GEORGE HOTEL AND GEORGE MANSIONS

LISTED BUILDING APPLICATION FOR AUGMENTING SOUTH ELEVATION

HERITAGE STATEMENT

Introduction

George Mansions is a property which has little documented history however its siting is significant in that it predates the construction of the Crescent (albeit only slightly) and therefore records the layout in this part of Buxton prior to John Carr's great engineering and building project.

It was built, as the George Hotel, approximately 1770 as a speculative venture in response to Buxton's early attraction to visitors seeking the waters and touring the Peak District. It underwent substantial alterations during the 19th century before changing its use from hotel to residential use in the 20th century.





As constructed



Apartments – today

History

Prior to 1780, the main Manchester to London Road ran through Buxton from the north to a point opposite today's St John's Church. Instead of turning sharply to the east, it continued via a bridge over the River Wye, behind todays' Old Hall Hotel before linking up with Hall Bank and then over the Market Place. It was Carr, having agreed his Crescent project with the 5th Duke, who introduced the easterly turn (in front of today's Devonshire Dome) and then turned the road south again to cross the river in front of the Grove Hotel. This enabled the River Wye to be culverted and allowed the site now occupied by the Crescent and the baths buildings to be developed.

The fact that it was originally built to front on to the former main road explains its odd angle to the present road arrangement. It is to be assumed that, given its location on the key route through the town, that it was built as a coaching inn. An early plan (see below) shows substantial buildings behind the main George Street block which could have been the provision for stabling. However, this 'prime frontage' could only have lasted about a decade as Carr's work was known to be underway in 1780.

An early engraving from 1853 and reproduced in the High Peak Borough Council's Central Buxton Conservation Area Character Appraisal (HPBC, 2007) shows the original building to be a simple design of three storeys with eight bays. Whether the three storeys is depicted correctly is questionable as, today, the same block is four storeys in height but with no sign of an additional storey having been added. The 1853 engraving also shows a mannered 18th century hierarchical arrangement of windows with the tallest on the first floor whereas, today, there is no corresponding hierarchy. However, in an effort to extend its floorplan and re-orientate its frontage to the new Manchester Road, some major alterations took place to the hotel in the mid-19th century between the 1853 engraving (but see below) and a photograph from the 1870s and reproduced in Hall (1984) which shows today's George Street elevation in place. These alterations certainly reduced the original eight bays to the present six which explains the asymmetrical roof to the George Street elevation with a single hip to its south end.



1853

The George Street elevation appears to have been partially sacrificed to accommodate the new block lying north-west and facing the new Manchester Road. Today, this block is symmetrically designed, centred on a seven-bay, three-storey block flanked by a two-storey hipped extension at either end. Whilst this block looks certain to have been built in the mid-19th century, it is possible that it is a rebuilding of something earlier (stabling?) as the plan drawn by John White and Son and reproduced in Hall (1984) shows a site plan looking quite like todays on this part of the site. This, again, casts doubt over the accuracy of the 1856 engraving referred to earlier whilst also demonstrating the frustration regarding the limited documented history of the George Hotel buildings.

The building appears to have been left unaltered since the mid-19th century in terms of its physical fabric although some major structural rebuilding to the south elevation, immediately above George Street has taken place. Although this rebuilding looks to date from the 1970s, it would appear to have been a recurring structural issue as an earlier photograph (1936? and taken from Picture the Past) shows the same elevation looking like it has been contemporaneously rebuilt but with a different window arrangement and retaining the end chimney stacks.

