

An interpretive report on The Friars and Somners, South Street, Cuckfield, Sussex.



The west and front elevations of Somners (blue painted render) and The Friars (pink painted render).

For

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1 Introduction.

1.1 Authority.

Joe Thompson of Sussex Oak and Iron carried out a site visit to The Friary and Somners, South Street, Cuckfield, West Sussex on Monday the 1st of July 2024. This was in accordance with the instruction sent via e-mail from Mrs Jo Saady on the 14th of May 2024 and subsequently on the 2nd of July 2024.

1.2 Location and site references.

For the purposes of orientation in this report, the front elevations shown on the cover, are taken as west facing and the long axes of the houses are north to south.

National Grid References; TQ30295 24520 – The Friary

TQ 30293 24528 - Somners

1.3 Aim.

To outline the form, function and development of the two houses, based on the arrangements of the structural timbers. In order to inform the client and their advisors when they are assessing proposed changes to the rear of Somners and the Friary.

1.4 Methodology.

A brief visual survey of both houses was conducted on the 1st of July, accompanied by David Thackery, the owner. Jo Saady kindly forwarded the 2016 survey by HB Archaeology regarding Dumbrells, now demolished.

1.5 Use of the report.

This report is solely for the use of the addressee and shall not be reassigned to any other party, without the written permission of Joe Thompson.

1.6 Statutory designation.

The Friars and Somners are both listed on the National Heritage List for England.

Summaries of these entries are below.

The Friars: Grade II. List Entry Number 1192142. Date first listed: 11-Dec-1987

House, probably C15 or early C16, remodelled and probably reduced in late C17 or early C18 and extended at front possibly in circa mid C19.

Somners: Grade: II. List Entry Number: 1423492. Date first listed: 03-Feb-2015

Early C18 house, reusing some earlier timbers. Re-fronted and refurbished in the mid-C19.

2 Executive Summary

This is a complex site to interpret as much of the evidence of some of the phases is partial, fragmentary or requires more detailed examination. Friars (*mid C16/mid C17*) and its originally detached neighbour, Somners (*late C17/early C18*) have become attached over time through later rear extensions.

An overview of the basic form, function and development of the two houses is set out below.

Table 1: Phases, date ranges and notable features of the development of the three houses.

Phase	Date range	The Friary	Somners
A	<i>Mid C16 to mid C17</i>	Two (<i>or more</i>) bays built with a smoke bay or open hall. Clapsed side purlin roof and small panel framing.	
B	<i>Late C17/early C18</i>		Four bay house of two stories and a loft, with an end chimney at the south and rear stair tower.
C1	<i>Mid to late C18</i>		Timber-framed extension of two or three bays attached to the stair tower. Ancillary services to the house.
C2	<i>Mid to late C18</i>	Extension to north of Phase A, with a chimney.	
D1	<i>Late C18/early C19</i>	Roof raised higher over Phase A and B chambers. Wall painting imitating wallpaper.	
D2	<i>Late C18/early C19</i>	Two storey and two bay, timber-framed, front range added parallel to earlier frame. Rendered.	
D3	<i>Late C18/early C19</i>		Roof raised on the Phase C1 extension. Brickwork partition wall and chimney inserted on the western cross-frame within this extension. Chimney rebuilt/added to the north of Phase A main range. Rendered. Outshot added to rear.
E	<i>Early C19</i>	Short two storey extension to the south.	
F	<i>Mid to late C19</i>	Single storey extensions to rear, abutting the walls of Phase C2 and D3 alterations.	
G	<i>Late C19/Early C20</i>	New prefabricated timber-framed and corrugated iron building – <i>probably non-domestic</i> – attached to the rear of The Friary and incorporating part of Phase C1 of Somners. Known as Dumbrells and later a dwelling.	
H	<i>C20</i>	Rear bay windows	Rear lean-to in north east corner.



Figure 1: Colour coded plan showing the phases of development.

