

Archaeological Building Recording



**ATLANTA HOUSE, MIDLAND ROAD,
HIGHAM FERRERS,
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
NN10 8DN**

NGR: SP 9622 6867

Commissioned by Sidey Design
in relation to planning consent 10/01156/FUL

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Non-technical summary

In November 2010 MADE Environment undertook an archaeological building survey of Atlanta House, Midland Road, Higham Ferrers (NGR: SP 9622 6867) prior to partial demolition and redevelopment of the site. The survey revealed that the structure comprised a contemporary office range and attached north light factory shed. Both structures were constructed in 1936, the offices being the new head office for John White a boot and shoe manufacturer from neighbouring Rushden. Although modernised in part, the offices retain some original features and fittings of the period. The north light factory range is structurally interesting because as a late example of the form it dispenses with internal columns using instead deep valley beams to provide support, creating an unimpeded floor space.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Assistant Archaeological Advisor, Northamptonshire County Council (AAA) has requested that, in accordance with a brief (dated 13/10/10), archaeological building recording should be undertaken on Atlanta House, Midland Road, Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 9622 6867).

F and L Group Ltd have obtained planning permission (Ref: 10/01156/FUL) for the part demolition and conversion of the building into six individual light industrial units. Planning permission has been granted with a condition for a programme of archaeological building recording on the recommendation of the AAA. Sidey Design, acting as agent for the developers have commissioned MADE environment to undertake the necessary recording work.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The site lies to the north east of the centre of Higham Ferrers at c.75m AOD on the east side of Midland Road and west of Bury Close (NGR SP 9622 6867). Two-storey Atlanta House was built as the headquarters for the John White Footwear company in the 1930s; the firm also used the adjacent building to the south, originally built for the Charles Parker Company in 1906. Atlanta House is not a listed building, but the front range is included within the Higham Ferrers Conservation Area. Latterly the building was occupied by Frank Thomas Ltd. (NIAG 2001, 35).

2. AIMS AND METHODS

2.1 Aims

In line with the requirements of the Brief (Section 4), the aims of the building recording were:

- To provide a comprehensive visual record of the front range of the factory in relation to the remainder of the building prior to the permitted conversion;
- To produce a report which provides a comprehensive review of the local and regional historical context of the structure recorded by the project;
- To produce a high quality, fully integrated archive suitable for long-term deposition in order to 'preserve by record' the buildings in their current form prior to conversion.

2.2 Methods

Detailed recording methods for the project were outlined in the Project Design and complied with those defined in the brief (section 5).

2.3 Compliance

The work has conformed to the requirements of the AAA as detailed in the brief, to the Project Design, to the relevant sections of the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance* (IFA 2001) and *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000a), and to current English Heritage guidelines (2006 & 2009).

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- 3.1 The site lies just beyond the edge of the pre-industrial settlement core of Higham Ferrers as defined in the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS). To the immediate west lies the site of the motte and bailey castle, a scheduled monument (SAM 13607). Further west are the scheduled Chichele College and Saffron Moat sites. (Foard & Ballinger 2000). The site frontage (office range) lies within the current Higham Ferrers Conservation Area boundary having been incorporated as the result of a review in 2008 along with the front range of the adjacent Charles Parker factory and local library (former Parish Rooms) (The Conservation Studio 2008).
- 3.2 Although the shoe industry became established in the town from the Industrial Revolution onwards, it was overshadowed by the industry in neighbouring Rushden where land for factories and new housing was more readily available. Within Higham itself Midland Road was the main focus for the industry and the site lies within the Industrial Survey area as defined in the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) although there were factories elsewhere in Higham (Foard & Ballinger 2000).
- 3.3 The site itself was included in the English Heritage Rapid Survey of the Boot and Shoe Industry (English Heritage 2000) alongside the adjacent Charles Parker building which was constructed in 1906 after their factory on Commercial Street was destroyed by fire (Figure 2). In 1936 the Charles Parker building was acquired by John White (Impregnable) Boots Ltd after the failure of the Parker business. White also acquired land to the immediate north of the site where he built 'some beautiful offices' (the present site,

Atlanta House), opened in 1936 by the then Mayor of Higham Ferrers (Figures 3 & 4). The opening of the offices is commemorated on a plaque in the entrance of Atlanta House designed by Sir Albert Richardson (plate 9) who was later responsible for the small close of retired worker's housing opposite the site, John White Close, opened in 1951 (figure 3) (Rushden Heritage 2010).

- 3.4 John White Footwear Ltd ceased manufacturing operations in neighbouring Rushden in 1991 but still trade today (Rushden Heritage 2010). However, it is thought that they vacated the Atlanta House site in the mid 1980s. Subsequently Atlanta House was taken over as offices and warehousing for Frank Thomas Ltd (motorcycle clothing manufacturers) who occupied the site until 2008, since when it has been unoccupied (F. Langley, pers. comm.).

