GLOSCAT TOWER BLOCK
BRUNSWICK ROAD
GLOUCESTER

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

CA PROJECT: 3323
CA REPORT: 11018

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date 28 January 2011

checked by Simon Cox, Head of Fieldwork
date 28 January 2011

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signed

date 28 January 2011

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A programme of Archaeological Building Recording to English Heritage Level 2 was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology in January 2011 at the now-redundant Brunswick Road campus of Gloucester College.

The building recording was carried out to mitigate the demolition of a tower block and contemporary two-storey annexe, custom-built for the college in 1972. The building had undergone almost no change externally or structurally since its construction, but had evidently undergone major refurbishment and re-ordering internally at some time in the last twenty years, most probably in or after 1997. Little of the internal arrangements of the original building seemed to survive, except for structural elements such as staircases and lift enclosures (and even these were renewed in the annexe). The lift mechanisms and a few doors and doorcases also remained from the 1972 construction. The building has internally been extensively vandalised, with pipes and wiring robbed, and is now in extremely poor condition.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In January 2011 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out a programme of archaeological building recording for Linden Homes at the old Gloscat campus, Brunswick Road, Gloucester (centred on NGR: SO 8309 1832; Fig. 1). The recording programme was undertaken to fulfil Condition 4 attached to a planning consent (10/01040/CON) to demolish the 1972 tower block on the site (identified as Block C when in use).

1.2 In response to the condition, a Brief for Archaeological Building Recording was issued by Jonathan Smith, Historic Environment Manager, Gloucester City Council Heritage Service (GCCHS 2010). A WSI to meet the brief was provided by Cotswold Archaeology (CA 2010) guided in its composition by the Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures (IfA 2008), the Statement of Standards and Practices Appropriate for Archaeological Fieldwork in Gloucestershire (GCC 1995), the Management of Archaeological Projects 2 (English Heritage 1991), the Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MORPHE): Project Manager’s Guide (EH 2006) and Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice (English Heritage 2006).

The site

1.3 The site of the former Gloscat campus is divided into two areas: the Main Site (to the north-west of Brunswick Road, with which this report is concerned) occupies an area of approximately 1.8ha at the south-east corner of the Roman and later historic walled area. The town wall and associated rampart fall within the boundary of the site, and along the Brunswick Road frontage it also includes the area occupied by the external ditch or ditches which lay outside the wall. The main two-storey block of the Gloucester Technical College, set back along the Brunswick Road frontage was built between 1937 to 1939. The nine-storey tower block was a later extension attached to the north-west side. It was designed in 1971 by the City and County of Gloucester Architect’s Department, under John Sketchley, and constructed in 1972. It was the second phase of a programme of works that had already seen the construction of the workshops to the north-east of the site in the previous few years (Hydrock 1971/96).
2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 The objective of the archaeological building recording was to produce a record of the tower block prior to demolition. This included the analysis and interpretation of the records, and formation of a site archive to secure the long-term storage of records in appropriate conditions, along with appropriate dissemination of the findings.

2.2 Site-specific objectives were:

• To record the form and nature of the tower structure, including any evidence for changes in its use over time
• Identify, in brief, the context of the tower within the wider site – what role did it have in the site’s educational function?

Methodology

2.3 The building recording followed the methodology set out within the WSI (CA 2010), and specification set out within the brief (GCCHS 2010). The survey was undertaken to Levels 2-3 accompanied by a written description of the buildings to Levels 3-4 (Levels as defined in Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice (English Heritage 2006). A detailed measured survey supplied by the client was used as the basis for the drawn record.

2.4 The archive and artefacts from the evaluation are currently held by CA at their offices in Kemble. A summary of information from this project, set out within Appendix A, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

3. DESCRIPTION (FIGS 3-32)

Exterior

3.1 The “Gloscat Tower” consisted of a nine-storey tower 15.85m x 48.53m x 30.66m high with a contemporary two-storey annexe attached to its north-eastern side (Figs 3-7, 12-14). To its south-west was a two-storey workshop block, built in the late 60s. These were Phase 1 of the programme of extension but did not form part of the present study. Externally, the floors of the tower from the second storey up were identical, the elevations articulated by an almost unvarying grid of identical window and precast concrete wall panels between externally-expressed vertical structural members of reinforced concrete. The only variation was the blank panelling marking the position of the service cores (plumbing ducts, staircases and lifts). This, however, at least resulted in some variation in each elevation. The top of the building was
finished with a set of cast concrete blocks shaped to give an almost crenellated parapet, especially when seen from below. Aluminium-framed, single-glazed sliding windows are the original 1972 fittings.