Phase A = Purple ~ *Mid C16 to mid C17.*

Phase B = Blue ~ *Mid C17 to early C18.*

Phase C1 and C2 = Green ~ *Mid to late C18*

Phase D1, D2 & D3 = Yellow ~ *Late C18 to early C19.*

Phase E = Pink ~ *Early C19.*

Phase F = Red = *Mid to late C19.*

Phase G = Orange ~ *Late C19 to early C20.*

Phase H = No colour ~ *C20*

3 Phase A ~ Mid C16 to mid C17 ~*The Friary*.

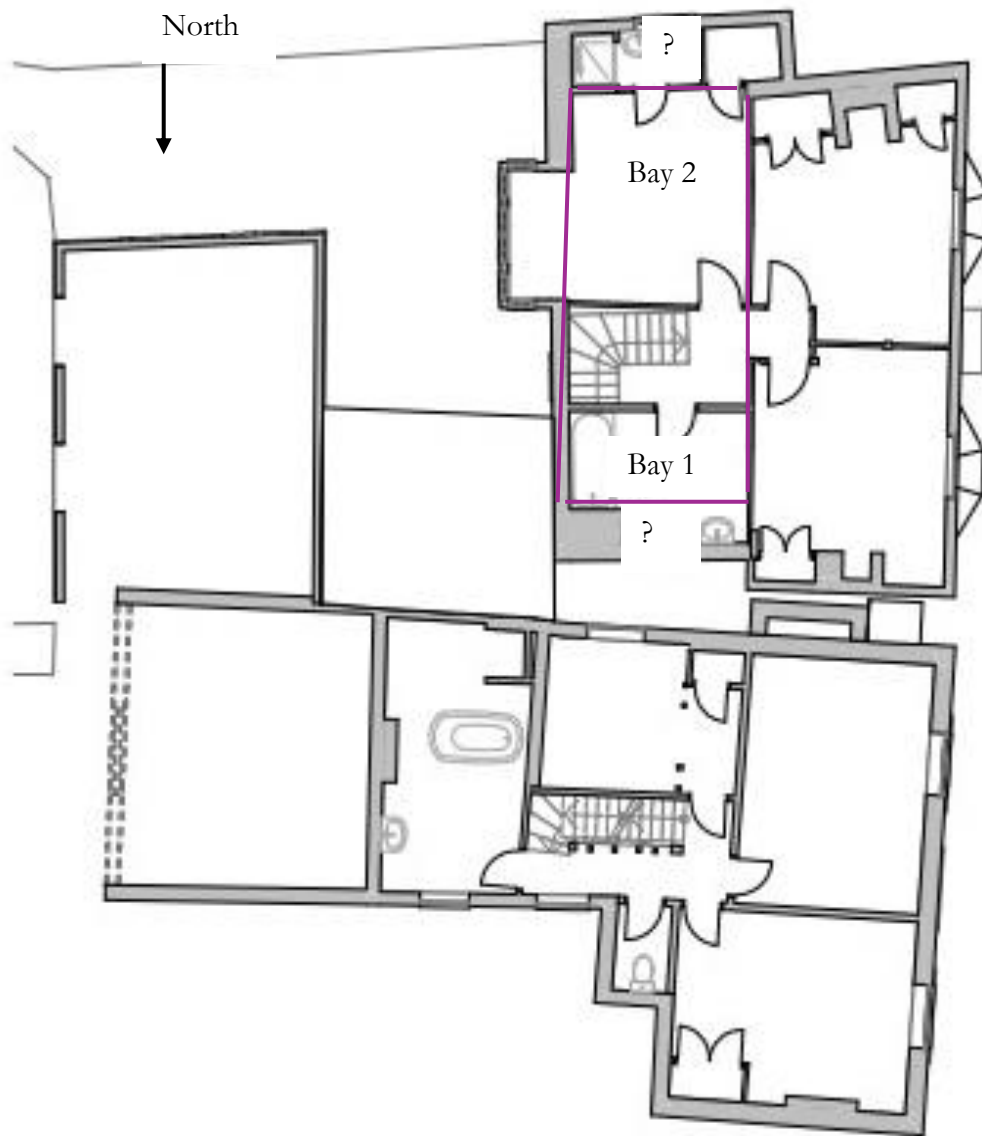


Figure 2: Annotated plan view of the site, showing the two surviving bays of The Friary, Phase A.

Two bays running nominally north to south. There is square panel framing visible to east wall of Bay 1 with a smoke blackened roof over. Comprising clasped side purlins with common rafters. The evidence suggests that the frame possibly extended further to the north and south.



Figure 3: Small panel framing on the east wall of Bay 1.



Figure 4: smoke-blackened common rafters in the foreground, over Bay 1.

There are a number of inconsistencies with the arrangement, weathering and smoke-blackening of the timbers which require further investigation. It is not clear whether this indicates re-use or evidence of the loss of features.