4. BUILDING RECORDING

4.1 ***External Description.*** (Plates 1 – 8)

Atlanta House comprises a two-storey brick built office range fronting onto the north-south aligned Midland Road with an attached contemporary single storey brick built north light shed to the rear (east side). The office range is enclosed by a low wall with a blue brick plinth, orange brick piers and upper courses surmounted by limestone capstones and slabs with simple geometric iron railings and a gate leading to the main entrance (plate 1). The walling continues in the same style along the frontage of the adjacent (and earlier) former Charles Parker factory and offices but is clearly stylistically linked with the later Atlanta House and should therefore be regarded as contemporary with it's continuation being intended to emphasise the then unity of ownership of the adjacent structures.

The office range has a steeply pitched plain clay tiled hipped roof with a stone-topped parapet on the west elevation (principal façade). The west elevation is broadly symmetrical comprising 3 and a half bays of finely jointed orange brick laid in Flemish cross bond (Brunskill 1990) either side of a projecting ashlar entrance bay (plate 2). The flanking bays have a darker brick plinth below a limestone string course and are oversailed by the parapet which is linked to the entrance pediment by a broad ashlar through-course. The windows are two-pane timber sliding sash with obscure glass lower panes. Sills are limestone; lintels are of tuck-pointed red-rubbers with projecting limestone key-stones. A single slender cast iron down-pipe topped with diamond motif embossed hopper drains the parapet at each end of the elevation. The parapet carries the name of the building's last occupant Frank Thomas Limited although the name of the original occupants Frank White can be picked out on the northern end. The projecting ashlar entrance is topped with a simple pediment above which the metal fitting for a flagpole remains. A single cast iron casement window is found at first floor level above well-made three paneled varnished timber doors with brass fittings including two striking lions head knockers. To the left of the doorway is a wooden plaque which would have carried a company nameplate.

The south elevation comprises the office range for the first 8m and is constructed of the same orange brick with 6 similar yet smaller windows and dressings. The brickwork at the join with the factory range is keyed-in and still Flemish bond but the change to the lighter Flettons is obvious (plates 3 & 4). Initially the range continues at (a slightly lower) two-storeys with less ornate limestone dressed windows and a single steel shuttered doorway letting into this toilet and kitchen block which retains a pair of slender cast iron waste pipes letting from the first floor, the hoppers of which bear the Northamptonshire rose. The east end of this two-storey section has a high brick parapet which while superficially resembling a lift shaft actually bounds the west-facing sloping glass roof of the first floor lavatories which breaks onto a small area of inaccessible flat roof.

This high parapet provides a link in height to the north-lit factory range which continues to the east for some 33m. Constructed in the same Fletton brick with a blue brick plinth and small Welsh slate roof and an imposing chimney at east end this elevation presents a largely blank face pierced only by two doors and windows at its eastern end (plate 5). Two bricked up doorways are also apparent at the west and east ends; that at the east marking the former link to the adjacent (demolished) Charles Parker factory as seen on the 1973 Ordnance Survey mapping. A series of five blocked apertures are visible as darker slates along the roof edge. The rear (east) elevation of the factory features 3 goods doors, 2 steel shuttered, one bricked up below the saw-tooth gables of the 3 north-lit bays (plate 6). A small brick-built pump room projects from the north end of this elevation and is over-shadowed by a substantial cast iron fire-sprinkler water tank. The northern elevation is now largely inaccessible being bounded by private gardens and properties and therefore will not be described in detail here other than to note that the brick is largely obscured by brown pebble dash. In addition the glazed side of the northern factory bay is visible from here and can be seen to contain 4 small evenly spaced glazed dormers at its apex. From the first floor windows in the rear (east) of the office range it is possible to confirm that this pattern is repeated in the other two bays (plates 7 & 8).

4.2 ***Internal Description; ground floor.*** (Figure 5; Plates 9 - 18)

Entering the building through the double front doors one passes into a vestibule within which on a plaque marking the 1936 opening of the building is set on the south wall (plate 9). Resting on the black and white tiled floor at the time of the survey was a brass plaque removed from the exterior identifying the building as Atlanta House registered office of Frank Thomas Ltd. Paired varnished timber glazed internal doors with brass comes and fittings open onto the impressive entrance hall / reception area (plate 10). The floor is hardwood herringbone parquet and this flooring is found throughout the office range, albeit covered by carpet in some areas, skirtings in this area are in matching dark wood. A staircase with a striking polished hardwood handrail, white painted metal balusters, and stone treads and brass handrail on the wall side leads up to the first floor. Opposing glazed double doors lead off to the north and south wings of the building.

The south wing comprises a narrow corridor which gives access to an open plan office (room 2) through a glazed partition. Room 2 would have originally

been divided into three parts, this division being evident by the three doors in the partition which forms the east wall as well as in the ceiling joists (plate 11). The doors retain some original brass furniture which can also be seen elsewhere in the office range (plate 14). In the south east corner of room 2 is a walk-in Chatwood safe (plate 12). Returning to the corridor access can be gained to some unremarkable staff toilets (rooms 3 – 5) as well as to the factory range.

