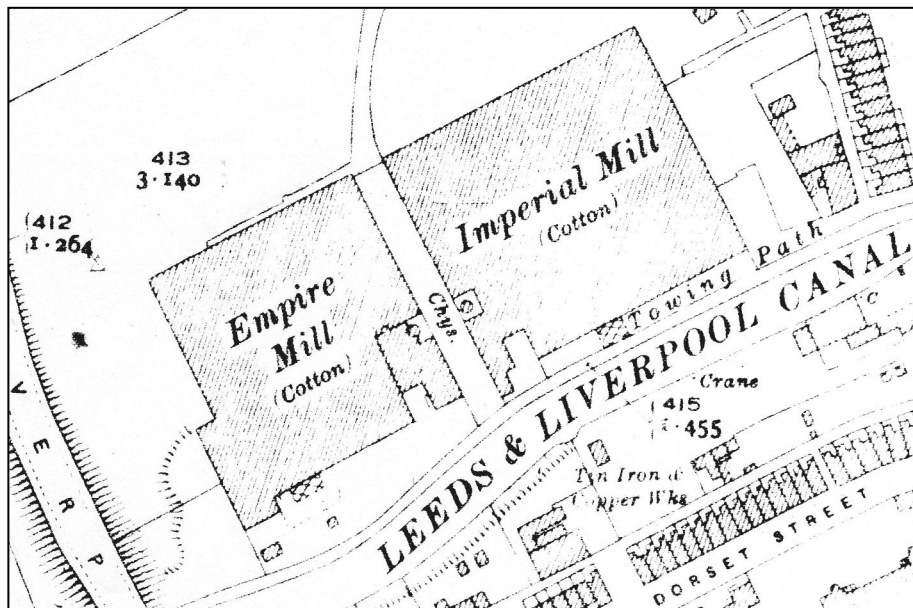


Empire Mill and Imperial Mill  
Liverpool Road, Burnley, Lancashire:  
Historical Record



October 2007

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STEPHEN HAIGH

B u i l d i n g s   A r c h a e o l o g i s t

11 Browcliff Silsden Keighley West Yorkshire BD20 9PN

Tel/Fax: 01535 658925 Mobile: 07986 612548

[stephenhaigh@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:stephenhaigh@tiscali.co.uk)

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# Empire Mill and Imperial Mill Liverpool Road, Burnley, Lancashire: Historical Record

## CONTENTS

### List of photographs

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Site location.....	1
3	Planning background.....	1
4	Historical background and architectural interest of the building type.....	2
5	Scope of historical research .....	3
6	Historical development of Empire Mill and Imperial Mill .....	3
7	Conclusion .....	5
	Appendix: Method statement.....	7

### Figures

1: Location maps	8: Extract from OS 1960 map
2: Detailed location map	9: Vertical photograph, c. 2005
3: Site of Empire Mill, September 2007	10: Imperial Mill: outline plan, 2005
4: Site of Imperial Mill, September 2007	11: Empire Mill: block plan, 1914
5: Extract from OS 1890 map	12: Empire Mill: plan of engine house etc, 1914
6: Extract from OS 1912 map	13: Empire Mill: details of engine house etc, 1914
7: Extract from OS 1931 map	14: Empire Mill: outline plan, 2005

## SUMMARY

Empire Mill and Imperial Mill (NGR: SD 814326) were built between 1905 and 1910 as two adjacent cotton weaving mills next to the Leeds – Liverpool Canal in Burnley, Lancashire, and were demolished in 2007 during the redevelopment of the site. Historical research was carried out subsequently for Barnfield Construction Ltd, as required by a condition of planning consent.

October 2007

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STEPHEN HAIGH  
Buildings Archaeologist

11 Browcliff Silsden Keighley West Yorkshire BD20 9PN  
Tel/Fax: 01535 658925 Mobile: 07986 612548  
[stephenhaigh@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:stephenhaigh@tiscali.co.uk)

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# **EMPIRE MILL AND IMPERIAL MILL, LIVERPOOL ROAD, BURNLEY, LANCASHIRE:**

## **HISTORICAL RECORD**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report presents the results of historical research into two former textile mills in the Rosegrove district of Burnley, Lancashire, which were demolished in the spring of 2007. The work was commissioned by the developer Barnfield Construction Ltd as required by a condition of planning consent from Burnley Borough Council for the redevelopment of the site.
- 1.2 Imperial Mill was built in 1905 and Empire Mill in 1910, and both were steam-powered cotton weaving mills which continued to work into the late twentieth century.
- 1.3 The research, which took place after the demolition of the buildings, was carried out in accordance with a methodology agreed in advance with the Lancashire County Archaeology Service (see Appendix). This report will be submitted to the client, the planning authority, the County Archaeology Service and the English Heritage National Monuments Record, while the project archive will be deposited at the Lancashire Record Office, Preston.

### **2 Site location**

- 2.1 The two mills formerly stood adjacent to one another, to the east of Liverpool Road (the A646 road) on the north bank of the Leeds – Liverpool Canal in the Rosegrove district of Burnley, some 2.5km west of the town centre, centred at NGR SD814326 (Figure 1). Of the two, Empire Mill stood to the south-west, Imperial Mill to the north-east (Figure 2). At the time of this research, both mills had been entirely demolished (Figures 3,4).

### **3 Planning background**

- 3.1 Planning consents were granted by Burnley Borough Council on 7 June 2007 for mixed use development on the site of the two mills (application nos: APP/2006/0769 & 0775), and each consent contains a condition requiring building recording and analysis before development. This was not implemented and following demolition, the present historical research was commissioned, in order to allow the conditions to be discharged.

## **4 Historical background and architectural interest of the building type**

- 4.1 The cotton industry developed rapidly from c.1770 to 1840, the main period of the British industrial revolution, during which time the factory system evolved as spinning and other aspects of production became mechanised, although weaving tended to lag behind in this respect and continued as a domestic industry well into the nineteenth century. Lancashire emerged as the centre of the cotton trade, due to a combination of its damp climate, proximity to Atlantic ports, and topography, and during the second half of the nineteenth century the eastern part of the county grew to prominence as the centre of the cotton weaving industry. Hundreds of cotton weaving mills were built in the Burnley and Pendle areas between 1850 and 1914, based on the steam-powered weaving shed housing power-loom, usually with an adjacent warehouse or yarn preparation block, and sometimes a spinning mill, although as specialisation with the industry continued it became the norm to buy yarn from elsewhere, particularly the Manchester area.
- 4.2 By 1850 there were around 9000 power-loom in Burnley, many of them in cotton weaving mills sited next to the Leeds-Liverpool Canal, which provided a ready source of water for steam engines, as well as a means of transport for coal, and raw and finished goods. The town's prominence as the centre of the cotton weaving industry began around 1880, and by the early twentieth century it was the home to some 100,000 looms (Hall & Spencer 1993). The industry reached a climax at the start of World War I in 1914, responding to intense demand from markets around the world, and many new large premises were built in Burnley between 1900 and 1914, such as Heasandford, Primrose, Cameron, Empire, Imperial, Woodbine, Lodge, Queensgate, Browhead, Park, Habergham, Oak Bank and Ferndale Mills (Bennett 1951, 107). Thereafter cotton weaving in the district went into decline, as among other factors, foreign competition resulted in production moving overseas, and the industry continued to contract throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.
- 4.3 With continual developments in the mechanisation of textile production, by the end of the nineteenth century the steam-powered cotton weaving mill had emerged as a highly specialised building type, with many examples sharing the essential components. These were the weaving shed itself, a warehouse and yarn preparation block usually of two or more storeys, an engine house, boiler house, chimney, and perhaps economiser house (containing a means of pre-heating water for the boilers) (Taylor 2000, 14). Of these the weaving shed occupied the greatest area, being a single storey structure with saw-tooth roof accommodating the characteristic north-lights which were a key part of the building, as they gave the necessary illumination for cloth production. The roof

was supported on rows of cast iron or steel columns which also served to support the transmission of power to the looms which occupied the building, via a series of shaft and belt drives, distributed from the engine house.