Figure 5: collar clasping the eastern side purlin is not faced with the rafter. The side purlin also truncates just to the north of this collar.



Figure 6: Significant decay pattern on the collar clasping the side purlin, indicating reuse or built against a feature like a masonry chimney stack.



Figure 7: Mixed pattern of smoke blackened and not smoke blackened rafters, collars and eastern side purlin over Bay 1.



Figure 8: Mixed pattern of smoke blackened and not smoke blackened western side-purlin and collar.

The form and function of this building are not clear, and it may have been an open hall or perhaps a kitchen or specialised building with an open hearth. The use of a clasped side purlin roof, square panel framing and smoke-blackening are interpreted as indicating a mid C16 to C17 date.

4 Phase B ~ Late C17/early C18 ~ *Somners*.

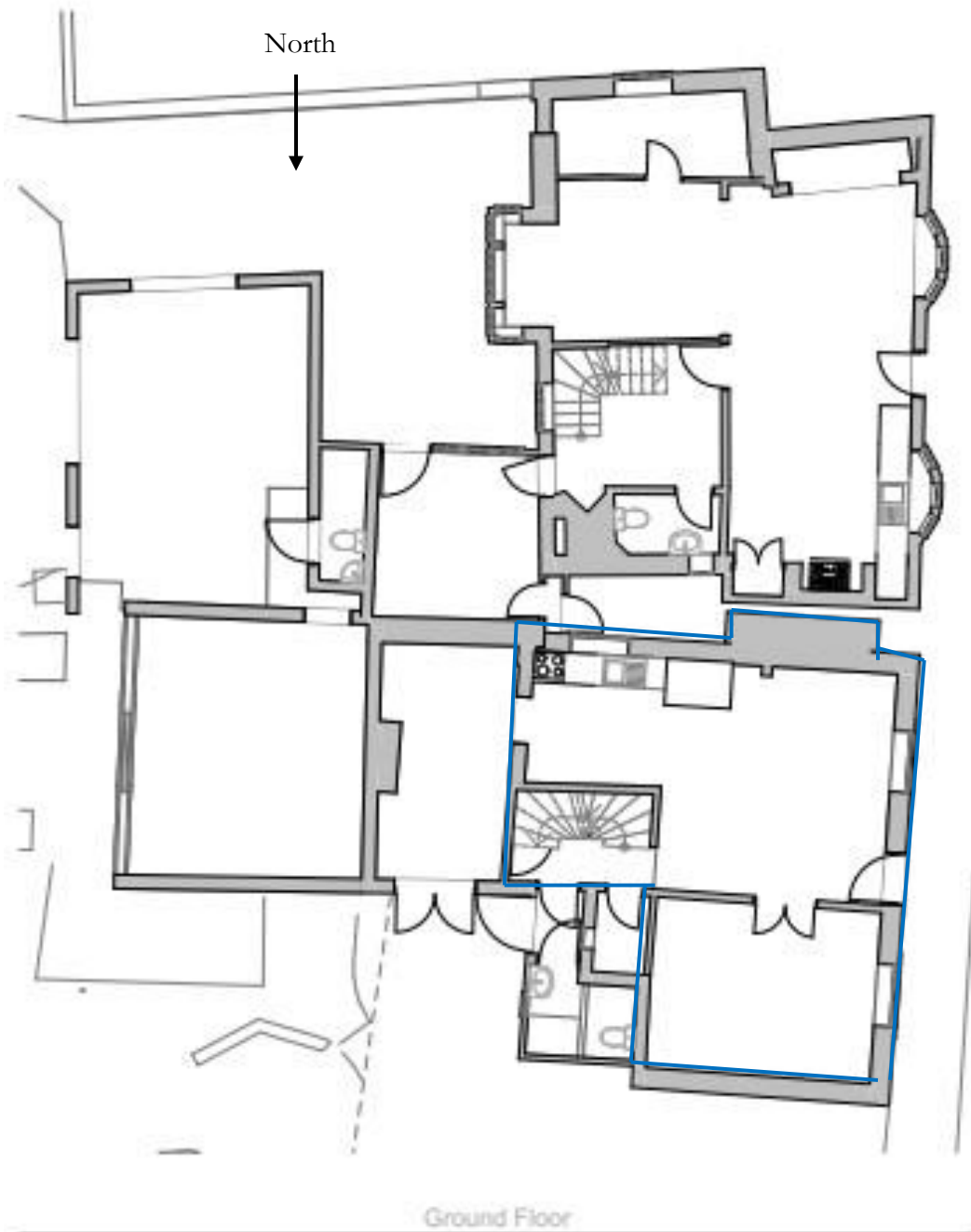


Figure 9: Annotated plan view of Somners, showing the Phase A arrangement.