The north wing also comprises a narrow corridor from which can be accessed three former offices with connecting doors (rooms 10 – 12); a further doorway leads to the factory range. Again the offices are separated from the corridor by a double glazed partition with obscure glass and lead comes. The doors again retain some original brass furniture including hinges with acorn finials (plates 14 & 15). Wall radiators are concealed in these rooms behind timber panelling which matches the high skirtings and may be original to the building (plate 13). Door cases and high skirting boards are also likely to be contemporary (plate 16).

Between the north office wing and the factory floor is a further office (room 13) lit by two skylights but inserted into the factory range. The factory floor is covered in plain softwood flooring and comprises a broad open space, uninterrupted by the regular supporting columns normally associated with earlier north light factories (plate 17). Instead the three bay roof structure is supported by two substantial east-west aligned steel valley beams and intervening 'I-beams' (plate 17), the use of which permits the elimination of floor columns increasing usable floor space (Emmet & Gorse 2010). The angle-steel trusses follow the typical lattice girder pattern. In the south east corner of the factory are a gents cloakroom and ladies toilets (rooms 8 & 9). A former kitchen and tearoom is found in the south west corner (rooms 6 & 7). Recent on-site geotechnical works have also confirmed that the wood flooring is supported by a reinforced concrete sub-structure (F. Langley pers. comm.).

4.3 ***Internal Description; first floor.*** (Figure 6; Plates 10 – 25)

The first floor can either be accessed via the staircase in the main entrance hall or via a single flight of stairs in the south west of the factory range. The south wing is divided into 4 separate offices (rooms 15 – 18) with identical double-glazed obscure glass and timber paneling to the ground floor (plate 22). Again, some original brass door furniture remains. Radiators and pipework are exposed. From the corridor a door leads to a cloakroom (room 19) with tiled walls and floor and a heated clothes rail (plate 19). A lunch room to the south (room 20) is clearly a later insertion as the tiled border on the floor continues; the small adjacent tea room (room 22) appears original. A further door leads to a toilet block (room 23) lit by a west-facing glazed roof. In both the toilet block and the adjacent cloakroom a quantity of the door furniture, light fittings, power switches, sockets and plumbing/sanitary wares appears to be original to the 1930s (plates 20 & 21).

The main staircase landing (room 14) is accessed via a pair of original glazed double doors matching those on the ground floor (plates 23 & 24). An opposing pair of doors lead directly to the open plan north office wing (room

23) which retains a single office cubicle in its south west corner (room 24; plate 25). A narrow dog-leg flight of stairs leads to the attic.

4.4 ***Internal Description; attic. (Plate 26)***

The attic is entirely timber lined and has been largely cleared having apparently been used to store archive paperwork (F. Langley pers. Comm.), some wooden box shelving remains. Six angle-steel roof trusses divide the area and hatches open onto the unlined roof hip space at the north and south ends. A further hatch midway along the west wall accesses the exterior and the flagpole which has been removed. Two large roof lights on the eastern (rear) pitch provide some illumination. The sprinkler system continues into the attic.

At the time of survey a small collection of archive paperwork was recovered from the floor. This comprises two postcards (one unused), a sample order and a clocking-on card from John White's later Ammanford, Dyfed factory. Perhaps the most significant of these items is the used postcard addressed to John White Ltd, Higham Ferrers which details a request from Elkan Goldman & Son of Leeds for a sample of the Gents Charms Safety boot (plates 27 & 28). The postcard is dated 31st December 1936, a mere month after Atlanta House had opened. The items will be retained in the project archive.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Although still retaining hints of the grandeur that befitted the head offices of a then major player in the boot and shoe industry the office range of Atlanta House is unremarkable in the wider context of regional industry. This is particularly true when compared with more significant structures such as White's 1939 Art Deco Grade II listed factory in neighbouring Rushden, designed by Sir Albert Richardson (Morrison et al 2004, 43). Nonetheless it is still a building of some period character as its acknowledged contribution to the Higham Ferrers Conservation Area demonstrates.
- 5.2 The single-storey rear factory range although constructed of more prosaic materials is similarly unremarkable in the wider context. It is also notable that buildings of this later period are not identified as research priorities in the regional agenda or resource assessment (Ballinger 2001; Cooper 2006), the focus being on the period prior to 1850. However, as a later example of the north light sheds which supplanted the multi-storey plan from the 1890s onwards; the use of deep valley beams in the roof structure, allowing an entirely unimpeded factory space demonstrates this industrial form at its most structurally developed (Emmet & Gorse 2010).
- 5.3 Overall the story of Atlanta House is inextricably linked with the history of the boot and shoe trade in the early to mid 20th century when a lack of available land in the early centres of the industry led to the increasing importance of and expansion into secondary centres such as Higham Ferrers (NIAG 2001, 4). This expansion was also driven in part by a shift from the earlier multi-storey factory form to the more versatile, larger footprint north light sheds, a

form with its roots in the northern English weaving industry of the second quarter of the 19th century (English Heritage 2007). The development of this and adjacent sites may also be linked to the opening of the Higham Ferrers branch of the Midland Railway in 1894, which appears to have stimulated the development of industry to the east of Higham Ferrers. Finally, the construction of the factory and offices as a headquarters and production centre for John Whites is illustrative of both the upwards trajectory of that company during the 1930s and also of the complex relationship between Rushden and Higham Ferrers.

