

Archaeological Standing Building Record  
Tay Ropeworks  
Magdalen Yard Road  
DUNDEE  
DD61



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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL STANDING  
BUILDING RECORD  
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*Illustration 1: Site location plan*

*Illustration 2: Floor plan of E and W standing buildings*

*Illustration 3: SSE elevation of ropeworks (Magdalen Yard Road façade)*

*Photos: 15, 23, 43, 46, 48, 57*

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**Editor** David Bowler, BA, MPhil, FSA Scot, MCIfA

**ABSTRACT**

*The C-listed façade of a former ropeworks and newer buildings to the rear were recorded in advance of the demolition of the buildings and reconstitution of the façade as part of a new housing development. The base of the façade possibly dates from 1837, with the first floor from 1910. The rear buildings were found to incorporate brick and stone standing walls deriving from the original ropeworks, most of which had already been demolished. The survey (site code DD61) was carried out on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2021.*

## **1 Background**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Carriden Homes Ltd commissioned Alder Archaeology to undertake an archaeological standing building record of a former rope-making factory on Magdalen Yard Road, Dundee, in advance of demolition and the erection of new build dwellings. The proposed development area consists of a listed façade with two adjoining, roofed buildings behind and an extensive back lot, centred on NGR NO 39171 29434. The work (site code DD61) was undertaken on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2021, in overcast weather conditions. The requirement was to conduct a Level 2 survey.

The work was designed to satisfy the archaeological condition on development application reference 18/00146/LBC-04.

### **1.2 Aims and Objectives**

The main aim of this investigation was to create a permanent photographic, illustrated and narrative record of the building in advance of development, taking account of current setting and condition, form, function and fabric and noting features of interest and any phases of construction and use.

### **1.3 Reporting**

The present document has been prepared as the final report on this survey. Copies will be sent to the client, The National Record of the Historic Environment at Historic Environment Scotland, and Dundee City Historic Environment Record.

### **1.4 Planning and Curatorial Issues**

This standing building record constitutes archaeological work designed to satisfy the outstanding archaeological condition on the planning consent for this development.

### **1.5 Acknowledgements**

We wish to thank Nadine Paton of Carradine Homes for her assistance and guidance throughout this project. Carriden Homes funded this standing building record.

