

Storing Winter for Summer

The St Ippolyts Ice House

Hidden beneath the mound in front of you lies a remarkable double ice house, built in the early nineteenth century within the landscaped grounds of the St Ibbs estate. Here, ice was stored for use throughout the year, allowing chilled drinks and frozen desserts to be enjoyed long after winter had passed.

Before refrigeration, ice was a valuable commodity. It helped preserve food, cool drinks and support the elaborate dining and entertaining that reflected the wealth and status of estate owners. Most surviving ice houses have a single underground storage chamber. St Ippolyts is exceptional in having two chambers beneath a single mound, a rare design that makes it one of the most unusual surviving ice houses in Britain.



The St Ibbs estate on the 1924 Ordnance Survey map, showing the ice house and nearby lake

Asparagus, Oysters and Brown Bread

By the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ice cream had become one of the most sought-after luxuries enjoyed by wealthy households. Some Georgian ice cream flavours may seem surprising today.

Alongside familiar flavours such as fruit, chocolate, coffee and vanilla, Georgian cooks experimented with ingredients including Parmesan cheese, cucumber, asparagus, brown bread and even oysters.

For guests at a country house dinner, ice cream was far more than a sweet treat. Served at great expense and effort, it was a symbol of wealth and sophistication.

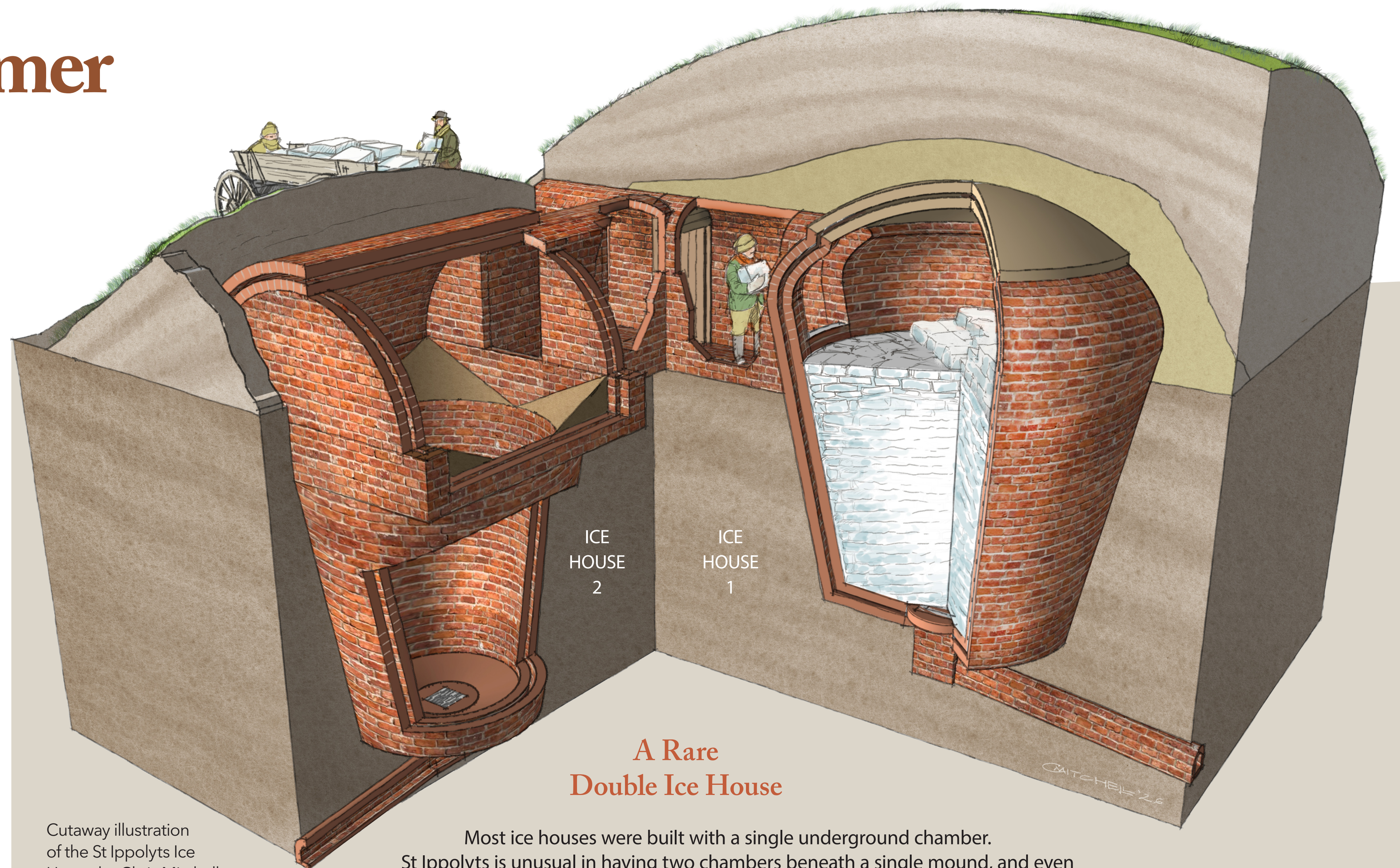


From Frozen Lake to Ice House

Each winter, ice was cut from frozen water and transported to the ice house by horse and cart. The nearby estate lake was probably the source of the ice stored here.