6. ARCHIVE

- 6.1 The project details have been uploaded to the OASIS system (Ref: madeenvi1-88626; Appendix 1, below). In due course the report will also be uploaded to OASIS. As detailed in the Project Design (Crank 2010) MADE Environment will store the Project Archive in the medium term.
- 6.2 The project archive is principally digital and comprises:
- 221 digital images
 - 16 drawings = 7 PDFs, 9 TIFFs, 1 DWG.
 - The Brief (PDF), Project Design (PDF / Word), Final Report (PDF / Word)
 - Archive documents referred to in section 4.4 (hard copy)

The archive will be stored on digital media (DVD +R & HDD) until suitable deposition can be arranged

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 MADE Environment would like to thank both Liz Mordue and Katherine Daws of Northamptonshire County Council for their input and advice. The assistance of the staff of the local studies section of Northampton Library is also acknowledged. Finally, the assistance and advice of both the developer Mr F Langley and his agent Adam Hartung of Sidey Design is also gratefully acknowledged.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Appendix 1: OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS	
Project name	Atlanta House, Higham Ferrers
Short description	In November 2010 MADE Environment undertook an archaeological building survey of Atlanta House, Midland Road, Higham Ferrers (NGR: SP 9622 6867) prior to partial demolition and redevelopment of the site. The survey revealed that the structure comprised a contemporary office range and attached north light factory shed. Both structures were constructed in 1936, the offices being the new head office for John White a boot and shoe manufacturer from neighbouring Rushden. Although modernised in part, the offices retain some original features and fittings of the period. The north light factory range is structurally interesting because as a late example of the form it dispenses with internal columns using instead deep valley beams to provide support, creating an unimpeded floor space.
Project type	Building Recording
Site status	None
Previous work	No
Current Land use	Industrial, offices, storage / warehousing
Future work	No
Monument type/ period	NORTH LIGHT SHED Modern
Monument type/ period	SHOE FACTORY Modern
Monument type/ period	OFFICE Modern
Significant finds	None
PROJECT LOCATION	
County	Northamptonshire
Site address	Atlanta House, Midland Road, Higham Ferrers NN10 8DN
Study area	c. 1800.00 Square metres
OS Easting & Northing	SP 9622 6867
Height OD	c. 74m
PROJECT CREATORS	
Organisation	MADE Environment
Project brief originator	County Archaeological Service
Project Design originator	MADE Environment
Director/Supervisor	N.A. Crank
Project Manager	M Ellison
Sponsor or funding body	Sidey Design
PROJECT DATE	
Start date	November 2010

End date	December 2010
ARCHIVE	
Location	MADE Environment offices
<i>Content:</i>	
Physical	N/A
Paper	4 archive documents
Digital	221 digital images; 16 drawings; 3 PDFs, 2 MS Word files
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished	Unpublished client report / Grey literature
Title	Archaeological Building Recording: Atlanta House, Midland Road, Higham Ferrers, NN10 8DN
Author(s)	Nick Crank
Date	December 2010

