framing behind later facades as is the case with 23-25 High Street; the subject of this report.
- 1.5.5 Presumably the site was originally two separate plots (nos 23 and 25) which were later united and the structures were unified behind the present façade which may be late 18th century or early 19th-century in date. The original plots probably extended further to the north-east perhaps as far as the red line on figure 2, the boundaries are still preserved in the present land division but have been subdivided laterally. By the time of the first edition Ordnance Survey (1880s) the properties were already united (and reduced in length) (Fig. 3). Other maps were not available due to cabinets being sealed due to water damage at the Buckinghamshire Records Centre.
- 1.5.6 A photograph of 1912 (Plate 1) shows the property with awnings over a shopfront, but it is not possible to distinguish the number or nature of the businesses occupying the premises. Prior to this development the property was occupied by a fishmongers and a florists and it is thought that the premises had been used for the sale of fish for over a century.
- 1.5.7 Local Trade Directories were consulted but due to these not being organised street by street and the names of former businesses not being known it was not possible to identify definite references to the properties.

2 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1.1 The building recording was undertaken at Level 3 as defined by English Heritage in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice* (EH, 2006) and the methodology was fully outlined in the WSI submitted by OXFORD Archaeology (OA, 2008.1). The recording strategy consisted of three main elements: a drawn record, a descriptive, written record and a photographic record.

3 **DESCRIPTION**

3.1 **General Layout**

3.1.1 Prior to the present development the ground floor (Fig 4) consisted on the street frontage of one large shop room and, at the north end, a passage way to the rear yard. To the rear was an L-shaped range of later extensions, consisting of several small irregular rooms and entrance passages behind the shop and at the north end a range of storerooms extending eastwards into the yard. These rear extensions which were all demolished prior to the survey were of Victorian and 20th-century inter war date (pers. comm. Tony Mealing). The yard is bounded on the north, east and south by the walls of adjacent properties.

3.1.2 The first floor (Fig 4) consisted on the street frontage of three rooms: two used as bedrooms and the largest to the north used as living room. Connecting the rooms at the rear was a north-south aligned corridor with a bathroom at the south end extending further east. The corridor and bathroom were part of the later extensions which have been demolished. In addition to the demolitions the building was stripped out prior to commencement of the survey.

3.2 **Street Frontage**

3.2.1 The street front façade (Plates 2 & 3), is in rendered whitewashed brick with four first floor windows and a moulded cornice and coped parapet above. Unfortunately the render hides details of the brickwork and window heads that may have helped refine the dating. The parapet hides the roof in views from the street. The four window openings were regularly placed to give a symmetrical façade which belied the three bay rhythm of the earlier building behind. The square windows contained vertical sliding sash casements with large, two over two, panes with horns on upper and lower sashes. The style of the casements is possibly later than the construction of the façade, the larger panes suggesting a mid to later 19th-century date. The ground floor of the façade consists of a modern shopfront and no historic fabric appears to survive here.

3.3 **Roof: exterior**

3.3.1 The main roof is a pitched roof aligned north-to-south along the street; the front slope of the roof was clad in large slates which were mostly removed before the survey was undertaken (Plate 4). The rear slope of the roof has three later gables projecting eastwards from it, these rear roofs were clad in plain clay tiles, again mostly removed prior to the survey (Plate 5).

3.4 **Ground Floor**

3.4.1 Access to the ground floor was very limited as it was being used as a temporary storage for demolition materials. The ground floor consists of the modern shop front and, at the north and south ends, of older brick walls. At the rear the ground floor is largely open due to the demolitions (Plate 6). Any former internal ground floor

divisions below the crossframe/trusses have been removed and replaced with girders. The south wall is of brick and is shared with the adjacent property and continues on the first floor where it contains a chimney breast and fireplace. The north wall divides the shop room from the passage from the street to the yard and runs under the north first floor room. The upper structure is now mostly supported by a steel framework of vertical and horizontal girders. There is a section of brick wall towards the north end of the rear ground floor and this contains the only surviving element of historic timber frame that was seen below the first floor; a mainpost below the central truss or crossframe above. A girding beam runs north from this post and supports the upper wall over the passage way, there is a rebate in the outer face of the plate immediately north of the post and this was probably for the top of a door, and would thus have been the former rear entrance to No. 23 (Plate 7).

3.4.2 The lath and plaster ceiling has been stripped revealing the beam and joists of the floor above and these are described in section 3.5.16 below.