- 4.4 The specialised form of the weaving shed means that it is unsuitable for most other forms of occupation, and with the decline in the textile industry the building type is diminishing rapidly. Although in some instances warehouses are converted to other uses, the other components of weaving mills (engine and boiler houses, and chimneys) have generally been made redundant by earlier changes in production, and are also rapidly diminishing in number.

## **5 Scope of historical research**

- 5.1 Material was searched at Burnley Central Library and the Lancashire Record Office, both of which produced historic maps and secondary documentary references to the mills. Burnley Borough Council's Planning Services provided copies of plans for an application for building control approval of an extension to Empire Mill, dated 1914 and apparently based on the original proposal drawing for the mill. The English Heritage National Monuments Record was also consulted, but could provide no information on the site.

## **6 Historical development of Empire Mill and Imperial Mill**

### **Imperial Mill**

- 6.1 Cartographic evidence in the form of Ordnance Survey 1:2500 maps shows that in c.1890 the site subsequently occupied by the two mills was still agricultural land and that Liverpool Road, and its bridge over the canal, had yet to be laid out (Figure 5). By 1909 Imperial Mill had been built, along with a new bridge over the canal, which replaced the earlier Ormerod Turn Bridge with one to the south-west. "Imperial Mill (Cotton)" appears as a building some 94m long from south-west to north-east, by 82m wide, with its chimney at the south-west side, presumably with the engine and boiler houses between it and the canal; access appears to have been alongside the canal towpath, from Lowerhouse Lane to the north-east, via an entry next to Dugdale Bridge (Figure 6). The 1929 revision shows Imperial Mill not to have changed in outline at all, except with the addition of what was probably a glazed canopy on the south-east elevation (Figure 7). A map of 1960 shows the mill to have been extended to the north-east, with minor changes at the south corner and along the north-west elevation (Figure 8).
- 6.2 Secondary sources record that Imperial Mill was built by John Spencer in 1905 and started working the following year, and in the 1930s contained 1278 looms, when it was at the centre of a dispute over the number of looms per weaver. It had a red brick weaving shed with sandstone detailing, the south-east elevation

bearing the date 1905 and the name Imperial Mill (Nadin 2002a, 15-16). A directory for 1914 records its occupier as “Spencer, John (Burnley) Ltd, Imperial Mill & Queen’s Mill” (Barrett & Co 1914, 220); it appears to have remained in the same hands for over fifty years as in 1966 a trade directory contained the following entry: “Spencer John (Burnley) Ltd, Imperial Mill, Rosegrove; 680 looms (3-shift Northrop automatic); poplins and spun rayons up to 44 ins for shirtings, pyjama, brassiere and dress fabrics” (*Lancashire Textile Industry* 1966).

- 6.3 John Spencer first went into business in the textile industry in 1871 with his son, also John, at Waterloo Shed on Trafalgar Street in Burnley, before moving to Ashfield Mill in the town. In 1887 they opened the new Queen’s Mill and Imperial Mill was their second major mill building, both being powered by horizontal steam engines. The company survived the lean times of the 1930s and was partly owned by Marks and Spencer for a number of years. Despite investment after World War II, the company was wound up in 1971, although its successor, John Spencer (Textiles) Ltd, continues to trade elsewhere in the town (Baren 1999).
- 6.4 Photographs published on the internet<sup>1</sup> show Imperial Mill as a plain building of red brick, with the south-east elevation containing a row of tall windows with brick arches and keystones and what is probably the boiler or engine house with a pair of tall arched openings with stone imposts. Vertical photography of recent but uncertain date<sup>2</sup> shows almost all the mill to have had a saw-tooth roof, the exception being two taller buildings at the south end near the former chimney, presumably the boiler and engine houses (Figure 9), which suggests that the warehouse and yarn preparation block was also of a single storey.
- 6.5 A site survey in 2005 recorded the outline of Imperial Mill, but shows no other information (Figure 10).

### **Empire Mill**

- 6.6 Cartographic evidence shows that Empire Mill was built after 1909, the first depiction on an Ordnance Survey map being that revised in 1929 (Figure 7). However, plans for the mill survive in the possession of Burnley Borough Council. These are titled “New Weaving Shed, Rosegrove” and “Proposed Weaving Shed, Liverpool Road, Rosegrove”, and dated May 1914, by the architects G & S Keighley, of Nicholas Street, Burnley. They are too large to reproduce in full here, although copies are contained in the project archive, and selected extracts are given here as Figures 11 to 13. The drawings appear to be for alterations to the mill, as another source dates Empire Mill to 1910 (Nadin

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<sup>1</sup> <http://groups.msn.com/BurnleyBanter/mills.msnw?Page=1>

<sup>2</sup> Google Earth

2002b, 27); it also appears to be referred to in a 1914 directory, as “Edmundson, Arthur Ltd, Lowerhouse Lane” (Barrett & Co 1914, 219), Edmundson clearly being the occupier, as indicated by other sources.

- 6.7 The two drawings of 1914 show the mill comprising a warehouse along the canal frontage, ten bays long by four and half wide, containing tape room, cloakrooms, winding and beaming<sup>3</sup> room and stores, with offices in a projecting bay at the south end. The engine house adjoins at the north-east end, with the boiler house (containing a pair of boilers) to the south-east of the chimney, described as 50 yards high. The weaving shed, holding 1012 looms, runs along the north-west side of the warehouse and engine house. The plan proposes the extension of both weaving shed and warehouse to the south-west, as well as the construction of cottages between the mill and Liverpool Road, and to the north-west. Elevation and section drawings show details of the construction of boiler and engine houses and chimney, and the exterior of the warehouse (a single storey), but appear to be of the structure existing in 1910, rather than the proposed extensions. A comparison of the plans with the 1931 Ordnance Survey map (Figure 7) indicates that the proposed extensions and cottages were not built. However between 1929 and c.1960 additions were clearly made to the south-west end of the mill, as shown on the later map (Figure 8).
- 6.8 Arthur Edmundson is recorded as occupier in 1944 (*Lancashire Textile Industry 1944*, 405), when they were listed, under “manufacturers of cotton goods” as “Edmundson, Arthur Ltd, Empire Mill, Rosegrove, Burnley, & Fir Trees Mill, Higham”, and in 1962 they were still at the site (Barrett & Co 1962, 8). However, they appear to have ceased trading at the mill around 1968 (Howell no date).
- 6.9 A recent vertical photograph<sup>4</sup> shows the mill to have retained its essential arrangement, albeit with the extensions along the south-west side (Figure 9). The boiler and engine houses form almost a mirror image with those of Imperial Mill, at the east corner. An outline survey of the mill made in 2005 shows this essential arrangement, although without details of the building’s structure (Figure 14).

## 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The two adjacent mills were built within a few years of one another at the peak of the cotton weaving industry’s fortunes, in the first decade of the twentieth century. At the time they would have been modern factories built to an established and highly refined design, as suggested by the fact that they appear to have been built to a very similar form, to the extent that they were almost

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<sup>3</sup> Beam warping was the treatment of yarn in preparation for weaving

<sup>4</sup> Google Earth

mirror images of one another. As the means of powering the looms which the mills were built to house, the horizontal steam engine was a key component of both sites, and all the other elements were built around the engine house, which was positioned next to the canal so as to benefit from the water supply it provided. The fact that the mills appear to have had single storey warehouses with saw-tooth roofs seems associated with the late date of the mills, a feature found in other examples in the Greater Manchester area, but less common in east Lancashire (Taylor 200, 20).