## **2 Details of Work**

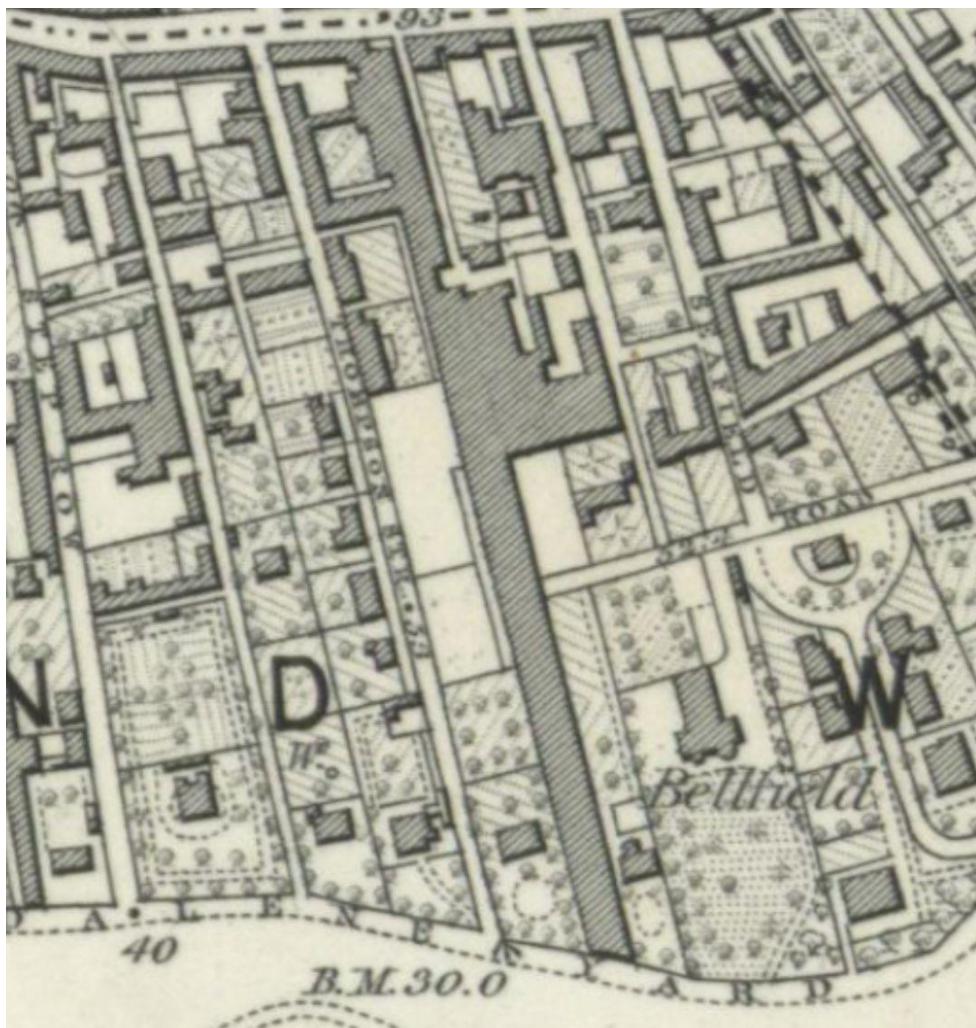
### **2.1 The Site (Illus 1)**

The façade of the former Tay Ropeworks fronts onto Magdalen Yard Road on the W side of Dundee, not far N of the Tay estuary and close to the rail bridge. The site is bordered to the E and W by housing on Bellefield Avenue and Thomson Street, respectively. Behind the façade, two buildings run NNW a short distance, before giving way to an overgrown backlot within the standing side walls of the demolished Victorian Ropeworks, far longer than the present buildings. The lot terminates in a N wall, alongside Seafeld Close, to the E.

## 2.2 Archaeological Potential

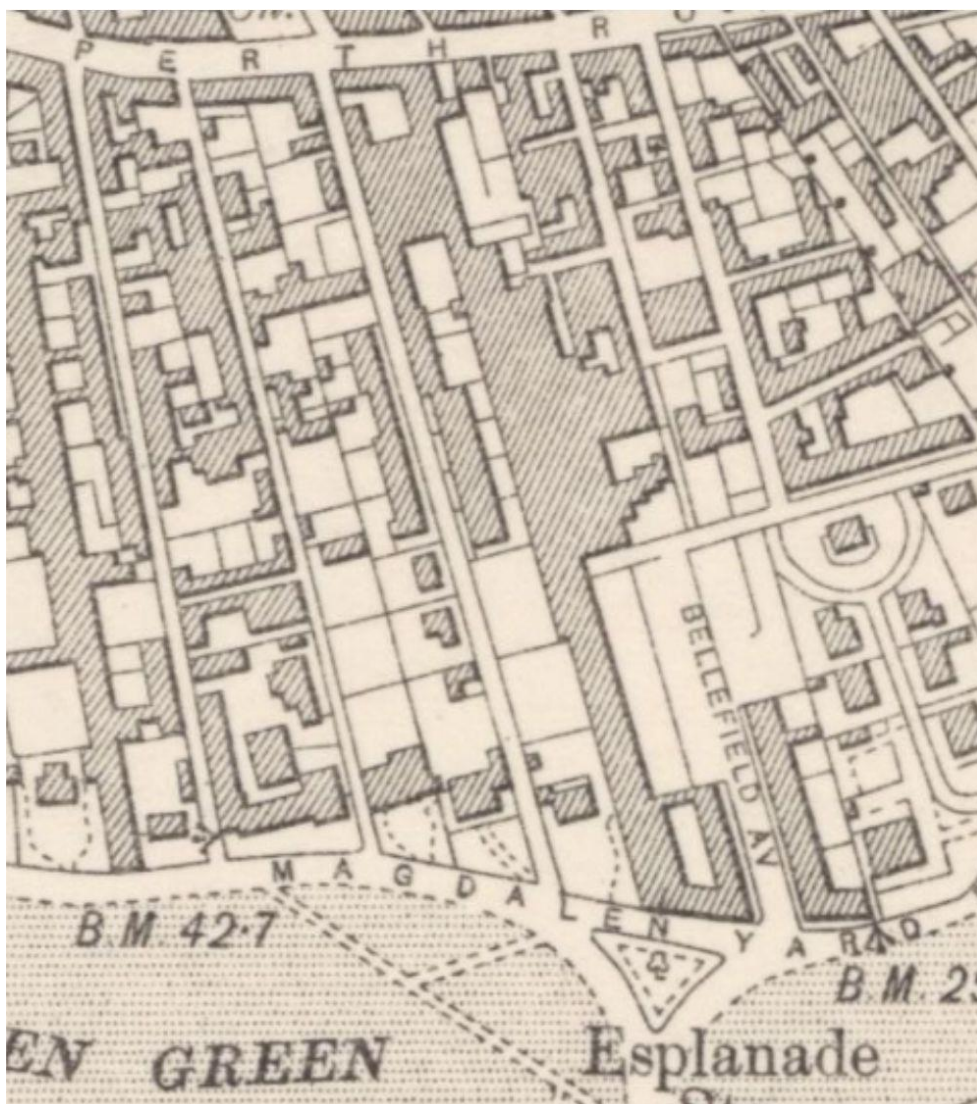
Tay Ropeworks, owned and operated by William Lawson and Sons Ltd (closed), was founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century; however, the majority of the building has since been demolished, leaving a C-listed ornamental façade, in a generally neo-Classical style, along the Magdalen Yard Road frontage. The ground floor of the façade is of mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century origin, possibly as early as 1837. The upper storey dates from 1910.