The ice was packed tightly into the underground chambers, often with layers of straw or other insulating materials to slow melting.

The chambers were carefully engineered to maintain a cold, stable environment. Thick brick walls, deep underground construction and a protective covering of earth helped keep temperatures low, while meltwater drained away at the base.



Cutaway illustration of the St Ippolyts Ice House by Chris Mitchell (cmitchellillus.co.uk)

A Rare Double Ice House

Most ice houses were built with a single underground chamber. St Ippolyts is unusual in having two chambers beneath a single mound, and even more unusual because they differ in both size and construction.

Ice House 1 is the larger chamber, with a domed roof and circular plan. Ice House 2 is smaller, with a barrel-vaulted roof and a different arrangement of brickwork. The two chambers are linked by a shared passage system, allowing access through a single entrance.

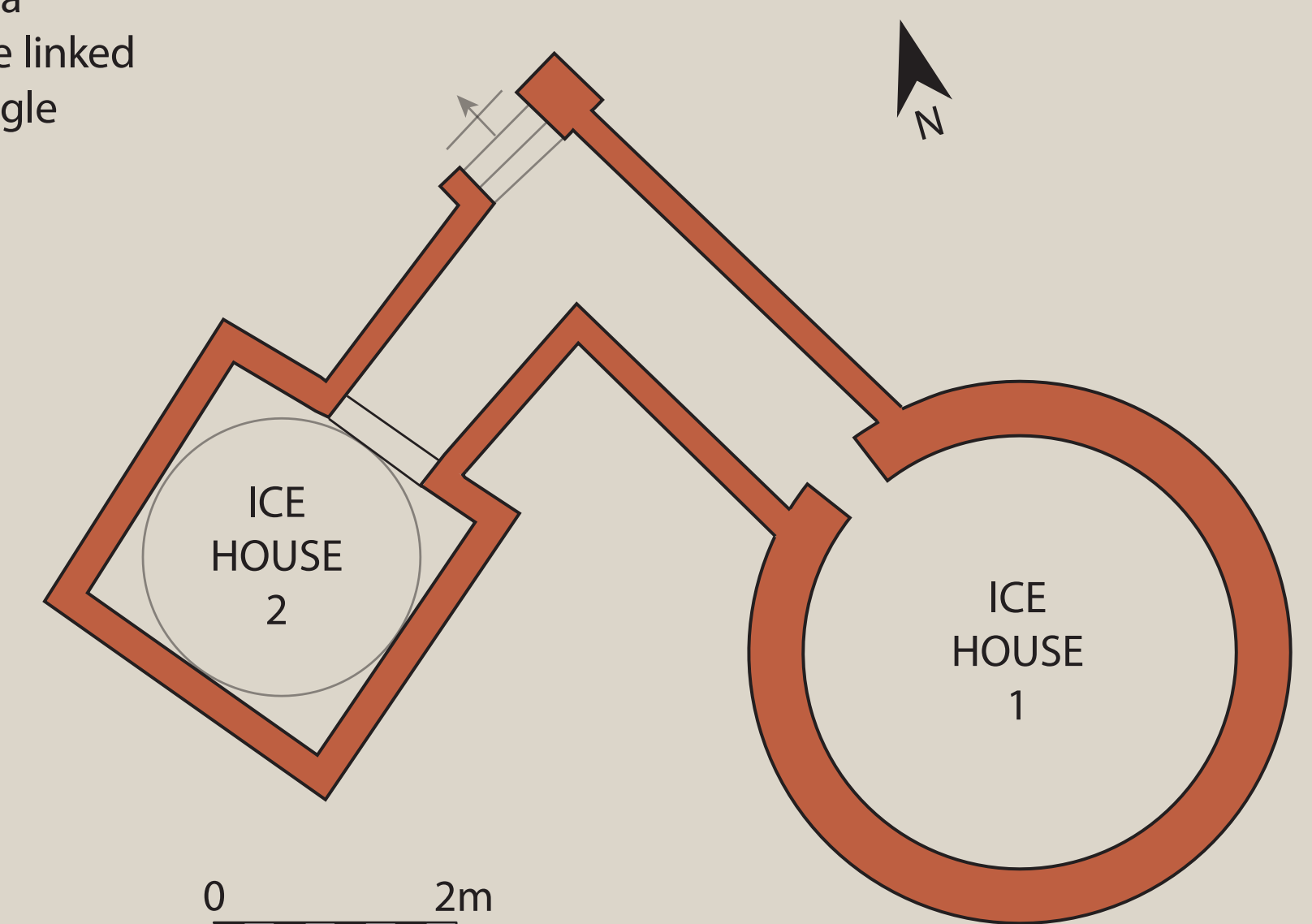
Double ice houses are rare. While a small number are known elsewhere, no other known example combines two chambers of such different design beneath a single mound.

The differences in construction suggest that Ice House 2 was added after Ice House 1, probably to increase storage capacity as the needs of the St Ibbs estate grew. The smaller chamber appears to represent a later phase of development, creating the unusual double arrangement seen today.

With the arrival of mechanical refrigeration, the ice house fell out of use and gradually became lost beneath dense vegetation. Archaeological investigation and conservation work have revealed the hidden chambers and secured this remarkable Grade II listed structure.



Looking into Ice House 1 through the brick-vaulted entrance passage. The domed chamber can be seen beyond (2m scale)



Plan of the St Ippolyts Ice House