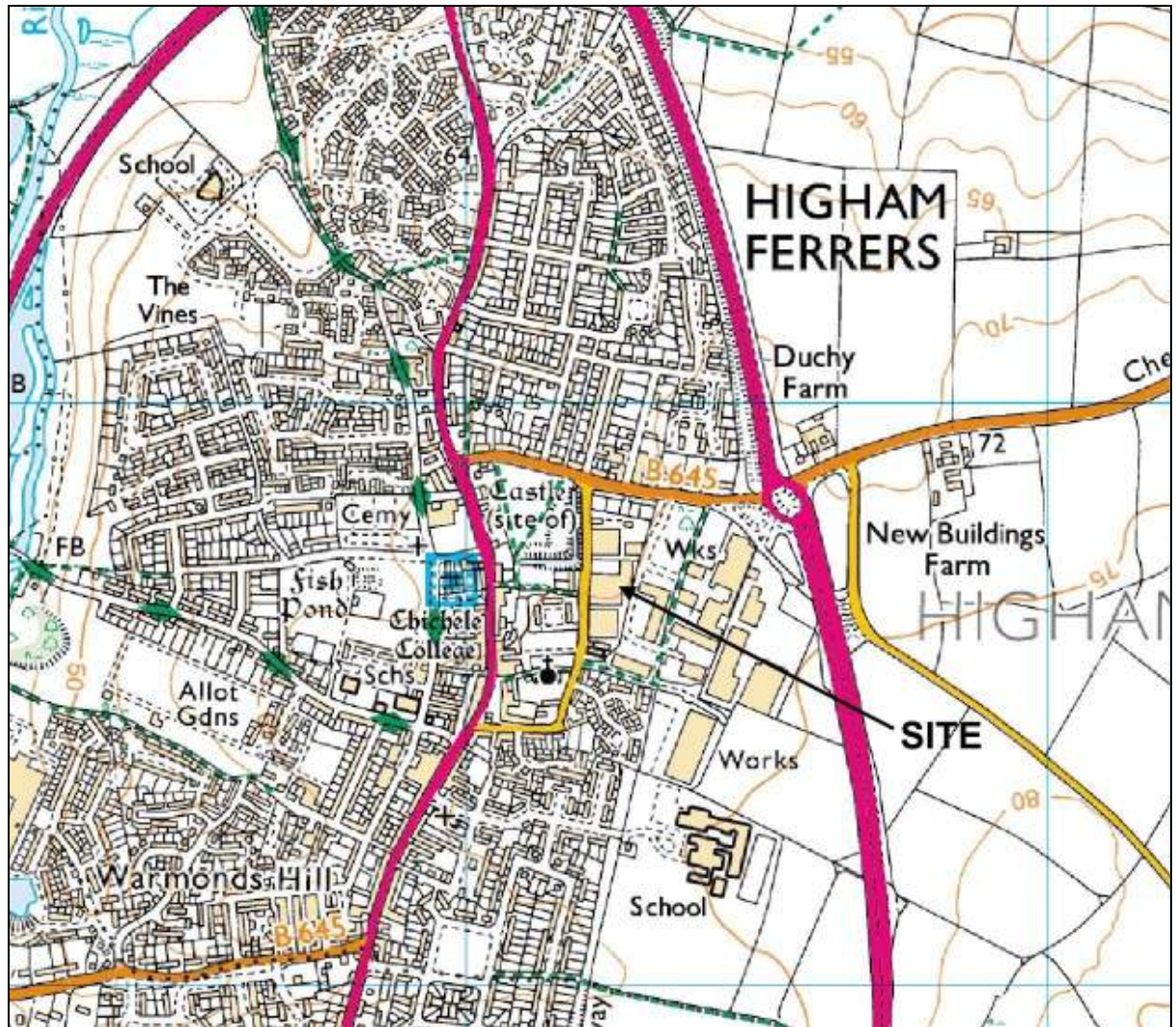


Figure 1: Site Location

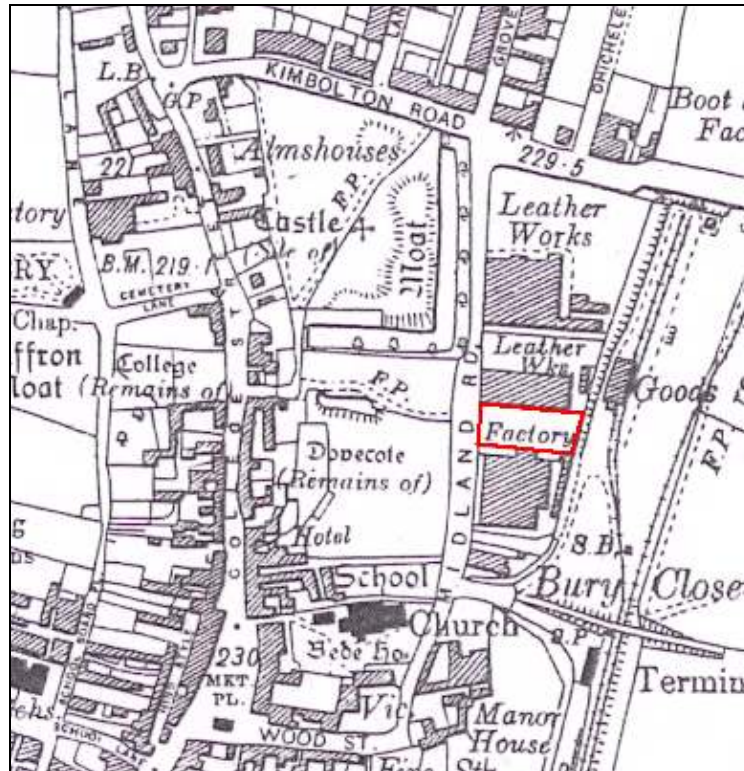


Figure 2: Site shown as vacant to north of Charles Parker factory on 1927 Ordnance Survey 6 inch mapping



Figure 3: 1951 Ordnance Survey 6 inch map showing outline of factory and offices with link to former Charles Parker factory to the south.