- 7.2 There appear to have been few changes to the mill buildings during the course of the twentieth century, although both Empire Mill and Imperial Mill were extended in the middle of that period and the chimneys at both were demolished. Both mills continued in textile production until c.1970, following which they continued to serve a variety of industrial functions.

## 8 References

- Anon 1944 *The Lancashire Textile Industry 1944*  
Anon 1966 *The Lancashire Textile Industry 1966*  
Baren, M 1999 *How it all Began in Lancashire*  
Barrett, P & Co, 1914 *General and Commercial Directory of Burnley, Nelson, Colne, Padiham*  
Barrett, P & Co, 1962 *Burnley and District Directory*  
Bennett, W 1951 *The History of Burnley from 1850*  
Hall, B & Spencer, K 1993 *Burnley: A Pictorial History*  
Howell no date *List of Burnley Cotton Manufacturers etc* (typescript, Burnley Library)  
Nadin, J 2002a *Old Lowerhouse*  
Nadin, J 2002b *Burnley's Industrial Heritage: The Cotton Mills*  
Taylor, S 2000 *Pendle Textile Mills: Architectural Survey Report*

### METHOD STATEMENT FOR DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

This method statement sets out the work proposed as archaeological mitigation for the redevelopment of the above site by Barnfield Construction Ltd, as required under planning consent from Burnley Borough Council, application nos 2006/0769 and 2006/0775. No archaeological record was made of the buildings before their demolition and consequently a desk-based record is required, drawing on any existing records, in order that the condition can be discharged.

The two mills are believed to have been nineteenth century cotton mills, located next to the Leeds – Liverpool Canal, of archaeological and historical significance because they represented a now largely defunct industry to which the district owes much of its character and former prosperity. Buildings associated with the textile industry are continually being lost through demolition and conversion and are often worthy of record because of this significance.

The desk-based record will take the form of a written and illustrated report containing, where possible<sup>5</sup>, copies of drawings, maps, plans or photographs of the two mills, of any date. Written sources such as accounts, trade directories, local history texts, and historical syntheses concerned with the textile industry will also be consulted and any relevant information will be incorporated in the report.

As a minimum material will be consulted at Burnley Library, Lancashire Record Office, and the National Monuments Record; other sources of information may be consulted if appropriate.

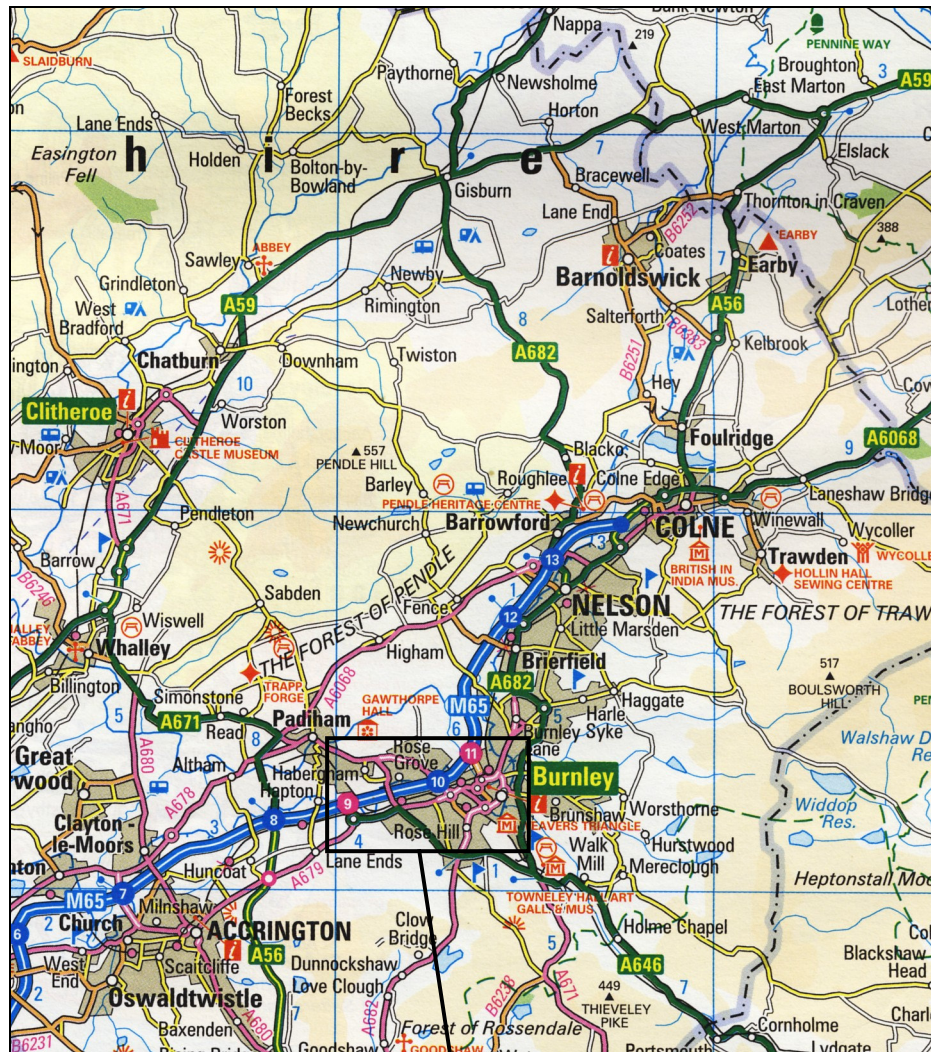
Research for the report will begin during the week commencing 3 September 2007 and it is envisaged that the report will be completed by 1 October 2007.

Stephen Haigh  
29 August 2007

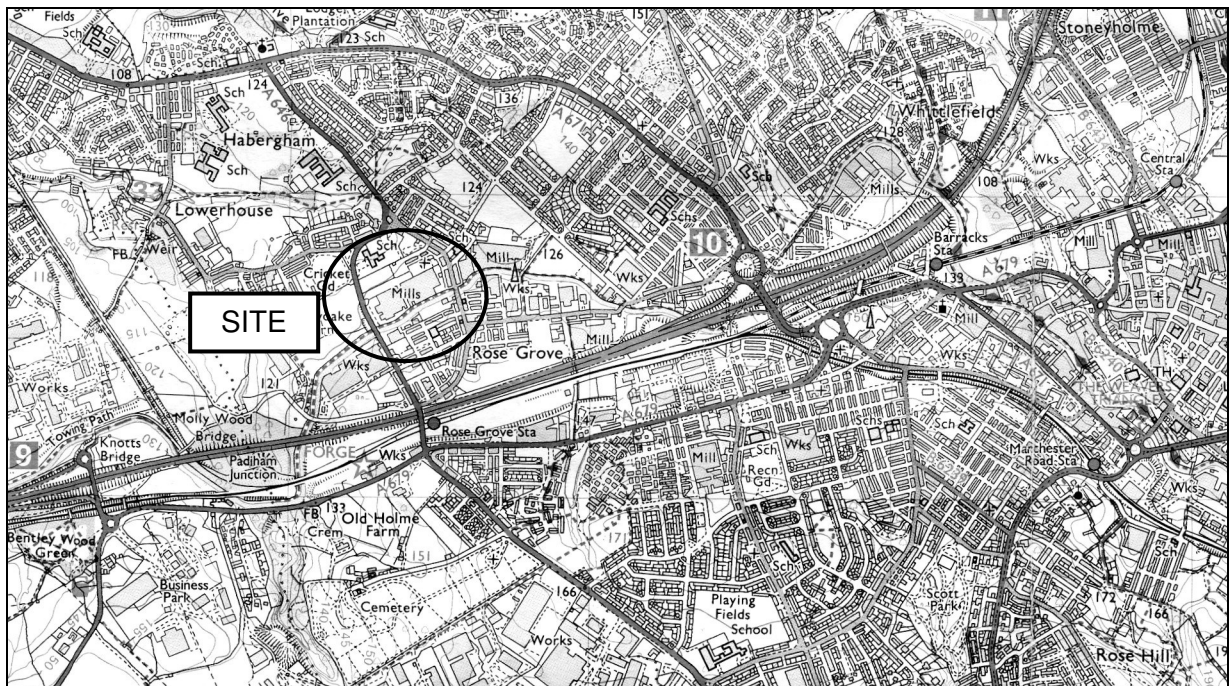
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<sup>5</sup> Copyright restrictions may prevent inclusion of certain images





