

REPORT

Nag's Head Caves, Nottingham

Fronting onto the Mansfield Road, north of the city centre, the Nag's Head has a splendid set of cellar caves cut into the local sandstone, consistent with the many other caves beneath the city. These were somehow missed from early surveys, but that has now been remedied, at least with a reasonable map of the site. The Nag's Head caves are more extensive than beneath most inns in Nottingham, and are also unusual by way of their multiple levels.

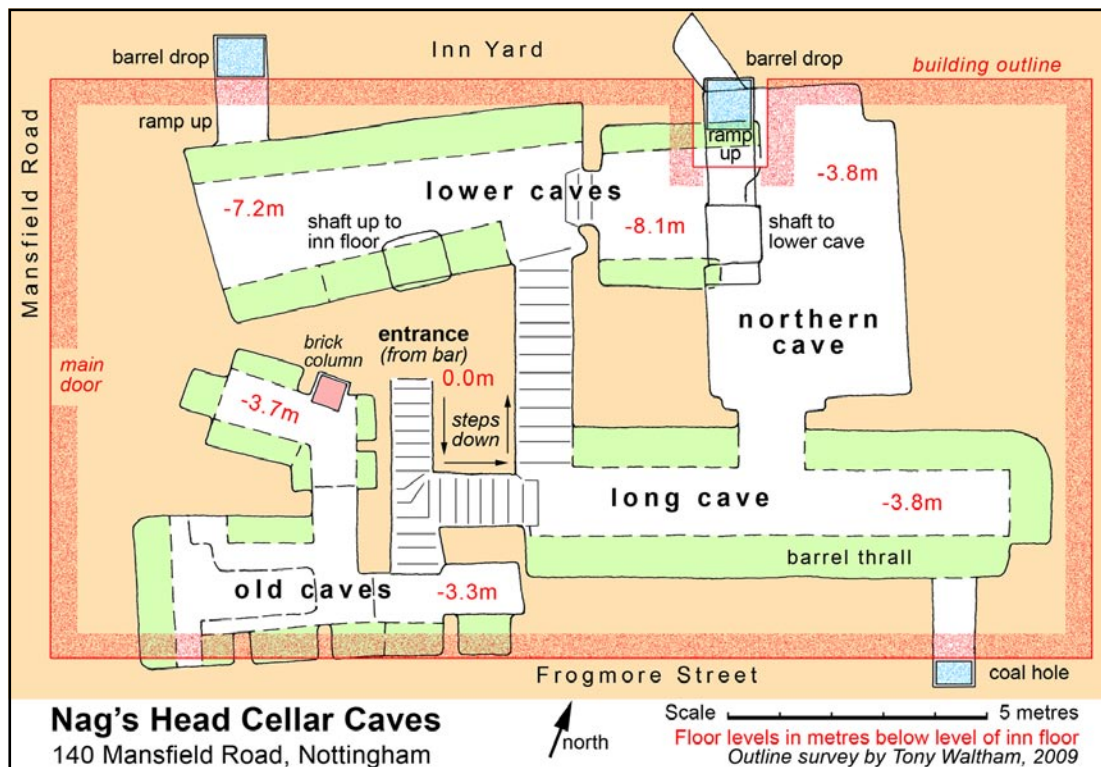
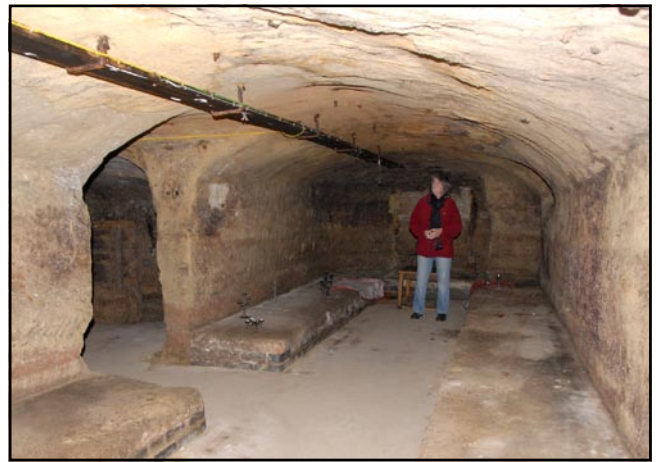
Straight down the entrance steps, the set of smaller caves are clearly the oldest, and lie beneath the footprint of the oldest part of the building, which is believed to date back over 250 years. The long cave is clearly a larger and later addition, which extends beyond the footprint of the old building. This lies beneath a building extension that post-dates maps from the 1860s. It appears that all the later caves pre-date the building extension, as the main barrel drop, through the northern cave and into the lower cave, would have been outside the contemporary building. The original vertical shaft was modified with a steep ramp to reach the inn yard in a recess within the later building. Both this and the second barrel drop, straight into the lower cave and also inclined to reach the yard, are now capped beneath new paving. An internal shaft from the lower cave is also capped by the bar floor. What appears to be a coal hole, opening high in the long cave wall, is also capped by recent paving.

All the caves have gently arched rock ceilings at the conventional height of about 1.9 m high, except the

northern of the old caves, with its roof at about 1.7 m. From the recorded floor levels (on the map) most of the cave roof arches lie just under 2 m beneath the inn floor. It appears that the inn buildings were set slightly into the sloping ground so that little or none of this thickness is weathered and weakened material; the roof of the entrance steps exposes 1.3 m of good solid sandstone. The lower cave has 2.3 m of rock separating it from the small part of the northern cave that lies above it.

There are stories that the caves were used to house condemned prisoners who were allowed a last ale on their way from the town jail, before heading to the gallows, which were in use into the 1800s, at the top of the hill. But the many barrel thralls suggest a different concept, and it is more likely that the last drinks were taken outside to the passing prisoners. It appears that the caves are just another set, but a very fine set, of beer cellars.

Tony Waltham



The long cave that lies at shallow depth beneath the rear of the Nag's Head, with the entry arch into the northern cave on the left.

Outline plan survey of the cave cellars beneath the Nag's Head public house.