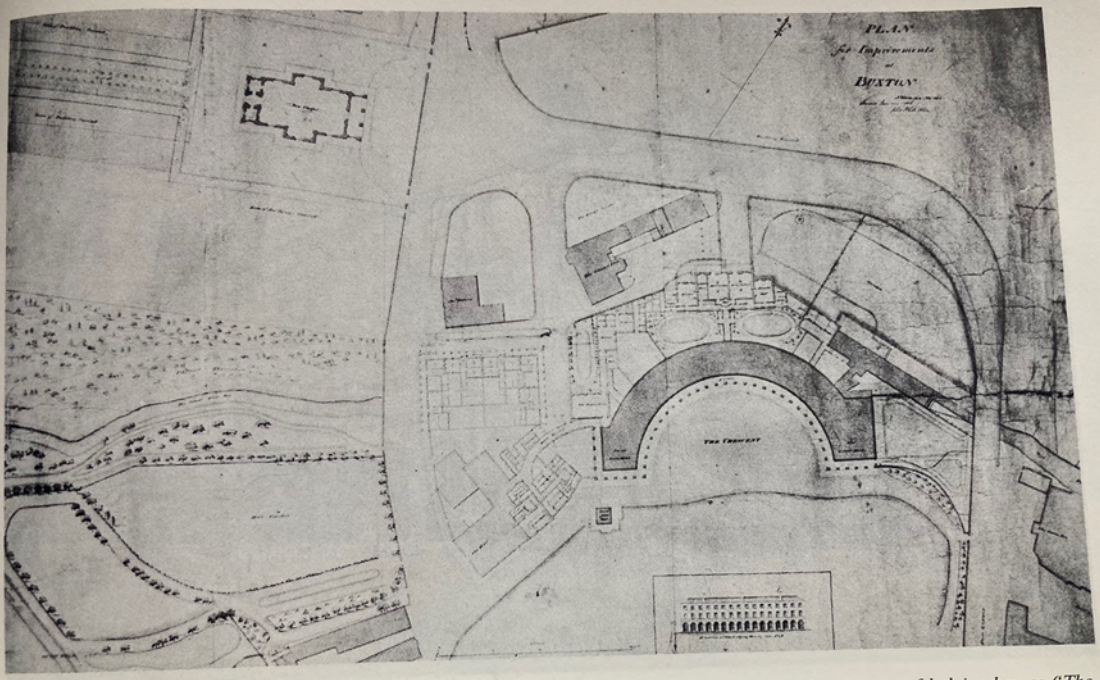

Fig. 27: Plans by John White and Son 'for improvements at Buxton' 1803-1806, including new baths, a group of lodging houses ('The Square'), a rear complex to the Crescent, and a new church (St. John's).

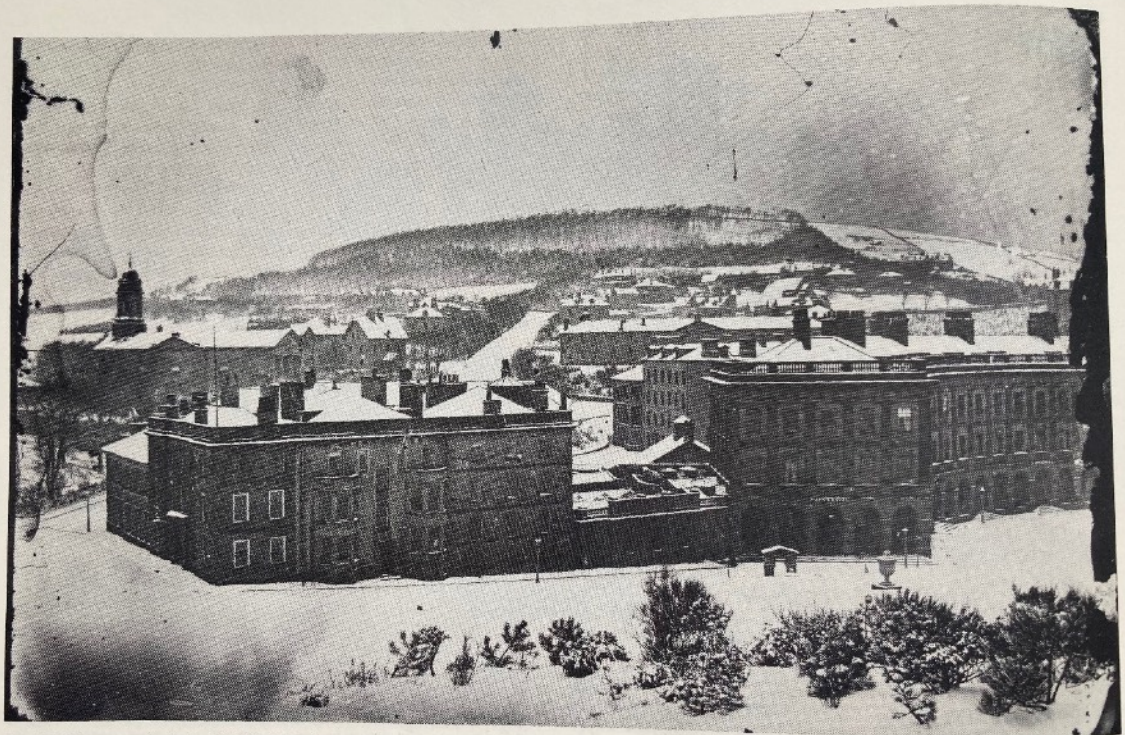

Fig. 8: Photograph of the Old Hall (taken in the 1870's), with St. John's Church (left), and behind the Crescent (right) the George Hotel (built c. 1770) and the Great Stables before the dome had been added (1881).



1936

The George Hotel was built and run privately but it was bought by the Duke of Devonshire, along with a number of other hotels and commercial properties, in 1806. In 1868 the American ex- President Jeffersen apparently stayed at The George.

Also, Mayor Alderman William Fenwick Mill owned the George Hotel in 1918 when he addressed a crowd of 2,000 about the successes of the British Forces in France after a string of victories during the 1918 Allied counter-offensive.