3.5 **First floor**

3.5.1 The first floor is divided into three rooms by two timber crossframe/trusses which were stripped of their lath and plaster covering prior to the survey revealing the historic timber-framing. The north wall also consists of a timber truss with a later brick chimney built against it (for ease of description the trusses will be referred to as trusses one to three, numbering from south to north). The east wall is timber-framed, in the north and central bays the frame has been fully exposed, in the south bay it retains exterior brick infill and internal lime render. The south wall is a later brick gable party wall with the adjacent property and contains a central chimney breast with a 19th century cast-iron fireplace. The west wall consists of the Georgian brick facade with four sash windows as described above. Former lath and plaster ceilings were also removed prior to the survey so the roof structure and its relation to the rest of the frame was visible.

3.5.2 *Timber framing: Phase 1*

3.5.3 The framing is of two main early phases with later extensions and additions. Trusses One and Two are an internal truss and north end truss of a building of at least two bays of which the southern truss is missing and has been replaced (slightly to the south and on a slightly different alignment) by the brick south wall.

3.5.4 The primary form of the trusses in this phase consisted of a cambered tie beam supporting principal rafters with vertical queen struts rising from the tie and supporting a collar. Single side purlins are clasped between the collars and soffits of the principals which are trenched to take the purlins (Plates 9 & 10).

3.5.5 The principals have mortises for windbraces which have been removed as have the portions of the common rafters below the collars to give headroom when the roof was extended later. The braces were not mortised into the purlins as is often seen but were trenched into the backs of the purlins and pegged. There are no mortises on

the north face of the principals in Truss Two suggesting this was the north end of this building although it is possible that there was a further bay without braces. The pairs of common rafters are half lapped at the apex and there is no ridge piece

- 3.5.6 The east queen strut in Truss One is part of a reused wallplate having mortices for studs or staves in the west face and V section rafter seats in the east face. The truss has small empty mortises in the soffits of the collar and tie and V grooves in the upper surfaces of these members for staves or studs for lost earlier wattle and daub infill. This truss, and Truss Two, have been closed later with some nailed hardwood studding consisting of some reused from removed medieval and later elements of the frame and some 'new' waney studding. The two studs between the collar and tie east of the east queen are pieces of reused ovolo moulded window jambs (Plate 11). The western one contains the entire height of the ovolo moulding with the mortises for the top and bottom rails of the window with broken tenons still *in situ*. Both exhibit much greater weathering on the side of the moulding that was exposed to the elements outside. One further central stud below the collar has ovolo moulding and empty mortices. This was probably a window sill or lintel and the mortices were for the mullions. Below the tie one other stud is made from a reused piece of moulded timber..
- 3.5.7 The west queen strut in Truss Two has a redundant mortise in the east face. The east queen strut in this truss has been truncated at about 0.5m below the collar, the truncation cuts through a redundant mortise in the east face of the strut. The tie beam has also been truncated with a large section east of centre missing. The west part of this gap was an earlier access into the adjacent room and has later been filled with a section of plate and reused hardwood studding of the same phase as later hardwood studding in the rest of the truss. The gap to the east below the truncated queen post was a second phase of doorway and this is blocked by later softwood studding. This truss also has V grooves on tie and collar for stave infill but instead of small mortises in the soffit of the collar there are drilled holes but no corresponding holes or mortises for studs in the soffit of the tie.
- 3.5.8 Both trusses and the rafters of this phase are heavily blackened with a residue of what is presumably soot from an open fire suggesting both bays of this building were originally open from the ground up to the roof (Plate 12). In Truss One, the central truss of these two bays, the blackening covers the soffits of the collar between the open mortises and the principals showing that the first phase of infill in this truss was secondary to the construction. There is a similar situation in Truss Two which is more difficult to understand, as if this was the end truss it would have been infilled from the start and therefore the blackening should not extend to soffits of principals and collars where the infill would protect them.
- 3.5.9 As mentioned the southern truss is missing and the south ends of the south pair of purlins are supported by iron straps fixed to elements of the later roof extensions. There was certainly a truss here and not an earlier brick gable as there are trenches in the purlins for braces from principals in this position. It is unlikely that the

building extended further south as the property boundary here probably reflects the ancient burgage plot divisions.

3.5.10 *Timber framing: Phase 2*

3.5.11 Truss Three (Plate 13) at the north end represents a separate construction phase which consists of the truss and roof over the north bay between this truss and truss two. This was presumably built on the adjacent plot which was possibly in different ownership at that time

3.5.12 There is now no trace of a south truss to this phase either and it is uncertain whether a truss has been removed later when the buildings were connected or whether the structure was built against the southern building with no separate truss at that end.

3.5.13 The crossframe/truss is also of queen post and clasped purlin construction like trusses one and two but the differences are that the principals are diminished above the purlins and there were formerly braces below the tie to the mainposts. The braces and posts are missing but the empty mortises for the braces, each cut with an angled outer end and with two peg holes, survive in the tie beam. As with the other trusses any early infill has gone and studs have been nailed in later above and below the tie. The principal rafters have been cut off above the purlins and the roof raised by about 0.3m by removing the purlins from their original position and supporting them on the backs of the principals, this was presumably done to bring the roof up to the level of the southern phase when the buildings were linked. As with the southern phase there are mortises for windbraces in the principals but only one of the purlins has trenches for braces so when the roof was raised there may have been some rebuilding or replacement of elements. It is possible that if there was a southern truss to this building (of which there is now no trace) it may have been removed at the same time that the roof was raised or during the later alterations and some of the reused elements in the other trusses may come from this.