An “L” shaped house of two stories with a loft. Consisting of a main range running north to south with two ground floor rooms, two chambers and a loft over. Access to the upper rooms was via the rear bay that housed a staircase and additional room on the ground and first floor.

The roof is a staggered and tenoned side purlin with tenoned common rafters over both the main and rear range.



Figure 10: Staggered and tenoned side purlins.



Figure 11: the principal rafter by the entry to the loft. The lack of framing pegholes indicate that there was no tenoned purlin in this bay, as it was intended to provide access.

There may have been an entrance lobby/corridor on the ground floor with doorways leading off to the two rooms either side and to the staircase straight ahead. There is evidence for a former bread oven on the outside of the southern chimney stack, indicating that this room was the kitchen.



Figure 12: empty mortice for a former doorhead. Leading to the staircase.



Figure 13: Blocked up opening for a former bread oven, on the southern chimney stack.

The southern chimney stack currently has three chimney pots indicating three flues. Normally one would be for the ground floor, one for the first floor. The purpose of the third may have been for the loft or for the bread oven, but neither of these is typical and further investigation is required to clarify.



Figure 14: Chimney stack at the south end with three flues.



Figure 15: Brickwork of the chimney and flanking wall.

The chimney stack on the south is built in brick and is bonded with the flanking brickwork. This may indicate that this flanking wall was also originally built in brick. They may also have been a similar stack at the north end of the main range, but the evidence has been lost. The current stack in this location being Phase D3.

5 Phase C1 ~ Mid to late C18 ~ *Somners*.

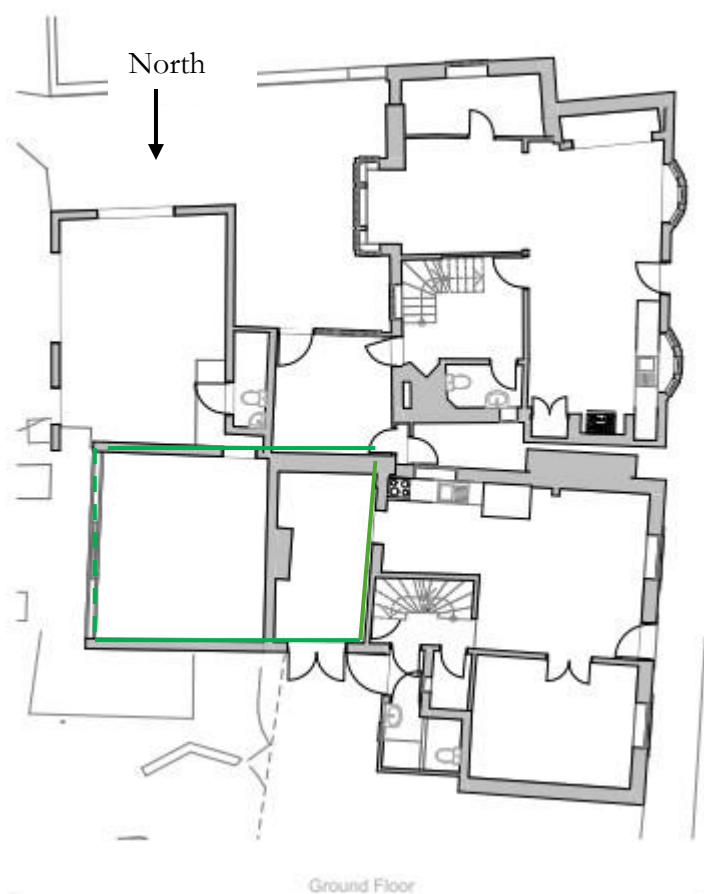


Figure 16: Annotated plan view showing the rear extension to *Somners*. Exact length not known.

To the east of the staircase block a timber-framed rear range was attached. The exact length and number of bays is not known, but it is likely to have been similar to that currently existing and of three bays. The purpose of this block was probably ancillary service/storage/workshop to the dwelling house.

The eaves height was lower than that which survives, as evidenced by the bay posts which are about 1m or so short of the current wallplate. Most of the surviving part of this oak timber-framing is in the westernmost bay.