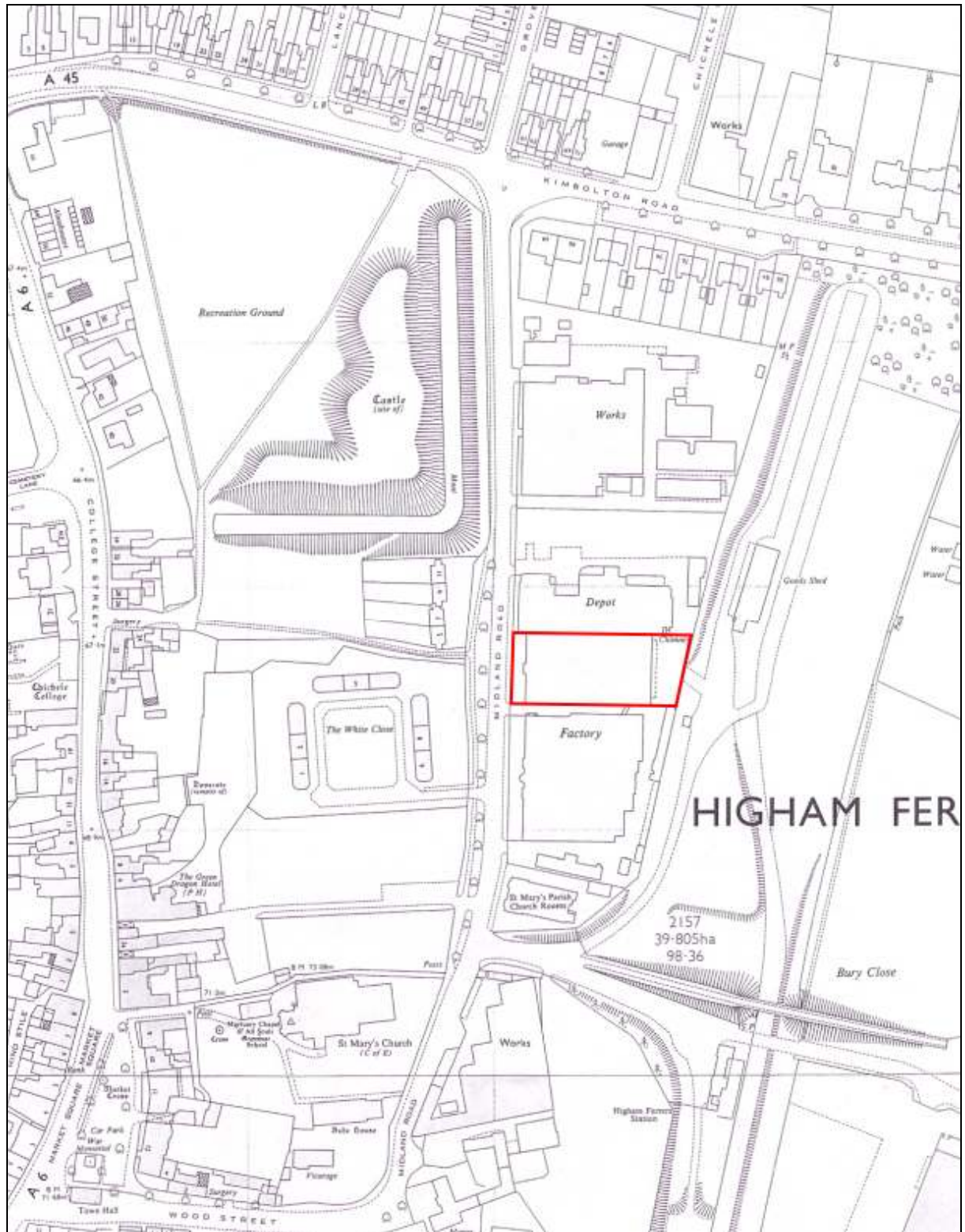


Figure 4: Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1973 showing link to adjacent factory to the south