3.5.14 The south ends of the purlins are not joined to the principals of the adjacent truss two but supported by other roof members. The eastern purlin is sagging and in poor condition and is supported by being bolted to a later softwood purlin beam which has been inserted above the rafters and which sits at its south end on the principal rafter of truss two. The rafters and purlins show no discolouration due to smoke and this phase was probably floored from first construction.

3.5.15 Stripping of truss three has also revealed the timber side frame of the adjacent building immediately behind it, this appears to be of later construction of relatively small section studs and braces which are simply butted and nailed.

3.5.16 *First floor structure*

3.5.17 The floor structure of phase 1 consists of a central south-east to north-west aligned spine beam with transverse common joists tenoned into either side of it. The south-west and north-east ends of the joists are supported in the front and rear walls by modern girders.

3.5.18 The joists are hardwood and are 0.09m wide by 0.12m high, the dimensions indicate that they are post-medieval, possibly late 16th century or later in date and were a later insertion into phase 1. They are joined to the spine beam with a dimished haunch tenon joint. The soffits of the joists have lime marks showing that a former lath and plaster ceiling has been removed. The south end of the spine beam (and chimney breast on the floor above) are supported by a girder and iron stanchion (Plate 8). There is trimmer in the centre of the east side of the floor marking the former position of a small chimney. Softwood floorboards, probably of 19th century date, are laid directly on to the joists.

3.5.19 A small section of the floor joists of phase 2 was visible within the ground floor room these were aligned at 90 degrees to the joists of phase 1 and were supported at their south-east ends by an inserted modern steel girder. The joists are of similar dimensions to the those in phase 1. Where the floor runs over the passage to the yard it is covered by modern painted panels and the timbers are not visible.

3.6 **Late alterations to frame and roof**

3.6.1 A new front slope was added to the roof probably at the same time that the facade was added (See plate 4). The added rafters are of softwood and are seated in the front wall about 1.5m above the tie beam and the former eaves level; they sit at a lower angle than the original rafters and rest on boards set on the ridge line of the early roof. At the rear the wall was rebuilt and heightened and the roof extended by means of three gables perpendicular to the main roof; a large central one with smaller ones either side.

3.6.2 There are two phases at least to these rear additions. The first phase may have only involved the south bay, here the wall is infilled externally in brick above and below what is probably the original wallplate. Internally there are two phases of lime infill, the two panels below the old wallplate containing earlier render which may be daub over stave and wattle work. The south part of the south lower panel and the entire wall above the old wallplate has later lime render applied straight to the brickwork (Plate 14). Above this the gable is of two phases; an earlier one in reused hardwood, which incorporates a smoke blackened timber as the north purlin, later extended to the south in softwood later (Plate 15).

3.6.3 The east wall in the other two bays has been rebuilt and heightened with reused hardwood and some softwood studs and plates and the only possibly *in situ* primary material are sections of wallplate now within the wall framing. In the central bay the wallplate has had a section removed at the south for a door into the heightened room (Plate 16) and in the north bay, there are two phases of doorway; an earlier central one which appears to date from the initial rebuilding of the wall and was later blocked with studding and a the present doorway inserted at the south end (Plate 17)

3.6.4 The gables have been added mostly in softwood with reused hardwood being used for the raking queen posts in the central gable truss.

3.6.5 Additional light stud framing was added to the main trusses to fill in the space above the principals which became part of the internal walls when the later roofs were added. In truss three brick infill was added above the western principal rafter. Ceilings were inserted after the roofs were altered by inserting central joists nailed to the underside of the primary purlins and outer joists between the primary purlins and later wallplates (Plate 18). The lower arrises of the primary purlins were flattened off to level up the ceiling, however the sagging east purlin at the north end meant that the joists from the purlin to the wall were set lower than the rest of the ceiling.

4 CONCLUSION

4.1.1 Recording of the historic fabric revealed at 23-25 High Street Marlow during redevelopment was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology. This followed a trial trench evaluation in the rear yard of the property.

4.1.2 The property originally consisted of two timber-framed structures on the street frontage of burgage plots on the high street of a medieval market town; firstly a two bay open hall building at the south end of the frontage and later a single bay floored building at the north, both with queen strut and clasped purlin trusses supporting ridged roofs aligned parallel to the street. A large proportion of the timber-framing survives on the first floor but the southern truss of the south building has been replaced by a brick wall. The north building has no surviving southern truss and may have been built against the north building but this is not certain.