3.2 Lower floors on the south-west were masked by the pre-existing workshops and on much of the north-east, by the annexe. However, in general, the ground floor was clad in good quality, well-laid, black face-brick (Fig. 16), with the base of the structural columns strongly expressed as piers on the tower, but in simple solid masses on the annexe. Special bricks were used on the south-west base of the tower to give a strong battered effect between the piers. The rest of the annexe was clad in a style very similar to the main tower, using the same design elements. However, the taller proportions of the first floor mean the overall effect was quite different and rather more interesting and the individual elements anyway had more impact in the context of the smaller building (Figs 16 and 17). On the narrow ends, the elevations had been given a certain amount of “movement” by recession and projection of parts. Clearly, some thought was given to the different visual impacts of the tower and the annexe.

3.3 Despite the overall rather oppressive effect of the building, largely due to the weathering qualities of concrete, it is clear that some effort went into the design of its finish. The concrete cladding panels formed a contrast in colour and texture to the smooth-shuttered structural elements, being bush-hammered and vertically-grooved (Fig. 12). They also gave a three-dimensional effect to the elevations by being set slightly projecting from the column plane. The parapet blocks, while rather lost on the top of the tower, had rather more impact on the annexe and on the bridge (Fig. 15) which connected the tower to the 1930s building. The battered, brick infill on the ground floor was a deliberate attempt at visual interest and almost tactile, again because it was on the ground floor and meant to be seen close up.

3.4 The roof of the tower was not accessible and seems to have no designed features meant to be seen. The lift machinery, for example, was inside, on the eighth floor. In contrast, the roof of the annexe, clearly visible from all the tower floors above, was carefully designed, with externally expressed structural ribs to the skylight and neatly finished zinc panelling and glazing (Fig. 23).
**Interior**

3.5 The interior of the building has been completely reworked since it was built and only a few elements of the 1971 design still existed at the time of the visit. In the annexe these comprised the skylight and its fittings (cast and wrought steel window opening mechanisms, lighting, Fig. 22) and doors on the first floor (Fig. 24), but little else. This reworking seems to be related to a change in status of the college in 1997. Preliminary plans for reworking the library area (the annexe), though not carried out in that form, are dated 1996 (Hydrock 1971/96).

3.6 In the tower, the stairs and lifts were the original. The stairs at the south-east end of the tower were clearly of higher status as they were finished in terrazzo in red and grey, and associated with two lift shafts (Fig. 29), while those at the north-west end were in plain concrete and associated with merely one lift shaft. Both had simple, real wood, plank handrails on steel frames (Fig. 28).

3.7 Also original was the lift machinery, housed in rooms on the 8th floor. Only the main double lift machinery was accessible (Figs 31, 32).

3.8 As far as could be seen, no internal partitions survived from the 1972 building (other than structural ones and on the first floor), although no comparative floor plans were available for the 1972 layout other than for the first floor. The ground floor in 2011 had clearly been laid out as a reception and circulation area with the main entrance in the south-east end. This gave access to a large lobby and the stairs and lifts. Access to the rest of the ground floor and the annexe was through more doors and a security gate and scanner (Figs 19 and 25).

3.9 The annexe seems to have been the college library; it certainly was in the 1971 designs, although none of the existing plans are quite what was built. This would explain the security equipment and the plan. A central stair is shown on the original plans, under the skylight, but the stair in place during the site visit was a much more recent structure associated with a “disabled” or access lift (Figs 20 and 21).

3.10 The basic plan of the rest of the tower was a row of rooms either side of a central corridor (Figs 10, 11 and 26), but the rooms varied considerably in size and number on each floor. The stair and lift enclosures were at each end of the corridor, but offset to either side. Access to the tower from the older buildings was via a bridge at first floor level (Figs 9 and 15). Because of the difference in floor heights and plan...
alignments, a flight of steps was necessary, in an offset vestibule in the southeastern end of the corridor on this floor. This had also contained, since 1971, a simple platform lift. This was presumably envisaged for goods and heavy equipment, but became known as an access lift in more recent times. On our visit we were told it had been donated to a railway preservation charity. It was certainly not in evidence.

3.11 A parquet floor at the south-east end of the tower on the 6th floor (room 604) was almost certainly of 1972 vintage and it implied that its north-western wall was on the same line as the present one. The room appeared to have been a staff room so it may always have been, with a better-quality floor. Few other floors were seen due to glued carpeting, but a pale brown, quarry-tile floor was noted in room 611, which appeared to have been most recently a hairdressing classroom. This, on the other hand appeared to have belonged to the most recent refurbishment. 3.12 It would seem likely that the spine corridor layout was also the basic plan form of the 1971 design above the first floor, given the shape of the building and the position of the stairs and lifts, but no 1971 plans for these levels survive. The first floor plans in both 2011 and 1971 were quite different from this but very similar to each other. Neither had a through, spine corridor but had rooms right across the block. To some extent this was because of the need to communicate with the workshop block on the south-west, but it is odd that it was only possible to pass from one end of the tower to the other at this level by going through several workshops (in 1972) or classrooms/offices (in 2011).