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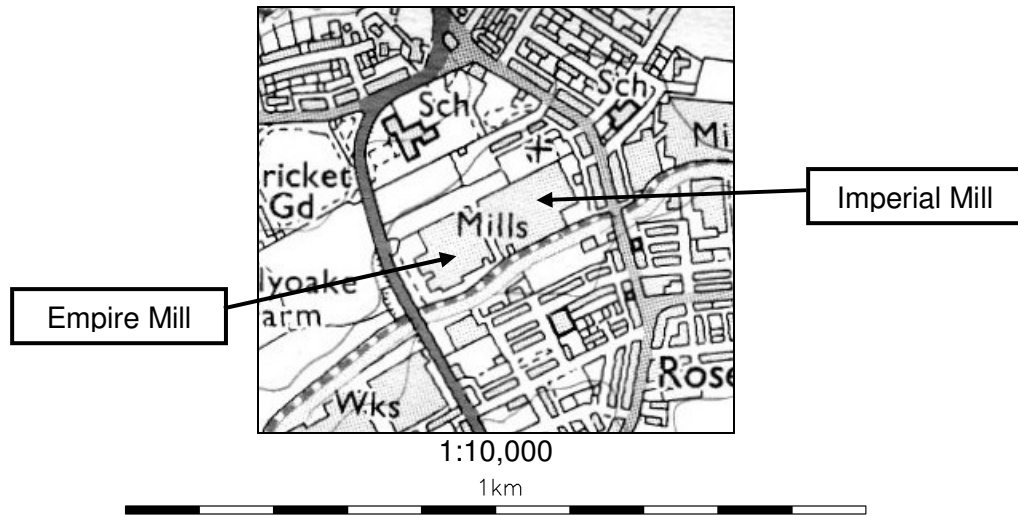


1km

**Figure 1: Location maps**

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**Figure 2: Detailed location map**

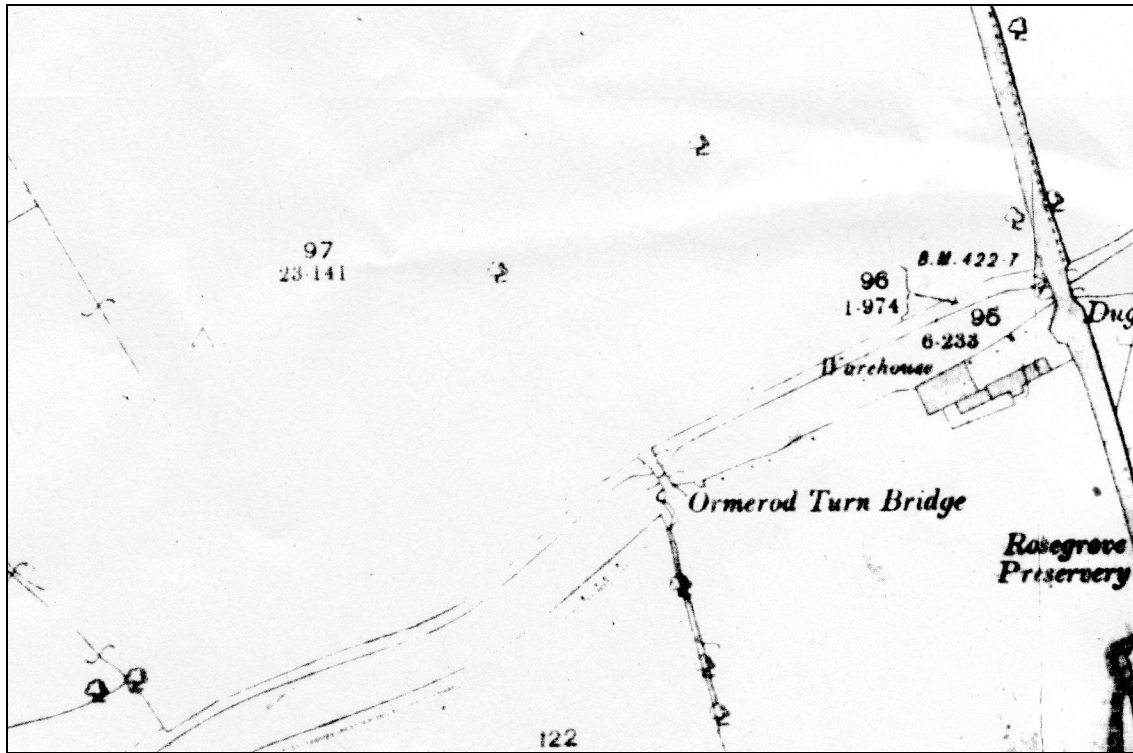
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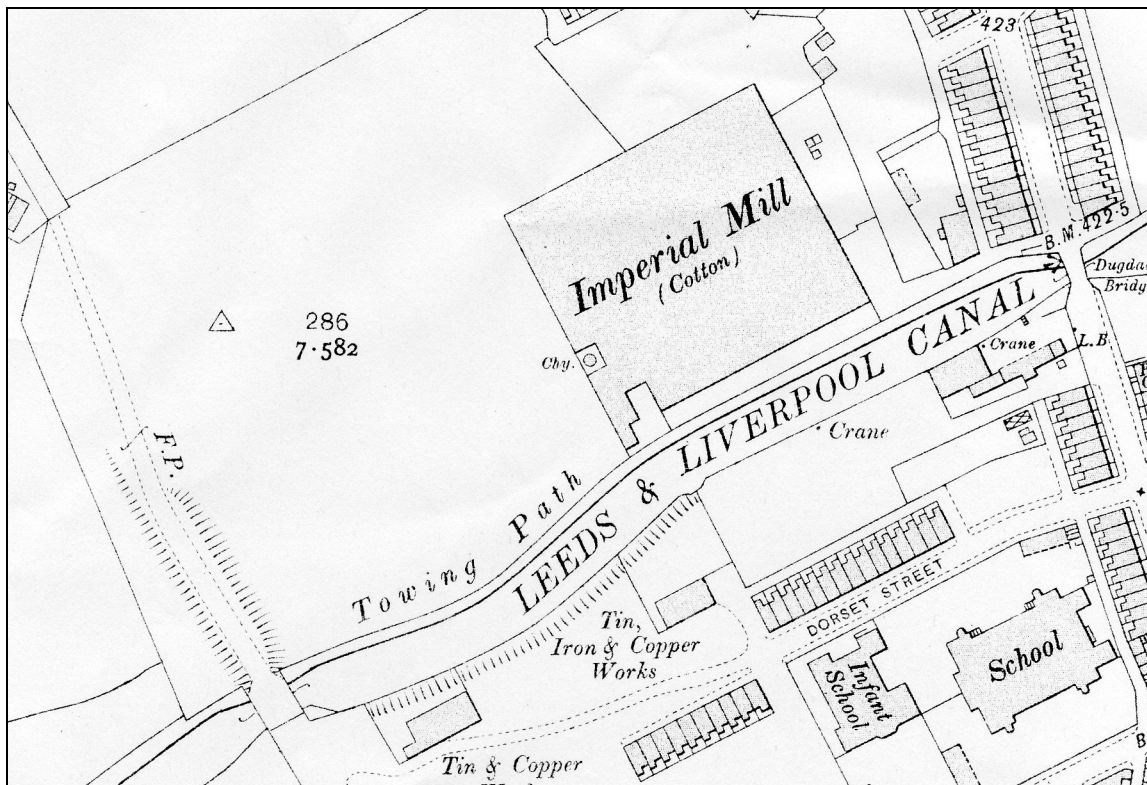
**Figure 3: Site of Empire Mill, from the south-west, September 2007**