4.1.3 The southern building probably dates to the later 15th or early 16th centuries. The Vernacular Architecture Group (VAG) Dendrochronology database has nine dated examples of halls with clasped purlins ranging from 1448/1477 to 1567/8 with three of these (in Surrey) dating to the early years of the 16th century and three dating to the late 15th century. Five of these are specifically described as having queen struts and these cover the same date range.

4.1.4 The northern building probably postdates the earlier structure by a few decades and probably belongs to the first half or middle period of the 16th century. The VAG database contains more than 20 examples of houses with queen struts, of which the vast majority date to the 16th century and of those about two thirds fall into the first half of the century.

4.1.5 The two buildings were later connected by a doorway cut through a truss and the roof of the north building was raised to match the south one. A floor was inserted in the south building perhaps in the later 16th century.

4.1.6 In the late 18th or earlier 19th century the front walls were replaced with a unified and higher brick facade with parapet and sash windows. At around the same time a new higher front slope was added to the roof and new extensions with ridged roofs at right angles to the main roof were added to the rear, a small south gable being the earliest of these (possibly an earlier phase). The first floor rooms were raised by cutting off the medieval common rafters at collar level and ceilings were inserted at

that height. The rear (east) wall was heightened with additional framing but elements of the medieval wallplates are and some early wattle and daub infill panels are preserved within it.

- 4.1.7 The rest of the early infill of the framing has gone although there are v grooves for staves in the ties and collars of the southern trusses. All the trusses contain later studwork for supporting lath and plaster and some of this consists of reused hardwood including some ovolo moulded 17th century window jambs and a few other moulded pieces. This studwork was probably originally an 18th century insertion possibly prior to the heightening of the roof and walls and was extended largely in softwood in the 19th century as part of those major alterations.
- 4.1.8 On the ground floor less early fabric survives. The only evidence of the early framing is a main post at the north-east corner of the south building, a plate supporting the floor of the north building adjacent to this post has a rebate for a doorhead showing the location of an early rear entrance.
- 4.1.9 The structures may well have been commercial premises from first construction but no firm evidence from the fabric or from historical sources of their former use was ascertained.

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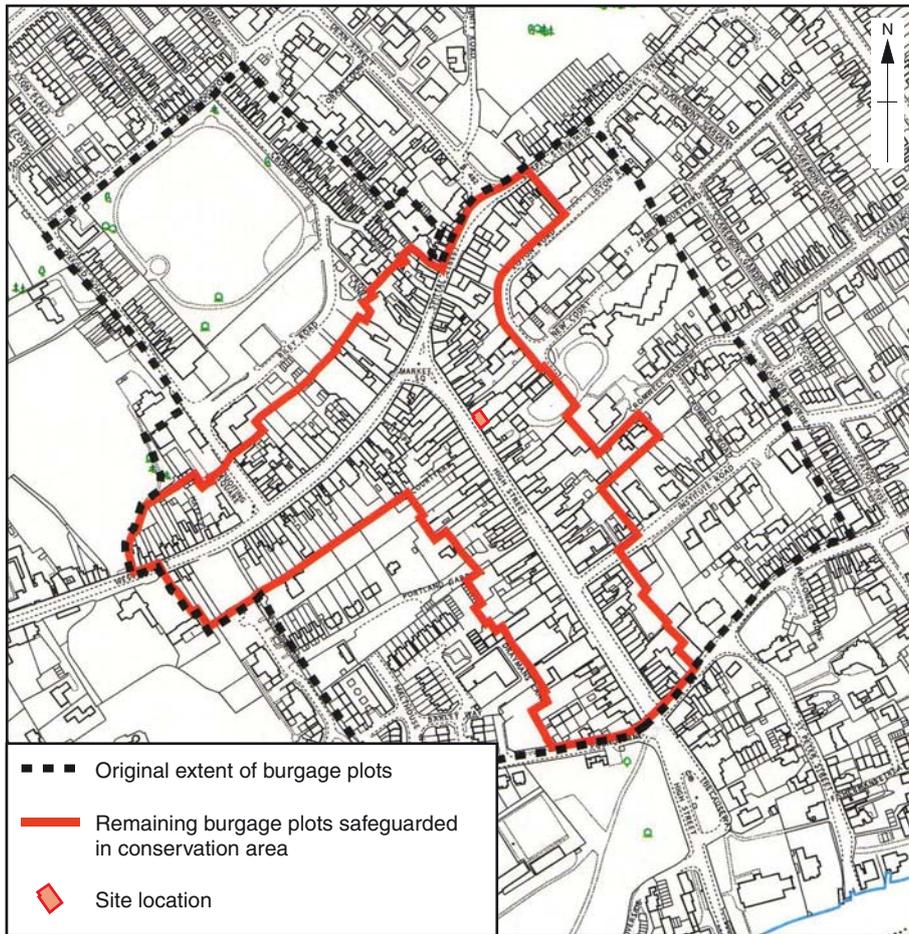
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Vernacular Architecture Group Dendrochronology Database accessed via the Archaeology Data Service website;
<<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/collections/blurbs/282.cfm>>