Figure 17: Top of a bay post, in the southern wall, on this Phase C1 extension. Now redundant as the wall was lifted higher in Phase E



Figure 18: side view of the same bay post, showing the wall plate with a wrought iron strap.

6 Phase C2 ~ Mid to late C18 ~ *The Friary*.



Figure 19: Annotated plan showing the Phase C2 extension to The Friary.

The three pairs of common rafters over this northern end of this bay are not smoke-blackened but are oak and are framed with a bridle joint at their apex. The chimney towards the eastern wall is probably contemporary though partly rebuilt.



Figure 20: the Phase C2 extension.



Figure 21: the oak common rafters over the Phase C2 extension.

7 Phase D1 ~ Late C18/early C19 ~ *The Friary*.

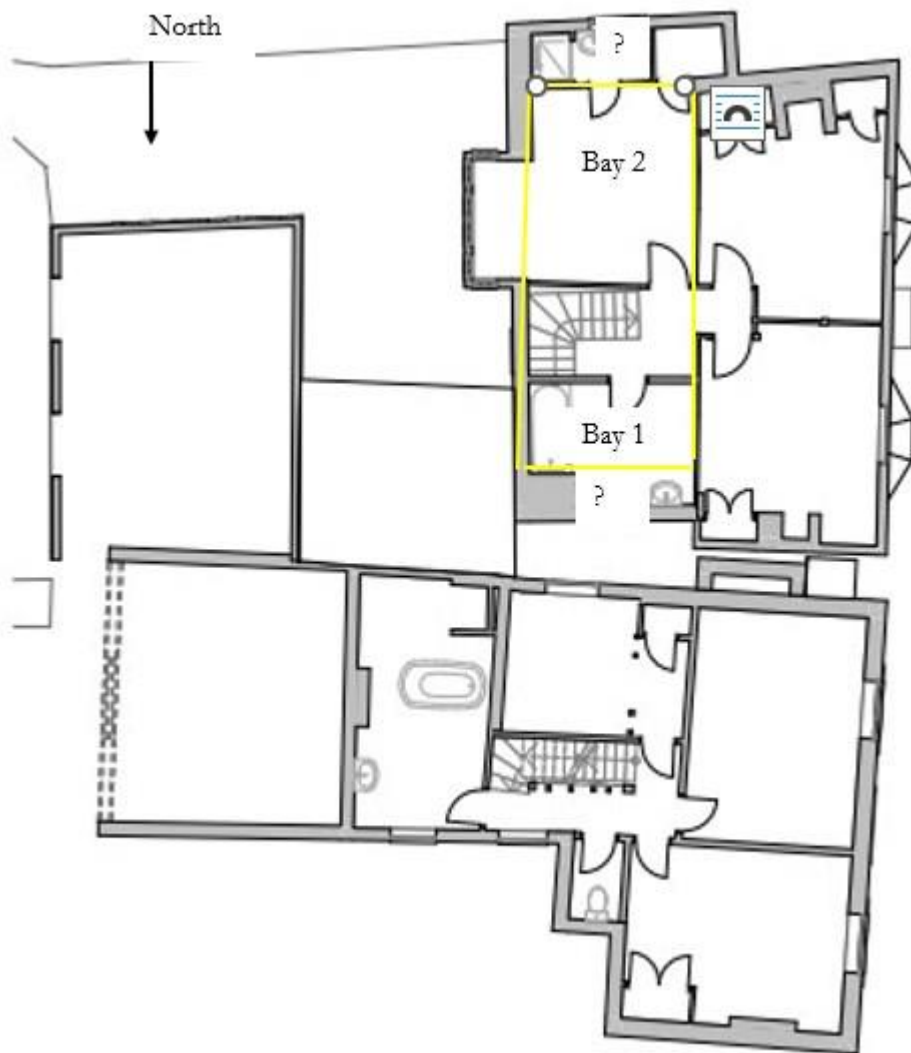


Figure 22: Annotated plan showing the location of the Phase D alterations to The Friars.

This was part of a major suite of improvements to The Friary.

The eaves level was raised over Bay 2 and a new, mainly, softwood roof with a hipped terminal at the southern end was constructed. This had a shallow pitch than the Phase A and C2 roofs which enabled it to maintain the same ridge height.



Figure 23: The raised eaves over Bay 2.



Figure 24: The new rafters over Bay 2, utilising some reused timbers, evidenced by the redundant mortices.