**Figure 4: Site of Imperial Mill, from the east, September 2007**

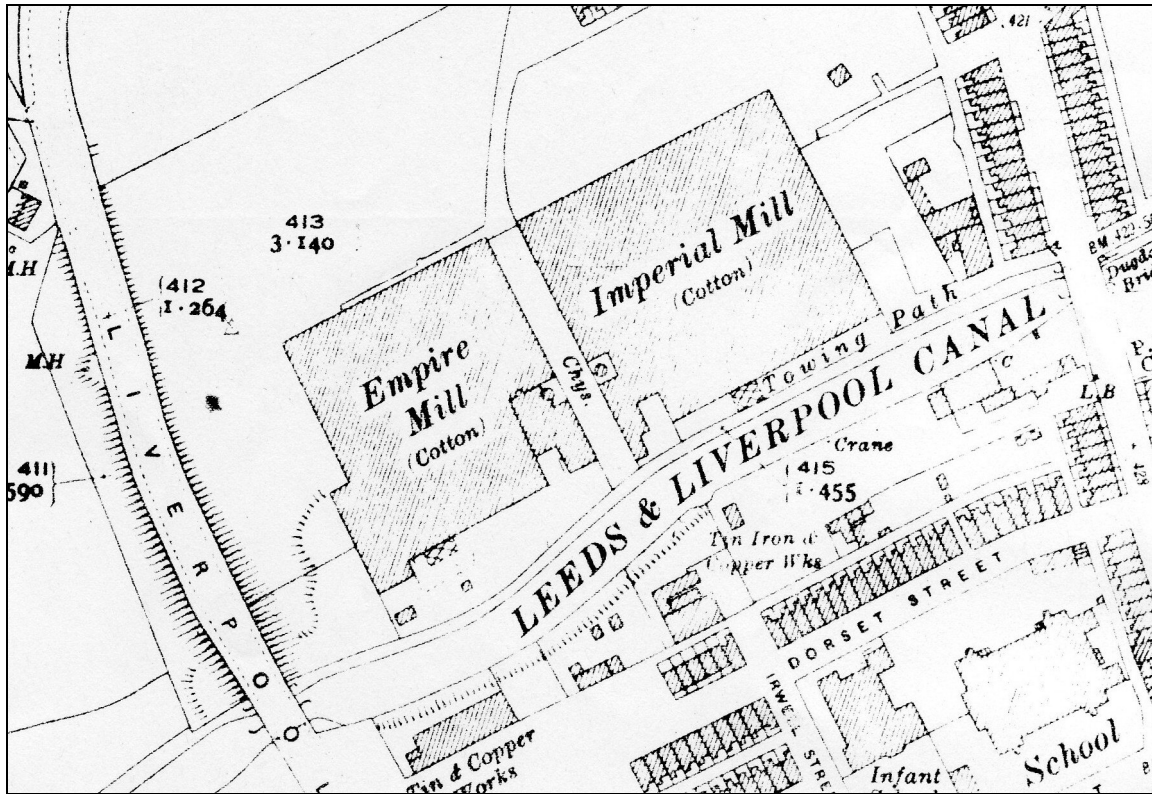


**Figure 5:** First edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, c.1890 (surveyed 1890)  
(Sheet no: Lancashire, 64.1)