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Figure 1: Site location



Not to scale

Figure 2: Marlow Conservation Area Historic Core (taken from Marlow Conservation Area Character Study, Wycombe District Council)



Not to scale

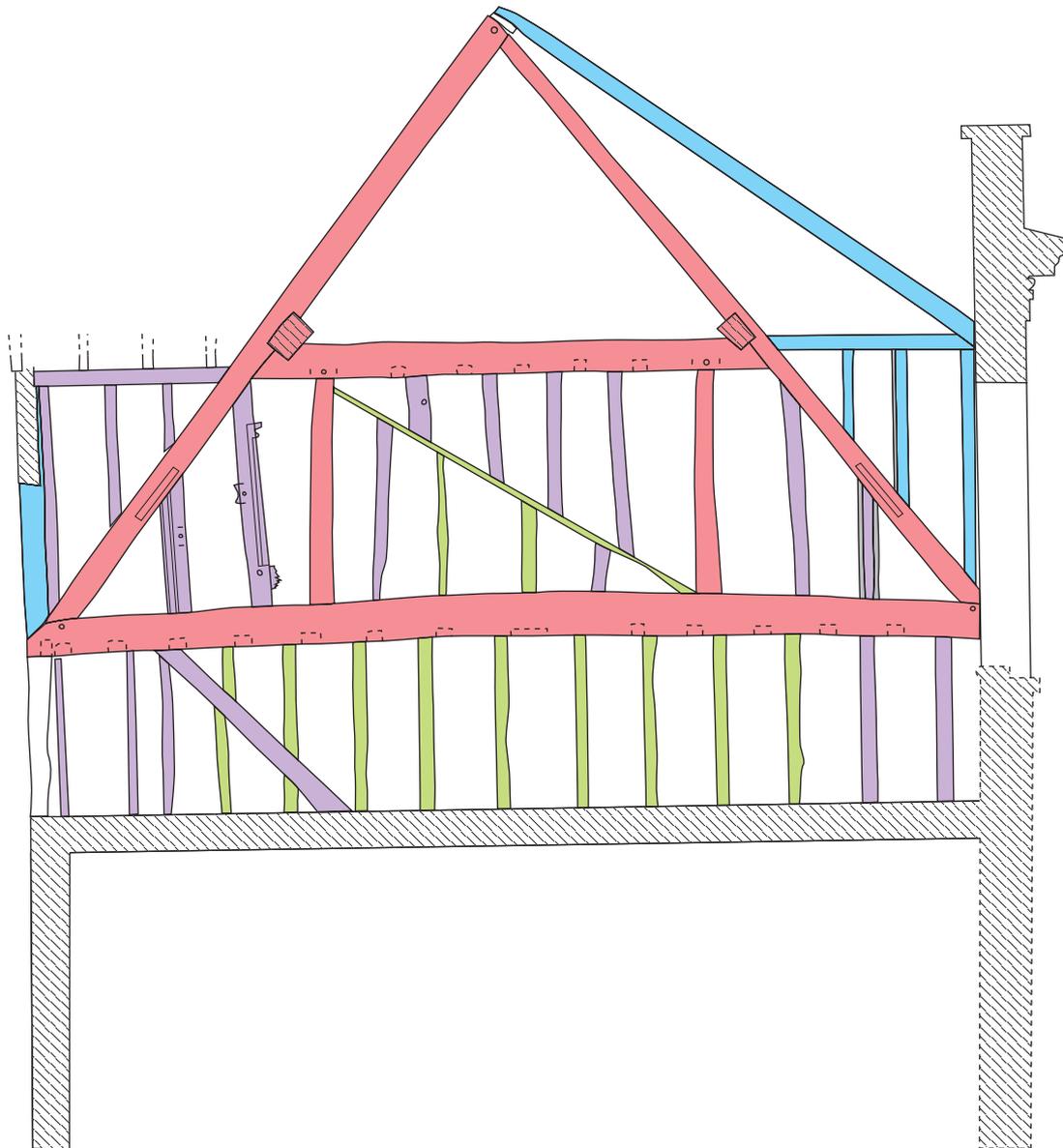
Figure 3: First edition Ordnance Survey

Ground Floor Plan

First Floor Plan



Figure 4: Ground and First Floor Plans



- Key
- Primary phase 1 truss
 - Reused hardwood addition (inserted c.17th century)
 - Hardwood addition (inserted c.18th century)
 - Softwood addition (c.19th century)
 - Projecting from elevation