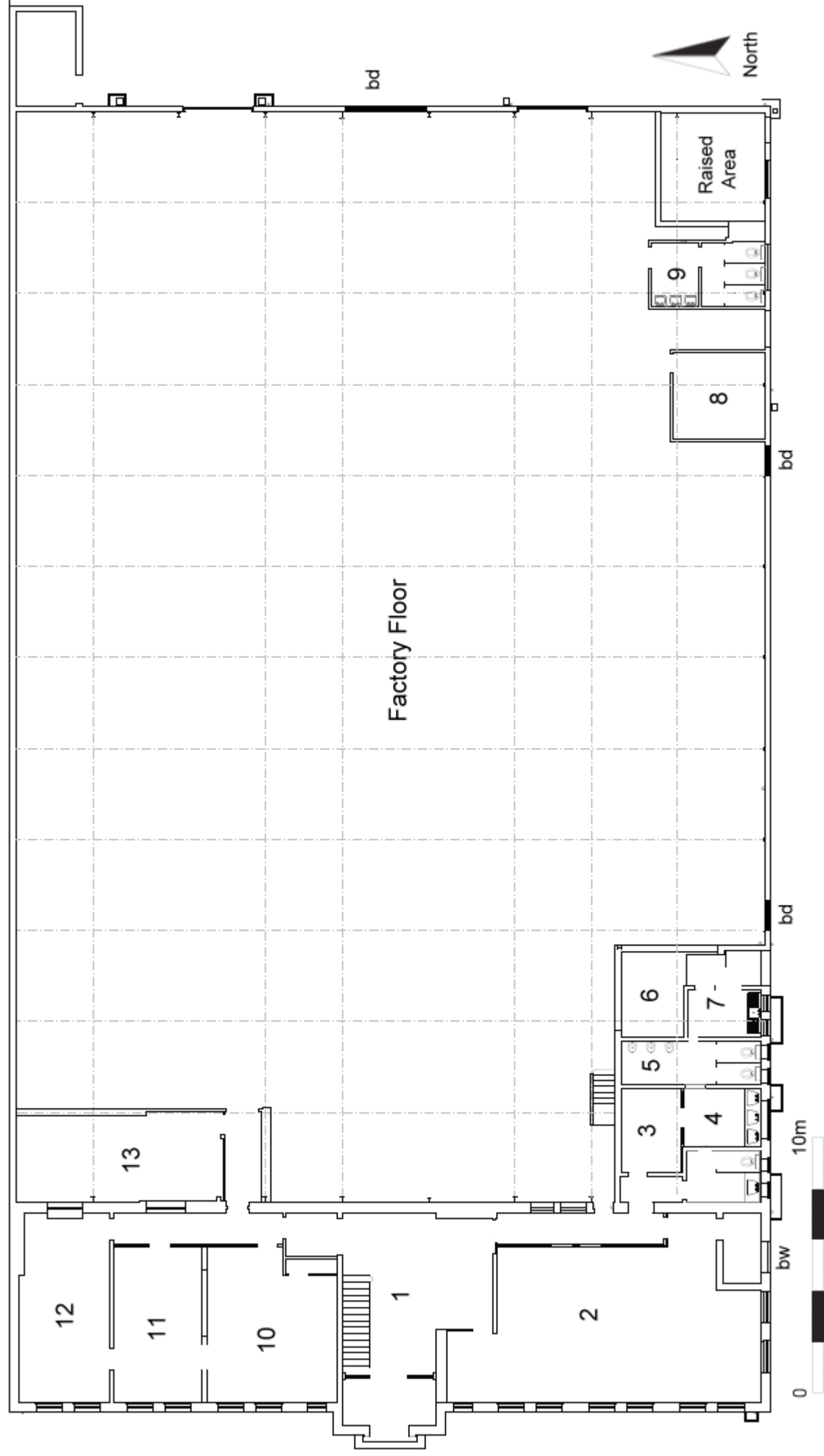


Figure 5: Ground Floor Plan (1:200 scale)



Figure 6: First floor plan (1:200 scale)