3.12 The internal walls/windows and doors, suspended ceilings and other fitments were all clearly the result of a major refurbishment of the block, dated on stylistic grounds to the last twenty years or so. In fact, the college underwent a major refurbishment programme in 1997. Everything non-structural, apart from the occasional door or partition, seems to date from this refurbishment. Only the doors and light fittings noted in the annexe are clearly from the earlier period. The latter survived because they were simply hidden when the skylight was ceiled-in (Fig. 22). The stair and access lift here were completely new in 1997 (Fig. 21) and designedly high-tech (and oddly like the ocean liner, “functional” aesthetic of the 1920s and 30s).
4. **DISCUSSION**

4.1 The tower block and its contemporary annexe were built in 1972 as phase 2 of a programme to improve and increase the facilities at the then Gloucester Technical College, adding workshop, teaching and office facilities to the 1937-9 main block and completing what the Phase 1 workshops to the south-west of the tower block had begun. It is not clear how the ground floor was used in 1972, but the first floor was to be given over to workshops (electrical and woodworking) which were clearly linked to the workshops in the Phase 1 building at this level. The annexe was a library.

4.2 The use of the floors above in the original design is unknown, but it can be assumed that they were teaching and administration.

4.3 The changes of 1997 were thorough-going in detail, but the photos on the Derelict Places web site taken in 2008, before the thorough vandalising of the block (DP 2008), show that the electrical workshops were still located on the first floor. The upper rooms were more for theoretical teaching, or practicals requiring simpler equipment, and administration. Timetables still attached to walls showed that, for example, Room 611 was used for psychology and sociology lectures as well as teaching hairdressing. Room 404 was used for a variety of teaching, from the “Fine Furniture Diploma” to “Entry to FE”. Both rooms were described as “GP classrooms”, presumably, general purpose.

4.4 On the 7th floor, a small room at the north-west end contained a washing machine-size, stainless steel steriliser and a plastic programme strip-controlled dishwasher. Both were designed in 1970s style, which fits the technology of the plastic strip programmes. As they were both apparently still in use right up to the closure of the college, it seems likely that they were more recent than that. The archaic design would be typical of specialised industrial manufacture. They seem most likely to have been used to clean and sterilise equipment in either the food technology or perhaps biology labs. The position of the latter is unknown, but the food technology was in the 1930s wing, so seems a far less likely candidate. A small fridge was also still in this room, and the remains of a sink.

4.5 The block was a typical example of design in concrete based on the New Brutalism of the 1950s and 60s and the belief in the social benefits of building high. While
present day attitudes to architecture have condemned the tower to demolition, and public tastes no longer accept the “modern” design ethos, the building was not without architectural value. Of the three tower blocks in Gloucester, it was clearly the best designed (the others being the hospital, and Clapham Court flats in Kingsholm). However, its characteristics were certainly not appropriate, according to modern attitudes, to the centre of an historic city, even one with such a large proportion of 1960s buildings as Gloucester.

5. **CA PROJECT TEAM**

5.1 Fieldwork was undertaken by Peter Davenport assisted by Rachel Leung. The report was written by Peter Davenport. The illustrations were prepared by Jon Bennett. The archive has been compiled by Peter Davenport, and prepared for deposition by James Johnson. The project was managed for CA by Simon Cox.

6. **REFERENCES**

**Printed sources**

CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2010 *Gloscat Tower Block, Brunswick Road Gloucester: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Building Recording*


GCCHS (Gloucester City Council Heritage Service) 2010 *Brief for Archaeological Building Recording*

**Manuscript sources**

Hydrock 1971/96 Thirteen drawings of various schemes for building and extending the college, 1937-1996, supplied by the client.
APPENDIX A: OASIS REPORT FORM

**PROJECT DETAILS**

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<thead>
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<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Gloscat Tower, Brunswick Road, Gloucester</th>
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**PROJECT LOCATION**

| Site Location                  | Former Gloscat campus, Brunswick Road, Gloucester              |
| Study area (M²/ha)             | 1.8ha                                                          |
| Site co-ordinates (8 Fig Grid Reference) | SO 8309 1832 |

**PROJECT CREATORS**

| Name of organisation           | Cotswold Archaeology                                           |
| Project Brief originator       | Gloucester City Council Heritage Service                      |
| Project Design (WSI) originator | Cotswold Archaeology                                           |
| Project Manager                | Simon Cox                                                      |
| Project Supervisor             | Peter Davenport                                                |

**MONUMENT TYPE**

None

**SIGNIFICANT FINDS**

None

**PROJECT ARCHIVES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2011 Gloscat Tower, Brunswick Road, Gloucester: Historic Building Recording. CA typescript report 11018