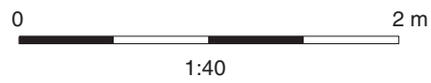
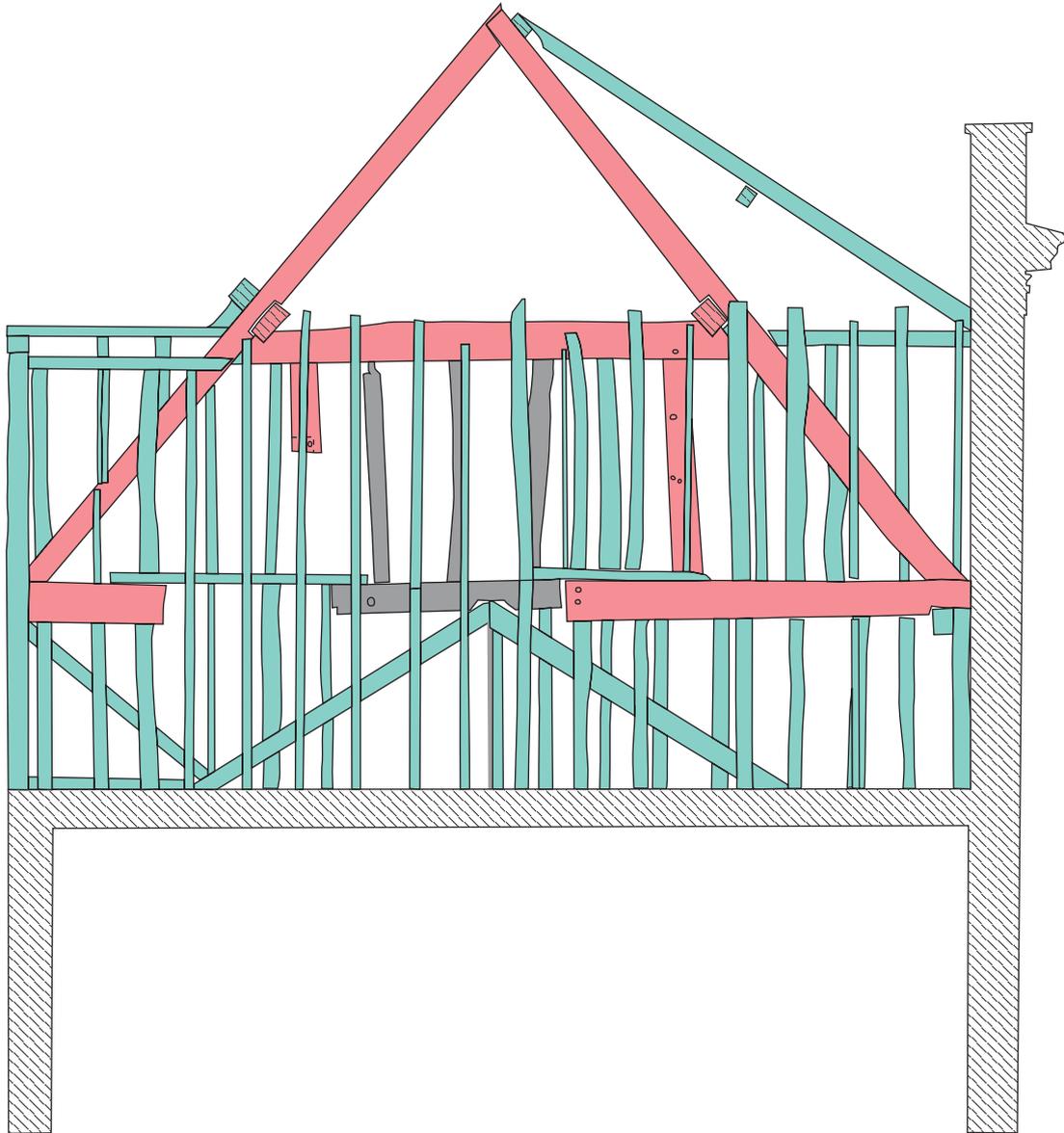