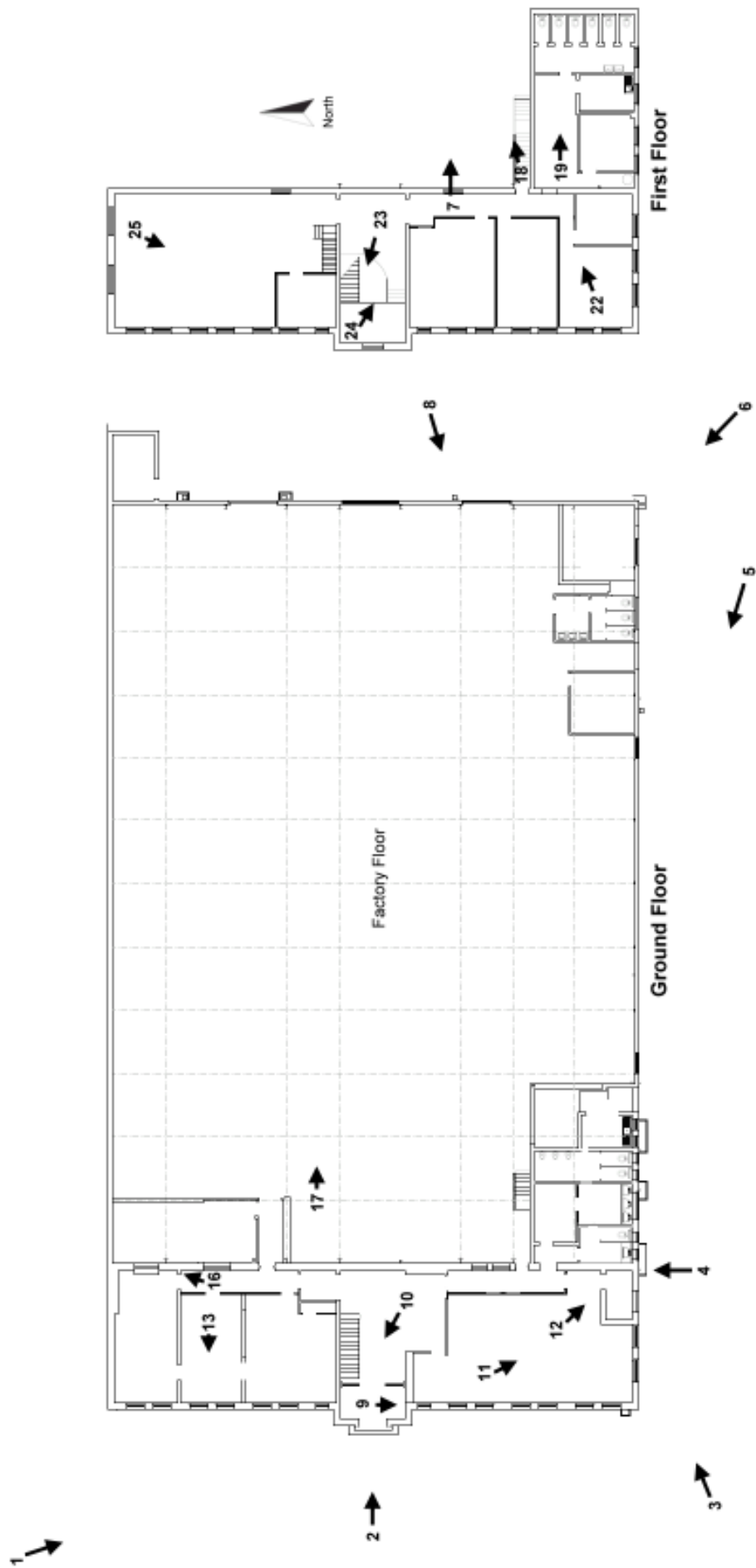


Figure 7: Diagram showing location / direction of Photographic Plates



Plate 1: West main elevation



Plate 2: Main entrance



Plate 3: South elevation, western section



Plate 4: Detail of south elevation showing join between office and factory range



Plate 5: South elevation showing factory range



Plate 6: South and east elevation of factory range



Plate 7: View of southern north light bay glazing from first floor rear window showing small ventilation dormers



Plate 8: View of southern north light bay from east end of factory range



Plate 9: Plaque commemorating opening of the building in 1936



Plate 10: Main staircase and entrance hall



Plate 11: Ground floor room 2 looking south east, walk-in safe in corner, ceiling joists marking removed partitions visible



Plate 12: Chatwood walk-in safe



Plate 13: Ground floor room 11 showing boxed-in radiators



Plate 14: Brass door knob and shield escutcheon found throughout office range



Plate 15: Over-painted brass door hinge with acorn finials on door to room 11



Plate 16: Detail of door case and skirting, ground floor corridor north office range



Plate 17: Interior factory range looking east



Plate 18: Factory range interior from first floor office range showing deep valley beam



Plate 19: First floor toilet block room 19 looking east



Plate 20: Chrome plated door handle room 22



Plate 21: Chrome plated door closer room 22



Plate 22: Room 17 looking east, showing glazed internal partitions



Plate 23: Room 14 main landing looking north west



Plate 24: Room 14 from main staircase half landing



Plate 25: Room 23 looking south west, showing room 24 and attic staircase



Plate 26: Attic looking north east



Plate 27: Address side of 1936 postcard

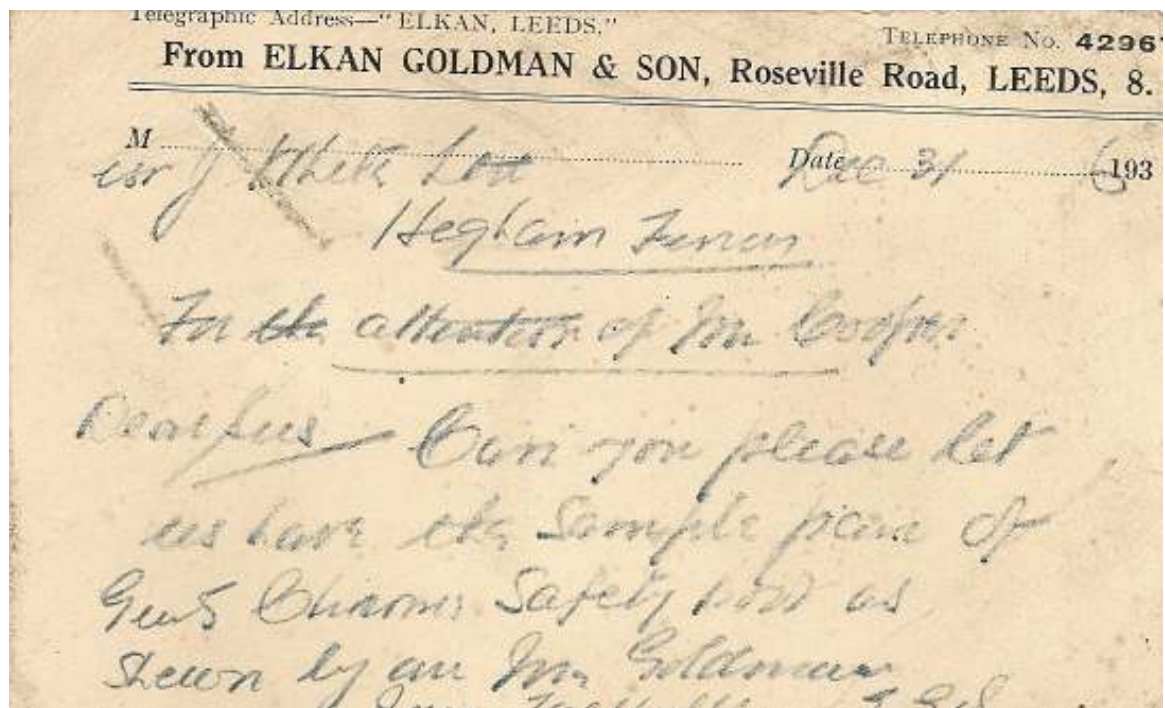


Plate 28: Message side of 1936 postcard