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Design Access and Heritage Statement

Proposed alteration to fire escape to Old Court House, George St, Buxton.

Now that planning permission has been given for a new terrace at the rear of the Old Court House, the Masonic Hall Committee have asked if it would be possible to alter their rear fire egress.

The photograph shows that it is presently necessary to climb up to get through a fire escape window. As many of the members are well over 60 years old this would cause considerable difficulty and danger if a fire did break out.

A door in this position would therefore be considerably safer for all members and comply better with fire regulations.

The exact date of The Old Courthouse is unclear, but it was certainly in existence in 1850 as the earliest records relate to its use during that time. The construction of the building is likely to have taken place not long after The Crescent and its use related to that building as the Duke of Devonshire Estate Office. Since this use expired during the 1930's, the building has being used for various purposes over the last few decades, but the main use now relates to bar and restaurant facilities with only two small retail units remaining to the ground floor. It is understood that these two units are to relocate elsewhere in the town. The first floor use still relates to that of a Masonic Lodge.

The Old Courthouse is just one of numerous Edwardian buildings in Buxton, that along with the more recent Victorian structures in the town, gives the area its distinctive Architectural style. This building in particular is of considerable architectural merit that sits comfortably next to its somewhat grander neighbour in the form of The Crescent, which is of course undergoing major works to form a high quality Hotel. However this building has been already altered considerably as will be described later.

It is these works that have in many ways been the catalyst for the recent changes of use at The Old Courthouse and the future use of The Crescent will of course be of major benefit to the success of the units within the building.

The group of buildings that The Old Court House sits next to, including The Crescent, the old bakery and associated Cavendish Circus buildings(opposite), The Cavendish Arcade, The George Mansions and slightly further on – The Square and The Opera House, form what is probably the most important part of the Architectural Heritage of Buxton. Although The Opera House and The Square have been refurbished over the recent decades, major works are now proposed for the rear of Cavendish Circus, George Mansions and, of course, The Crescent. The Old Court House is an important Architectural Heritage building within this group and has itself, recently undergone the first seeds of refurbishment to capitalise on these surrounding changes.

The Old Courthouse has however over the years undergone many changes. Although the attached scanned photograph is very vague the building had an original pitched slate roof. There were also steps going up at the front of the building to form an entrance to the first floor. Over the years the building has changed considerably. The roof was made flat, although in a very poor manner, in that the top chords of the trusses were just taken away leaving a bottom chord supporting the new flat roof. Part of this roof collapsed in 1983 and considerable remedial works were required by the Masonic Hall.

The steps have also been taken away on the front elevation and certain alterations have already been made to the openings. On the rear elevation some of the windows have already been blocked in.

The new extension to the rear that has been approved will further alter the elevation of the Courthouse. Thus we believe that although it is understood a window elevation will be altered at the rear to achieve the new fire escape, the resultant elevation will be both considerably more attractive and also considerably safer than the present elevations with the fire escapes that are in existence.



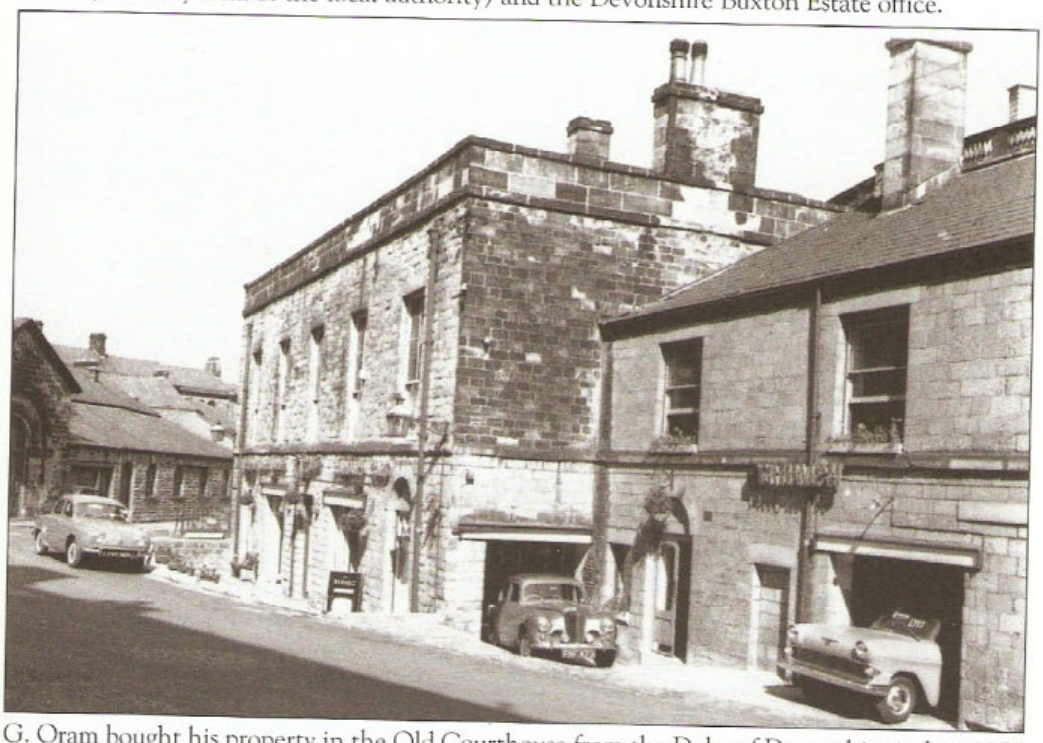
Existing fire egress- bars have to be opened when meetings take place.



General View of Buxton



The motor business of G. Oram in the Old Court House, George Street in the mid 1960s. By this time the firm also had an agency for Renault cars. The building was known as the New Court House in 1870 and provided the magistrate's court. It was also the office of the the Buxton Local Board (the early form of the local authority) and the Devonshire Buxton Estate office.



G. Oram bought his property in the Old Courthouse from the Duke of Devonshire in late 1955 and opened his showrooms there in 1956. This photograph, taken at about that time, shows two new cars for sale, a Standard Eight and an Austin A30.



Photograph 1 Existing fire escape

Photograph 2 Window exit