Figure 5: Truss 1: North elevation

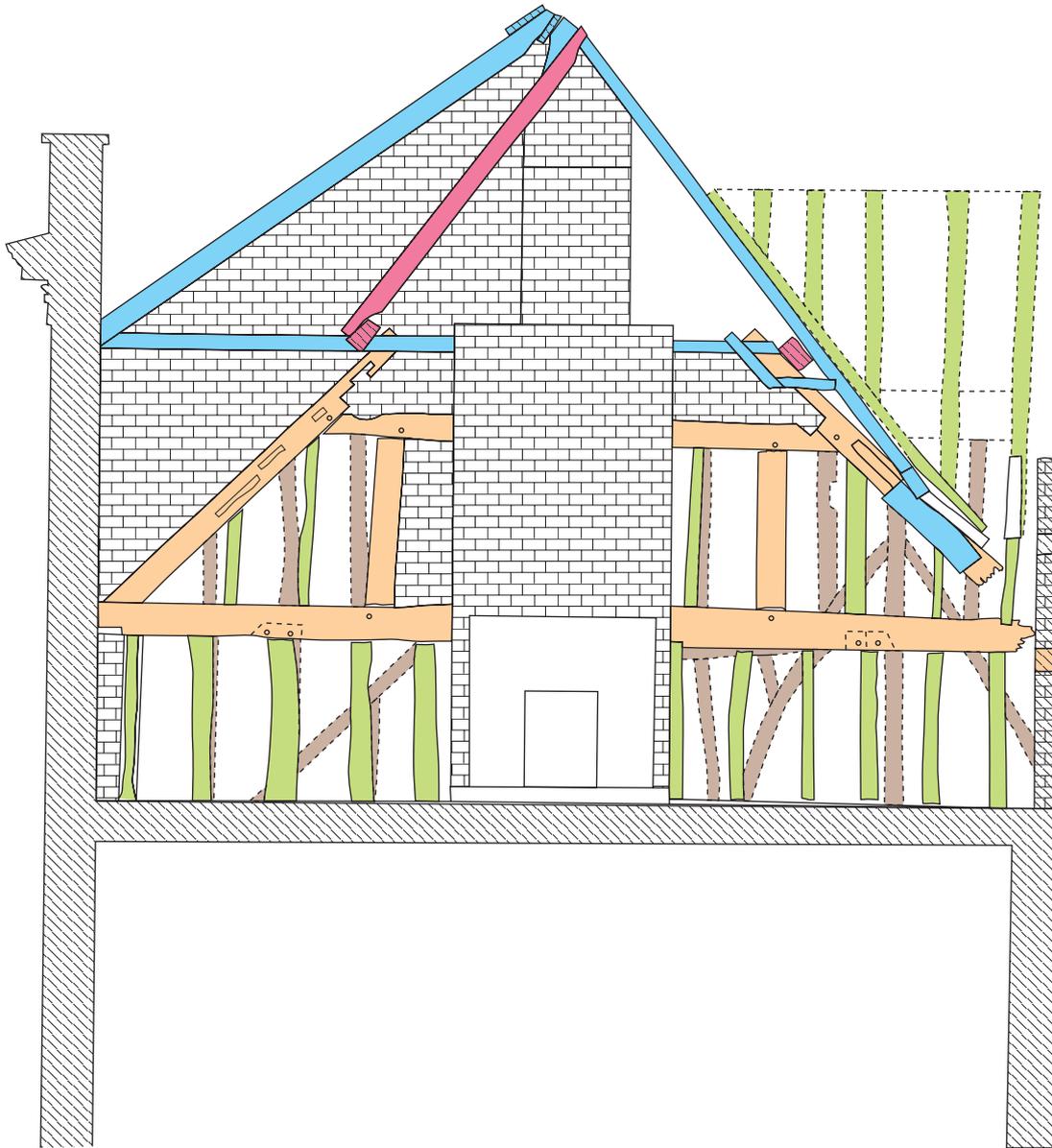


Key

-  Primary phase 1 truss
-  Blocking of later opening in truss
-  Later studwork, bracing etc c.19th century
-  Projecting from elevation