Internally the additional timbers to lift the eaves up are clearly visible.

Additional improvements were internal decoration to the chamber of Bay 1. Here a fragment of wall painting survives. This is a regular repeating grid of sprigs on a plain background. It is applied over a lime plaster on laths nailed to stud-framing. It is imitating wallpapers of this period (*Andrea Kirkham, pers comm*).



Figure 25: The Phase A wallplate and tie beam are arrowed, with Phase D1 timbers above.



Figure 26: Wall painting on the other side of the wall with the orange arrow in Figure 24.

8 Phase D2 ~ Late C18/early C19 ~ *The Friary*.

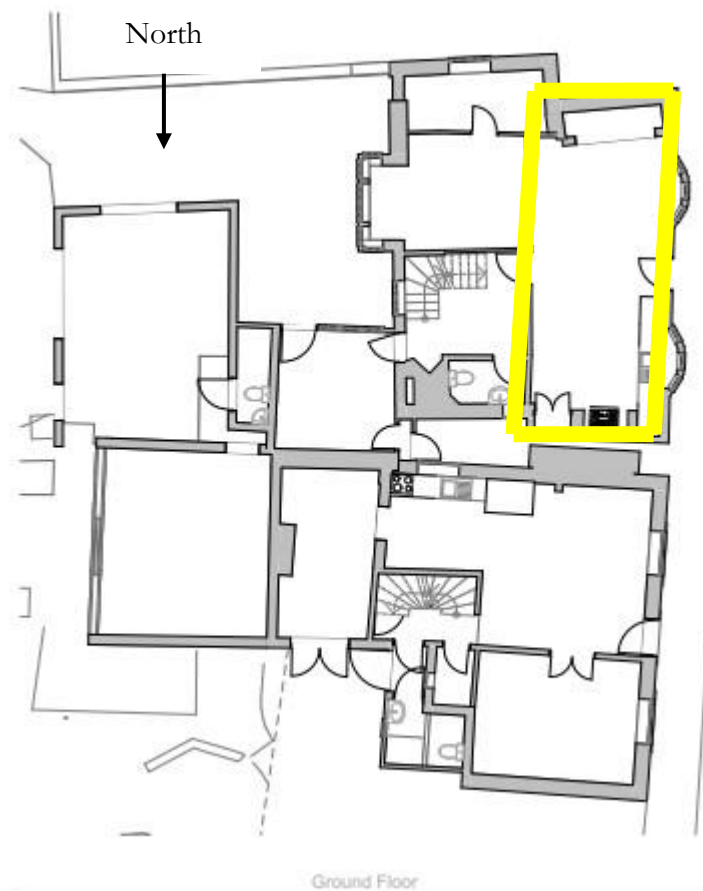


Figure 27: Annotated ground plan showing the location of the Phase D2 extension to *The Friary*.

A front range of two storeys and two bays was attached to the western elevation of the Phase A building. This was framed in a mixture of oak and softwood. The roof over was framed with nailed on collars that clasped the side purlins, with a continuous ridgeboard over.



Figure 28: the west and front elevation of Phase D2.



Figure 29: the softwood roof over the front range.

The gabled terminals at each end had two flued chimneys, serving hearths on both the ground and first floors.



Figure 30: Brick on edge of the northern chimney.



Figure 31: Northern chimney, bricks laid with faces mis-aligned due to proximity of Somners southern chimney, about 200mm

It was probably during this phase that the front and the south walls were rendered.