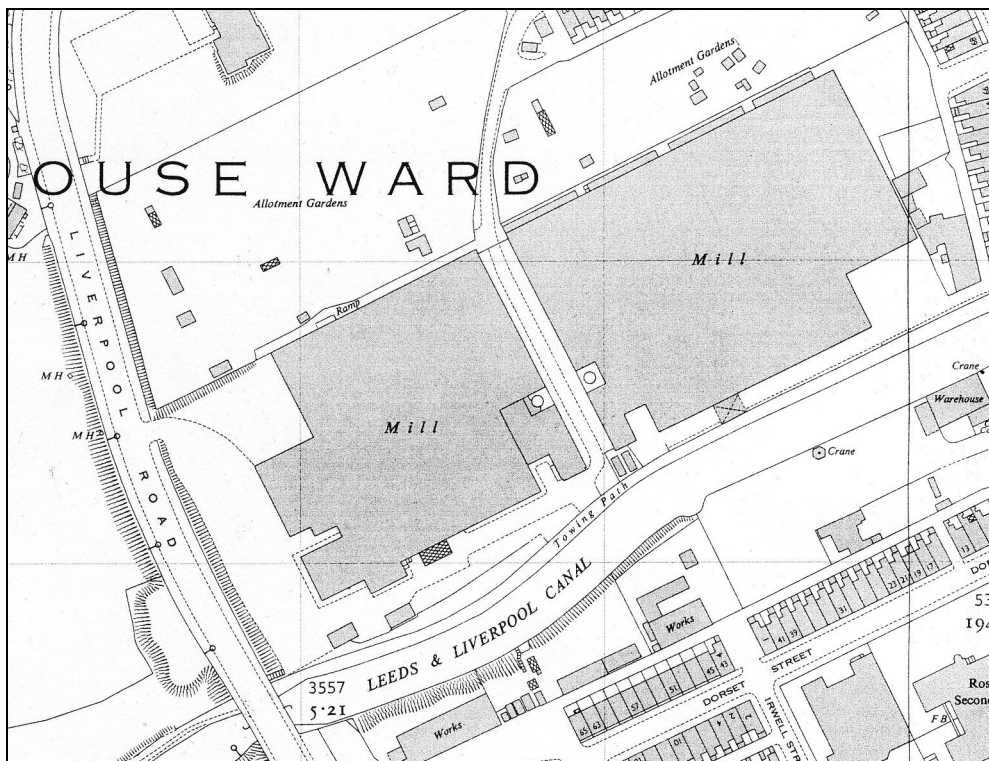


**Figure 6:** Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, 1912 (revised 1909)  
(Sheet no: Lancashire, 64.1)





**Figure 7:** Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, 1931 (revised 1929)  
(Sheet no: Lancashire, 64.1)



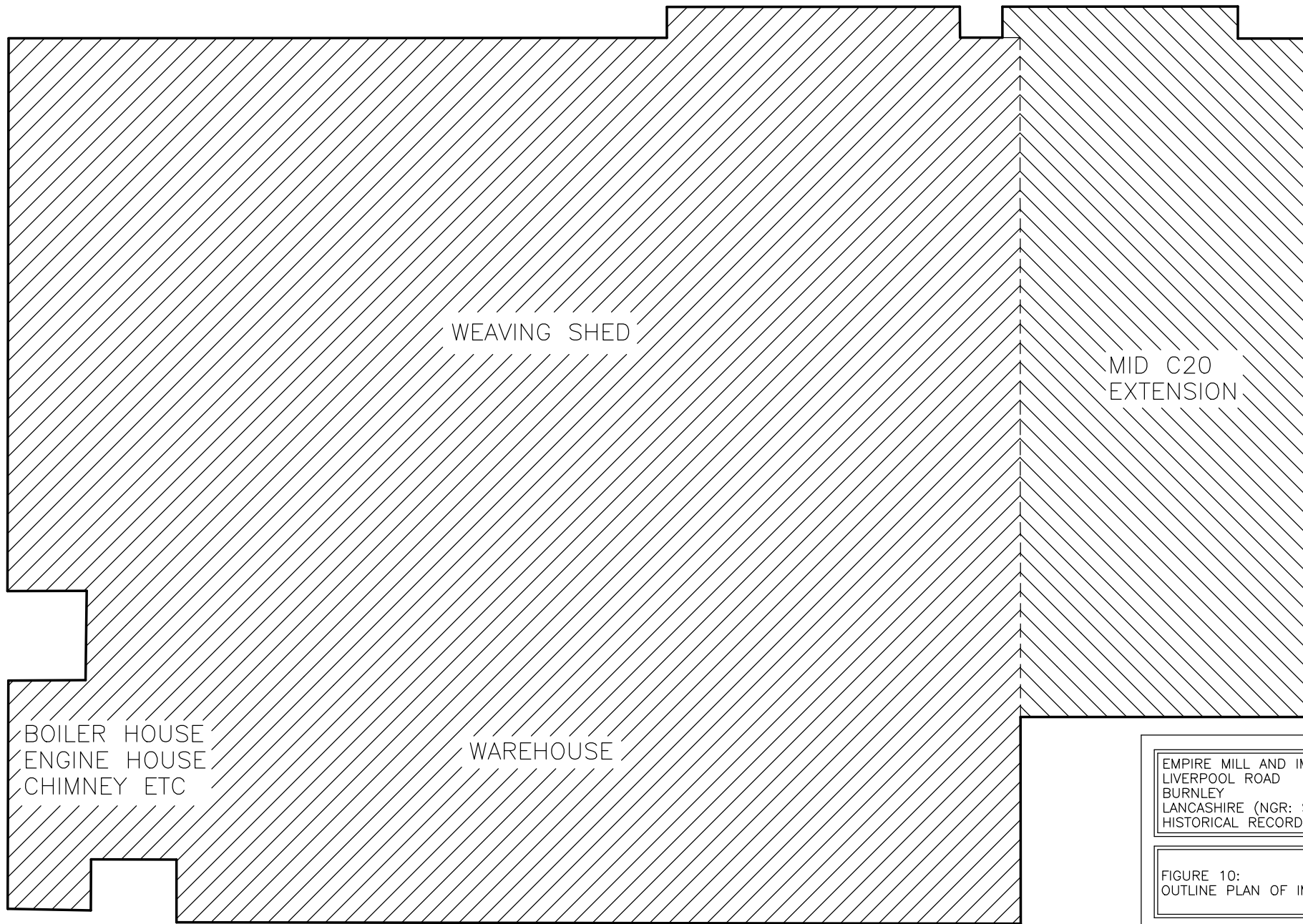
**Figure 8:** Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, 1960  
(Sheet no: SD 8132)

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NORTH



**Figure 9:** Vertical photograph of the site, c. 2004  
From *Google Earth*



BASED ON 2005 SURVEY BY LAND SURVEYING AND ENGINEERING SERVICES

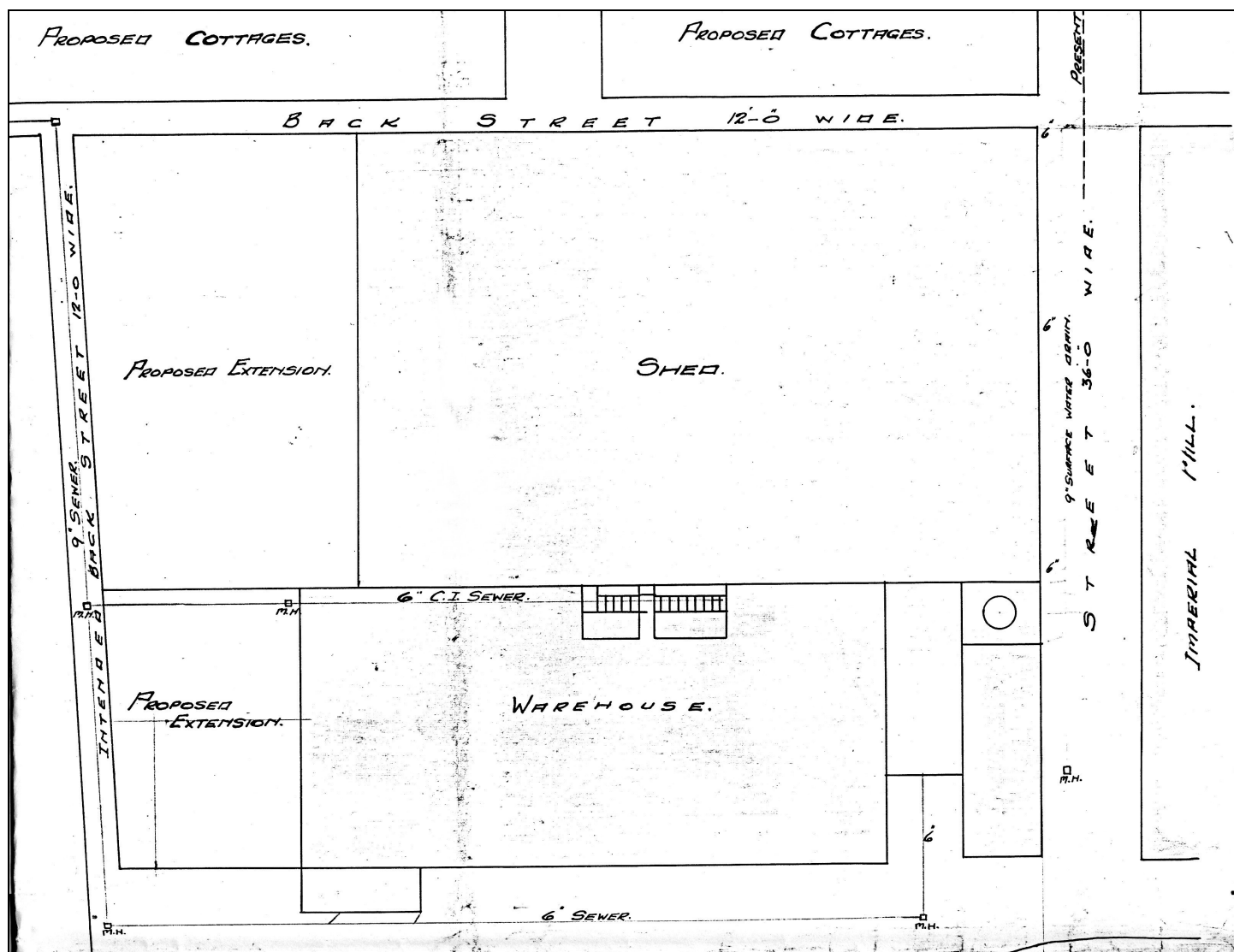
EMPIRE MILL AND IMPERIAL MILL  
LIVERPOOL ROAD  
BURNLEY  
LANCASHIRE (NGR: SD 814326):  
HISTORICAL RECORD