Figure 6: Truss 2: North elevation

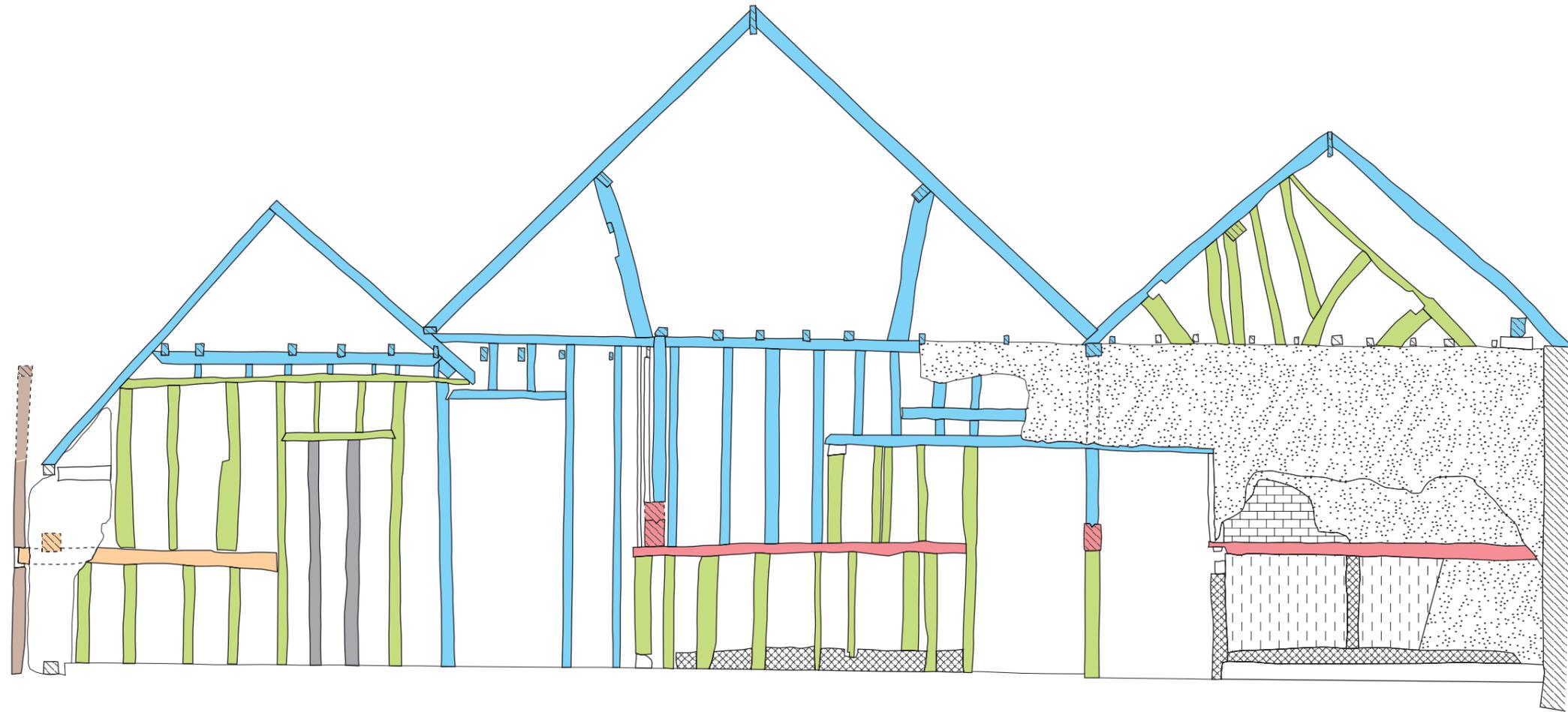


Key

-  Primary truss of phase 2
-  Raised roof of phase 2
-  Frame of adjacent property
-  Inserted studs and rear gable rafters c. 18th century
-  19th century addition
-  Brick chimney stack and infill panels
-  Projecting from elevation



Figure 7: Truss 3: South elevation



Key

-  Phase 1 wall plate and tie
-  Phase 2 wall plate and tie
-  Possible early timber
-  Rebuilt and extension c.18th century
-  Blocking of doorway
-  19th century addition
-  Frame of adjacent building
-  Brick infill
-  Modern plaster or decoration
-  Earlier lime infill
-  Projecting from elevation

0 2 m
1:40

Figure 8: East wall: West (internal) elevation



Plate 1: The High Street in 1912 (No. 23-25 indicated by arrow)



Plate 2: High Street facade during works



Plate 3: Section of first floor facade showing windows



Plate 4: Front slope of roof looking north



Plate 5: Rear slope of roof at north end with later gable extensions



Plate 6: Rear view of building during works



Plate 7: Main post and plate with rebate in rear wall exposed during works



Plate 8: Floor structure; note girder and stanchion supporting bridging beam and chimney breast



Plate 9: South side of truss one



Plate 10: North side of truss two



Plate 11: Reused ovolo moulded window jambs and east queen strut in truss one, note also mortice for windbrace in principal rafter



Plate 12: Smoke blackened rafters above later ceiling joists



Plate 13: North wall incorporating truss three and later chimneybreast and additions; note empty joints for original clasped purlins



Plate 14: East wall in south bay showing old wallplate and earlier infill in lower panels



Plate 15: External view of south rear gable



Plate 16: Framing of east wall in central bay



Plate 17: North east corner showing framing of east wall in north bay on right



Plate 18: View of roof east from central bay showing early smoke blackened rafters and later gable and ceiling joists



Head Office/Registered Office

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@thehumanjourney.net
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oanorth@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
f: +44 (0) 1223 850599
e: [oaeast@thehumanjourney.net](mailto: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net)
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net/oaeast>

OA Méditerranée

115 Rue Merlot
ZAC La Louvade
34 130 Maugeio
France

t: +33 (0) 4.67.57.86.92
f: +33 (0) 4.67.42.65.93
e: [oamed@oamed.fr](mailto: oamed@oamed.fr)
w: <http://oamed.fr/>



Director: David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

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