Listing

George Hotel and George Mansions were listed, Grade II, on 31 January 1997 and lies within the setting of the adjacent Grade I listed Crescent. They are also located in the Central Buxton Conservation Area.

Interior

Further support that the 1853 engraving may have been an incorrect rendition of the George Hotel's main George Street frontage is to be found on the inside of the building. There is no evidence of any hierarchical floor to ceiling heights that the mannered three-storey elevation would have involved. Neither is there any evidence that the fourth storey was added later.

Unfortunately, the conversion from a hotel use to residential, probably in the first half of the last century has significantly altered the internal room and the higher up the building one goes there are fewer and fewer historic features.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Unfortunately, there is surprisingly little published material about the history of the building available. Also, what little there is, is sometimes contradictory or unreliable, however there is more evidence to support the view that, whereas the number of bays to the George Street elevation of the hotel was reduced at the north end as a result of the later alterations, the building was built with four storeys rather than the fourth storey being added at a later date.

The George Street elevation was built in a rather plain style with no architectural hierarchy from one storey to the next. The rest of the complex fronting on to Manchester Road has been designed in a style typical of Victorian Buxton. It occupies a prominent position, both on Manchester Road and in the setting of the Crescent and the former Devonshire Royal Hospital. As such, it is important principally in contributing to the character of the conservation area.

The main area of significance of the whole complex lies in the fact that the building pre-dates the John Carr building project and its orientation, at an angle to today's road layout, is a remnant of the earlier route of the Manchester to London Road. It survives as an early example of a commercial coaching inn. The plain style of the George Street frontage suggests it was designed locally and driven by functionality as with most of the other coaching inns in Buxton at the time. The town's mannered architecture only arriving with the 5th Duke's aspiration for attracting a new market for the town just after the construction of the George Hotel.

Unfortunately, early- to mid- 20th century internal alterations have significantly altered the interior albeit some internal features do survive.

REFERENCES

Leach John: The Book of Buxton: Leicester: 1987-: 122

Alterations to the road routes led to the decline of The George, and subsequent rise of The Grove.

Extract from Buxton in 50 Buildings by David Morten

The George 1770

In the 18th century Buxton was on the main London to Manchester coach route and, when it was built in around 1770, the George Hotel faced onto the original Manchester Road. Unfortunately, with the diversion of this road in 1780, The George lost out in trade to the Grove Hotel as it was the Grove that now fronted onto the main through route.

However, the George still did a good business as a base for commuters. In the 1850s, well before Buxton had its own direct railway service, a horse drawn coach known as 'The Peak Guide' offered rail travellers a return journey to the closest railway station. The carriage departed daily from The George Hotel, went through Ashford and Bakewell and arrived at Rowsley station to connect with trains to London and Derby. It proved a very popular sideline until Buxton got its own railway station in 1867.

Despite being described by John Leach in The Book of Buxton as having 'never achieved anything of particular note', this Grade II - listed building was a popular pub and venue before it closed in need of refurbishment in 2007.
This Georgian hotel is simple in style, stone clad with multiple sash windows. There was a later addition of dormer windows.

The George has since been purchased by the developers of the Crescent and is presently being used as their headquarters while the Crescent project is underway. Plans are in place to reopen the George as a hotel again when the new development is finished and it can be restored to best display its simple charm.

Hall, Ivan, *Georgian Buxton*, Derbyshire Museum Service, 1984

High Peak Borough Council, Central Buxton Conservation Area Character Appraisal, 2007

FULL LISTING

SK0573NE GEORGE STREET 616-1/3/35
The George Public House and George Mansions Grade II

Public house and hotel. c1770 with mid C19 addition and C20 restoration. Ashlar and dressed stone with ashlar dressings and Welsh slate hipped roofs with stone stacks.
EXTERIOR: 4 storeys to main range, 3 and 2 storeys to additions. Original south-west front has 4 storey, 6 windows range to right. Off-centre later doorway with 4-panel double doors with overlight in deeply moulded segment headed surround. To left a single sash and to right 4 similar sashes. Above 6 sashes to each floor, those to the third floor smaller, topped by 3 dormer windows. To left 3 storey wing with full-height canted bay window with plain sashes and 2 pairs of sashes beyond. North-west front 3 storey, 7-window front with 2 storey single window wings. First and second-floor sill bands. Central segment headed doorway in moulded ashlar surround with flanking columns and keystone, plus double glazed doors with side lights and overlight. Either side 3 2/2 sashes, above 7 segment headed similar sashes, above again 7 similar sashes. Wings have single segment headed tripartite sashes with keystones and above single 2/2 sashes. Rear: regular 4-window range; first bay and right return rebuilt at all levels. Left return: 3-window range. Projecting stacks. Single storey outbuildings.
INTERIOR: not inspected.

Listing NGR: SK0573273564