FIGURE 10:  
OUTLINE PLAN OF IMPERIAL MILL, 2005

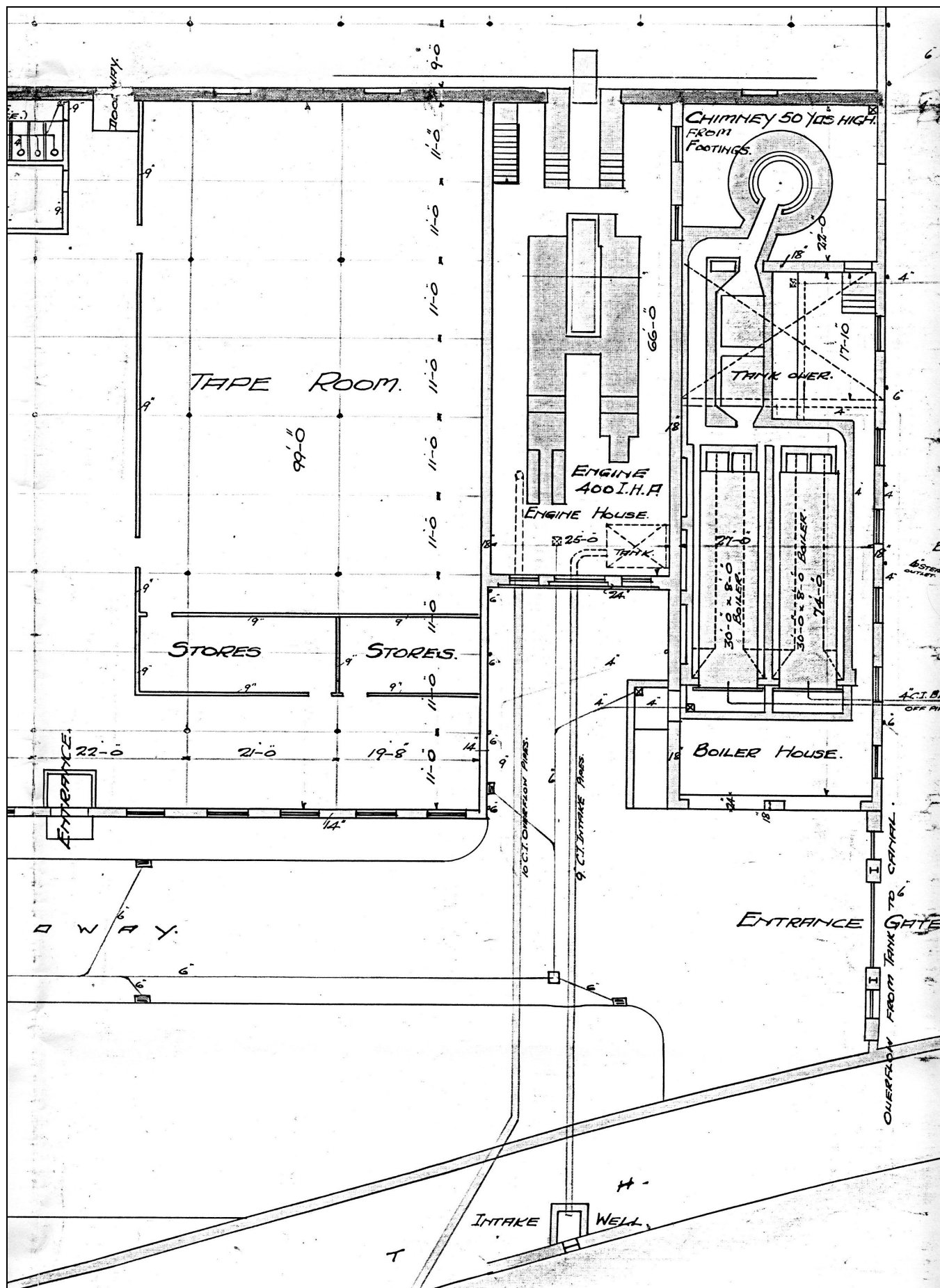
SCALE: 1:500

STEPHEN HAIGH  
Buildings Archaeologist

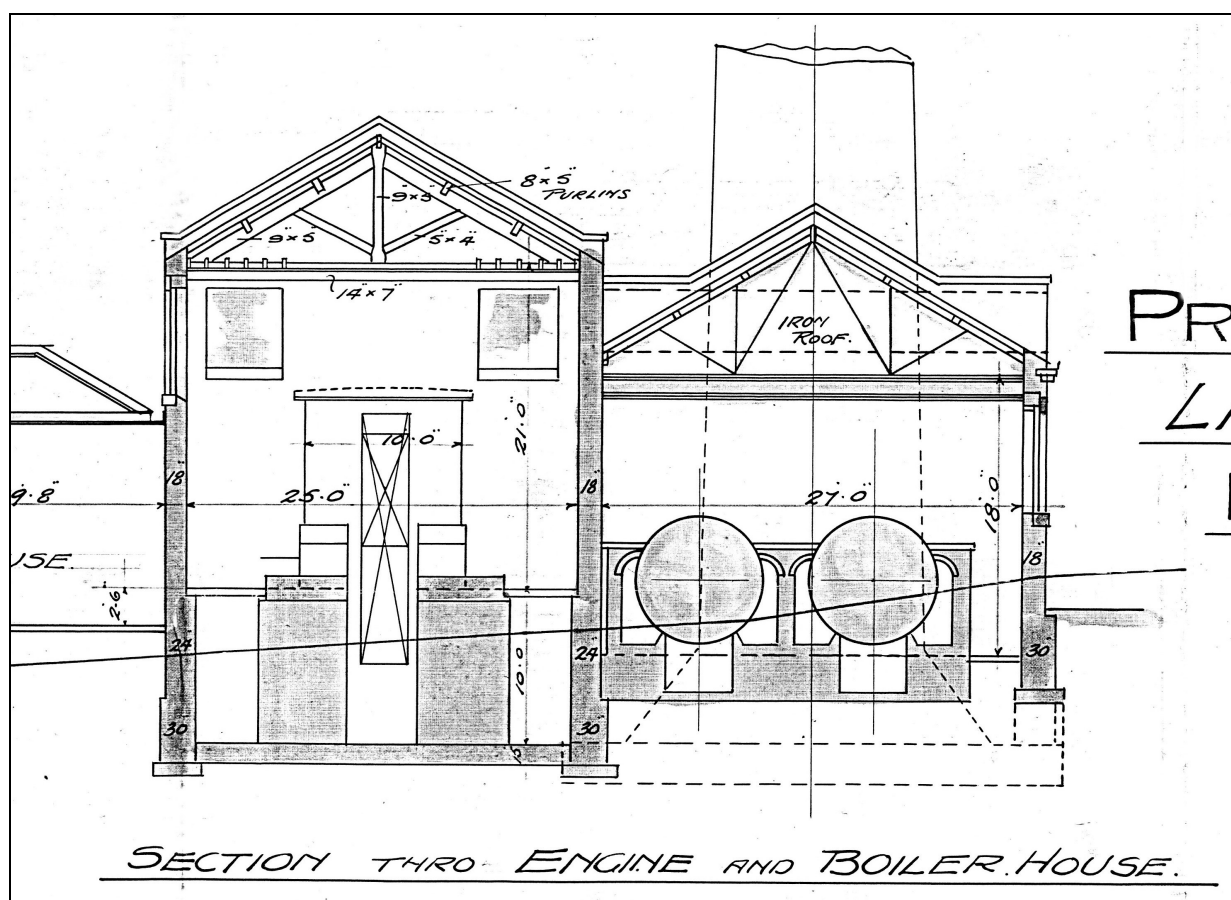
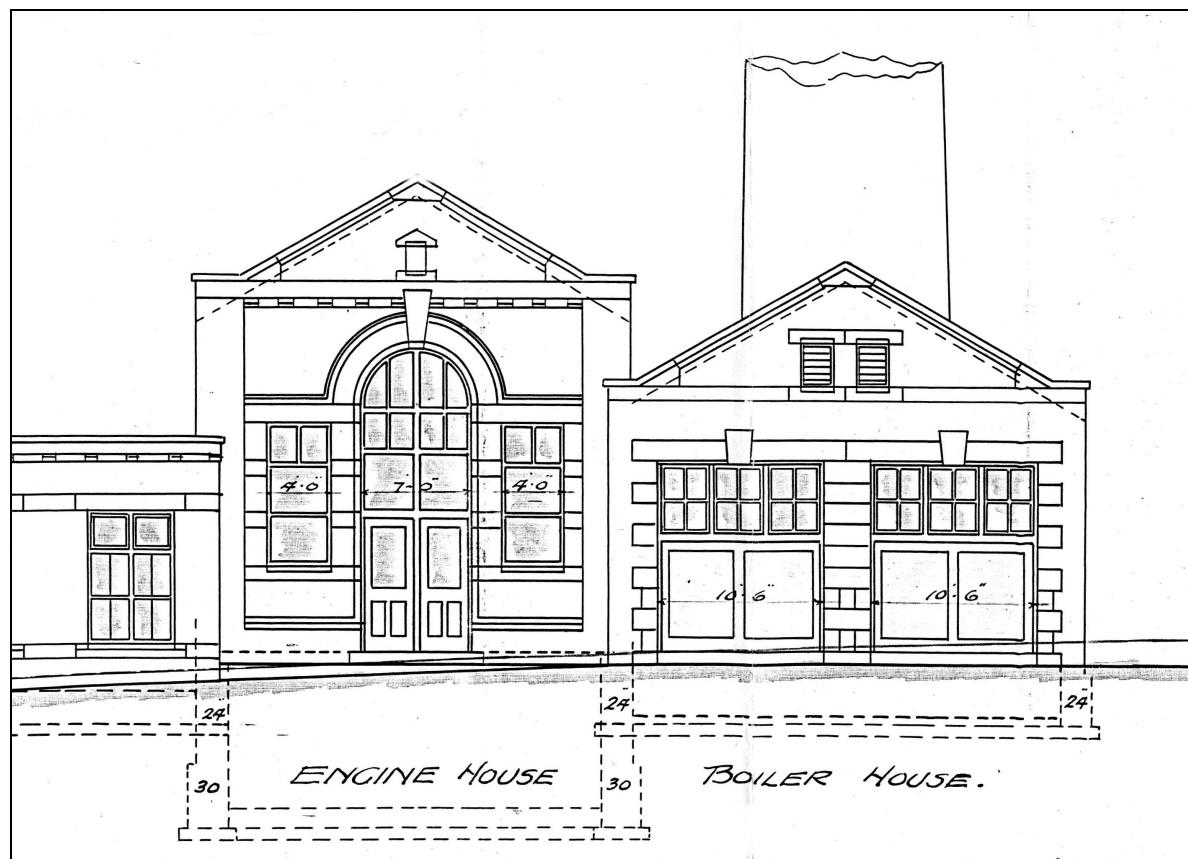