9 Phase D3 ~ Late C18/early C19 ~ *Sommers*.

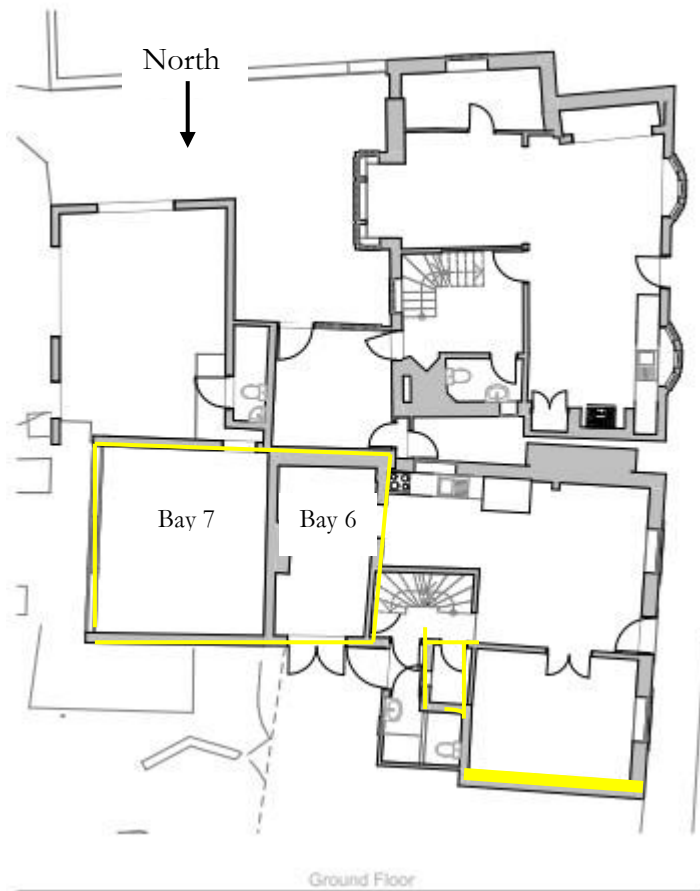


Figure 32: Annotated plan showing the Phase D3 alterations to *Sommers*.

A suite of alterations made to *Sommers*.

The roof was raised in the rear, Phase C1 extension, bringing it up to the level of the Phase B eaves and converting it to domestic use.



Figure 33: the Phase C1 wallplate (arrowed) with new timbers raising the eaves and weather-boarded, above.



Figure 34: clapsed side-purlin in Bay 6, at loft level.



Figure 35: The purlin extending into Bay 7.

At the first floor level a doorway was created from the Phase B stair landing, into Bay 6. Part of the re-framing of this chamber utilised second-hand timber.



Figure 36: the new chamber in Bay 6. Note the arrowed timbers in the background, raising the eaves and the central floor beam with its redundant semi-circular housing.

Close examination of this central floor beam shows that it has blackish deposits of grease/oil in the area of the semi-circular housing.



Figure 37: detail of the semi-circular housing.

This shape of housing and staining is consistent with this timber formerly being part of a bell frame. The housing being under the bearing or gudgeon and the semi-circular shape allowing for the movement of the ring of the headstock (or axle) on which the bell rotates. This implies that the timber is currently upside down compared to its earlier use. *It would be fascinating to know if the parish church, which is within 100m has any records of repairs to or a new bell frame during this period.*

In order to heat this new domestic space a chimney was built up against the timber cross-frame between Bays 6 and 7, and a brickwork partition extended either side of this up to the new tie beam level. The tie beam was a second-hand timber with redundant mortices.



Figure 38: The new brickwork partition, chimney and re-used tie beam between Bays 6 and 7.



Figure 39: detail of the lap dovetail joint between the new wallplate and tiebeam.

During this phase the northern gable end including a brick chimney of the main, front, range was either rebuilt or added.



Figure 40: chimney at the north end of the main, front, range.

It was probably during this phase that the front and north gable wall were rendered.

There is a rear two storey outshot added into the angle between the stair range and the main range.



Figure 41: showing the raised eaves and roof of the rear range (left hand side) and the new outshot (arrowed yellow) to the main range.