**Figure 11:** Empire Mill: block plan, 1914  
 From drawing by G & S Keighley, Architects, in possession of Burnley Borough Council  
 (not at original scale)

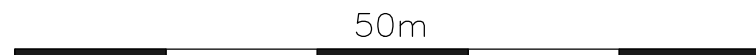
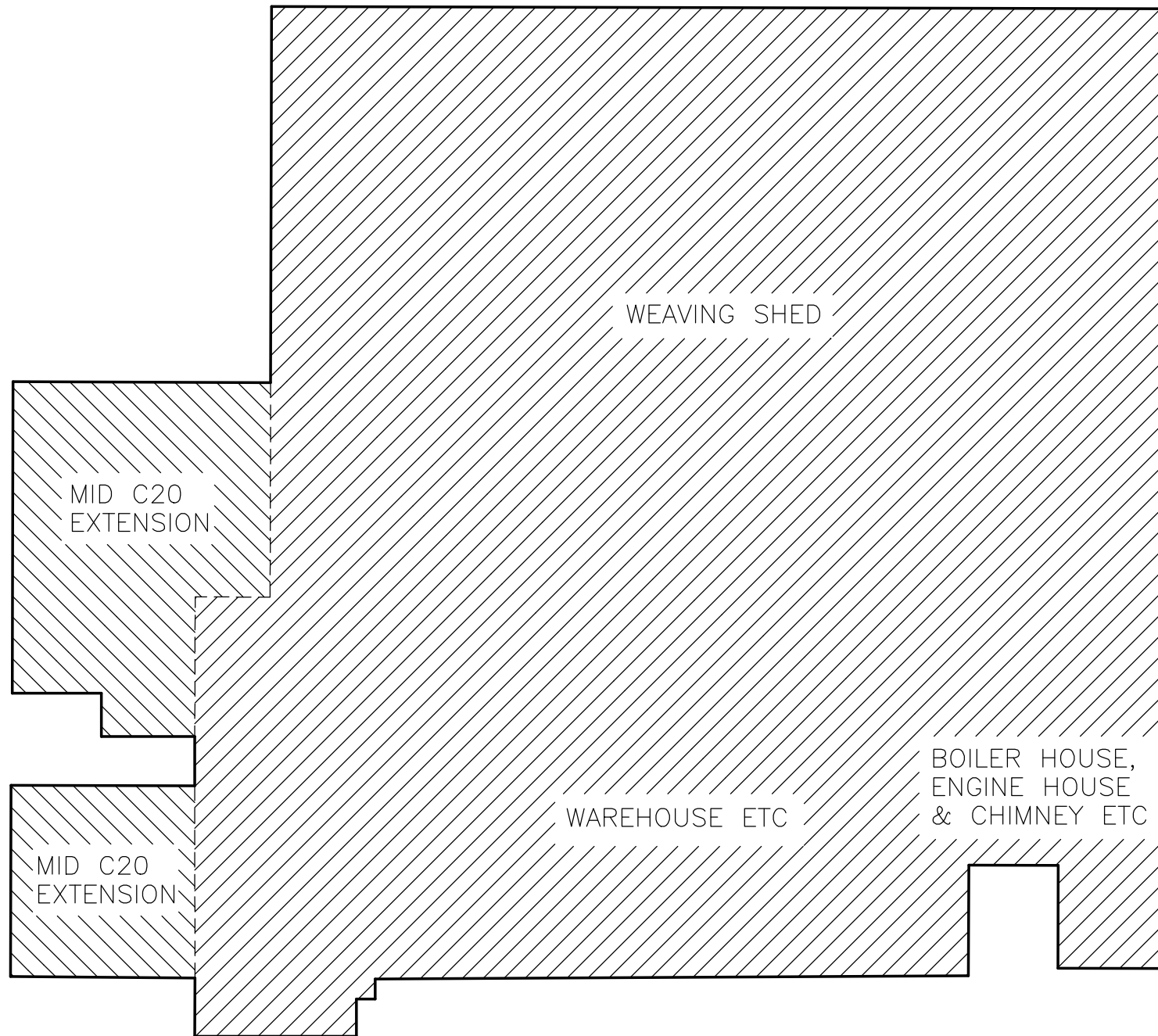


**Figure 12:** Empire Mill: part of plan, showing east end of warehouse, engine and boiler houses etc, 1914  
From drawing by G & S Keighley, Architects, in possession of Burnley Borough Council  
(not at original scale)



**Figure 13:** Empire Mill: elevation and section of engine and boiler houses, 1914  
 From drawing by G & S Keighley, Architects, in possession of Burnley Borough Council  
 (not at original scale)





BASED ON 2005 SURVEY BY LAND SURVEYING AND ENGINEERING SERVICES

EMPIRE MILL AND IMPERIAL MILL  
LIVERPOOL ROAD  
BURNLEY  
LANCASHIRE (NGR: SD 814326):  
HISTORICAL RECORD

FIGURE 14:  
OUTLINE PLAN OF EMPIRE MILL, 2005

SCALE: 1:500

STEPHEN HAIGH  
Buildings Archaeologist