10 Phase E ~ Early C19 ~ *The Friary*.

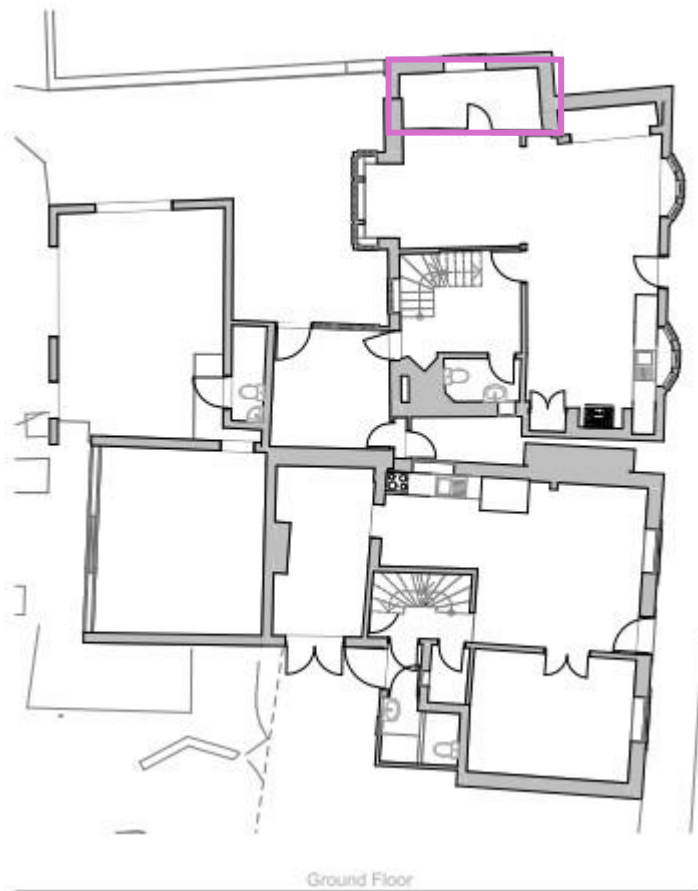


Figure 42: Annotated plan view of Phase E of The Friary.

A two storey brick-walled extension to the south end of The Friary. Built up against the chimney stack of Phase D2, providing further domestic space.



Figure 43: Additional room and a flue added to the south end of Phase A and D1 of The Friary.

11 Phase F ~ Mid to late C19 ~ *The Friary*.

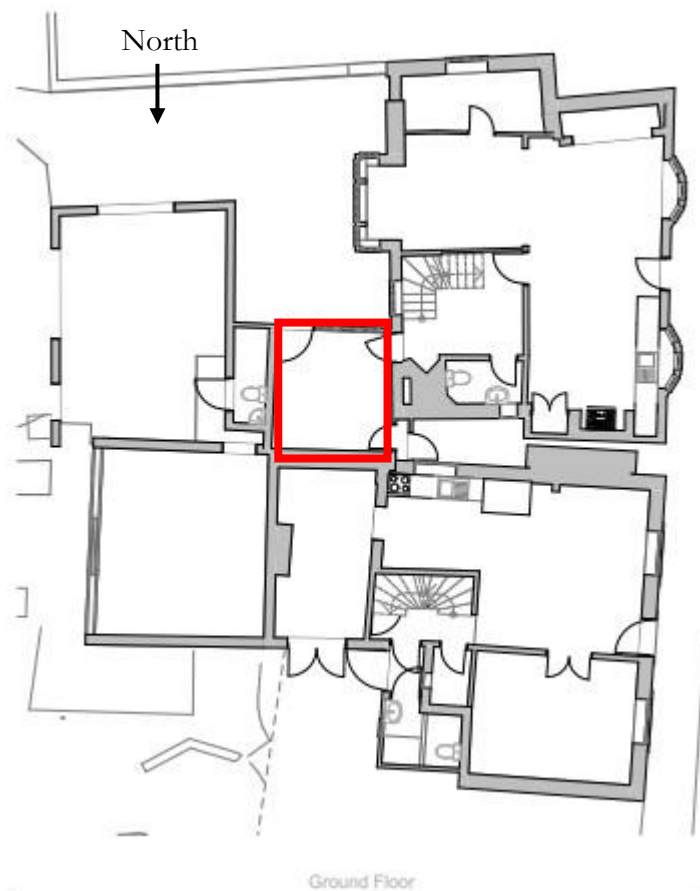


Figure 44: Annotated plan view showing Phase F of *The Friary*.

A brick-walled, single storey extension, with a lean-to roof, extending off the eaves line of Somners.



Figure 45: The extensions accessed from *The Friary* and built against *Somners*.



Figure 46: the lean-to roof abutting the framing of *Somners*, on the right hand side.

12 Phase G ~ Late C19/Early C20 ~ *Dumbrells*.



Figure 47: Annotated plan view of Phase G, *Dumbrells*, to the rear of *The Friary* and *Somners*.

A prefabricated timber-framed and corrugated iron building – *probably initially non-domestic* – attached to Phase F, of *The Friary* and incorporating part of Phase D of *Somners*. Late converted to a dwelling and then consent given to its demolition recently.



Figure 48: The only remaining part of this Phase, to the east, identified by abutment in the brickwork



Figure 49: The end wall of the abutting Phase F.



Figure 50: East elevation (photo courtesy of Jo Saady, April 2024)

13 Phase H ~ C20 ~ *The Friary and Sommers.*

Additional improvements aimed at adding space to the two dwellings were made during the twentieth century.



Photo of rear extension to Sommers required here.

Figure 51: Bay windows on the rear of The Friary.