A rapid desk-based assessment, including analysis of online sources including the National Library of Scotland, established that the ropeworks featured on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (six inches to a mile):



*OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, surveyed 1860-62; the ropeworks appears as part of a continuous building conglomeration stretching between Magdalen Yard and Perth Road. The N part of this area is now broken up by the Seafield Close/Lane housing development.*

The Second Edition map shows no major changes, beyond the construction of Bellefield Avenue and a building at the SE corner:



OS 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, revised 1898, published 1903

### 2.3 Archaeological Method

A Level 2 Standing Building Survey was carried out to create a permanent record. This comprised: a full photographic record of the building in its current setting, with all main external and internal elevations and features of interest; annotated measured plan and elevation drawings of the building, together with location maps at appropriate scales; a narrative account, taking in the form, fabric, condition and function of the building, together with features of interest, measurements of key features and details of any evidence of phases of construction and use.

Areas of the building which appeared structurally unsound or otherwise unsafe were avoided.

### 2.4 Results of Investigations

#### *Exterior*

The ground floor of the Magdalen Yard Road façade (S elevation of the buildings) was, on the W of the two buildings, of grey-painted ashlar blocks, with side pilasters bearing

inscribed neo-Classical panelling. Although heavily overgrown with ivy and overhanging trees, the entrance sign- "Tay Ropeworks"- was still visible in embossed, painted lettering. The first floor was of coursed, stugged rubble with ashlar dressings, including an arch framing a Venetian-style window, still glazed. Below the sign, a row of eight modern fixed panes sat above the boarded entrance. The E building featured an inserted steel roller door below modern brick reinforcement; the remainder of the ground floor was harled and painted. The first floor featured a stepped gable façade with painted stone facings overlaying a rubble core (visible in a damaged section near the base of the E side). A blocked first floor window with ashlar façade casing, measuring 1.20m x 0.55m, was visible just E of the centre line, above the W end of the inserted door. A boarded ground floor doorway, 2.50m x 0.90m, was positioned just W of centre.

The rear (NNW) elevation was divided into two buildings (E and W, or numbers 49 and 51, respectively), both of which were constructed of concrete blocks with red brick elements and were also heavily overgrown. These elevations had been built between the E and W long walls, which extended far beyond the NNW limits of the present buildings to reach the limits of the site. These, along with a central brick wall (up to 3.00m tall on the same alignment) were presumably survivors of the original, much larger ropeworks. All featured regularly-spaced arches, many filled-in with either brick or concrete blocks; however, others were probably dummy entrances constructed to match the open doorways. The SSE end of the central wall had been extended upwards with concrete blocks to form the W wall of the E building, which at 42.00m NNW-SSE was 18.00m longer than the W building (24.00m). The W and central walls extended 174.00m to a boundary on Seafield Lane, while the E wall formed the end wall of neighbouring gardens and ended on Seafield Road.

### *Interior*

#### E building

The E wall was constructed largely of original sandstone rubble, standing 3.40m tall to the wallhead; there had been some brick rebuilding/extending at the wallhead to reach this height, except at the N end where the stone reached fully to the top. A brick-blocked window, 1.10m tall x 0.75m wide, was located 6.00m from the N end, 1.00m above the modern concrete floor. Another window, also blocked, sat directly above at the wallhead, with a second 0.80m to the S. The opposite, W, wall was largely built of concrete blocks; the base of this wall on the E (outer) face was of brick, but no trace of this was apparent in the interior. Brick buttresses were spaced along the length of this wall. The NNW elevation was of concrete blocks, while 17.91m to the SSE was a wooden partition, beyond which the central core of the building was clad in plasterboard and subdivided into modern office spaces. No original features were visible in this area, which also featured an upper floor (not safely accessible). The SSE end of the E elevation, beyond the plasterboard cladding, was once again of exposed stone rubble, but this had been painted white and extensively graffitied. No features were visible, except a 0.20m tall layer of bricks at the wallhead to support the corrugated metal roof. The base of the W side of the SSE elevation was within an enclosed office formed from wooden partitions. This elevation featured a window set within an embrasure measuring 1.20m tall x 1.00m wide, 0.55m deep (wall thickness); the window itself (of modern glass) was 0.90m x 0.50m and clearly replaced what was probably an original feature. Within the same office space, the W elevation featured a

stretch of exposed, black-painted stone wall, standing 1.80m tall, around a modern aluminium flue and presumed former location of a gas heater. The office itself enclosed an area 6.39m NNW-SSE x 3.64m transverse.

### W building

This comprised a single room, measuring 19.32m NNW-SSE x 5.21m, 8.75m tall from an uneven, guano-covered floor to a high, wooden A-frame roof which was possibly original, or incorporated some original beams. Rows of steel girder corbels indicated a former first floor 2.00m above the ground and a second floor at 4.20m. Blocked arches in the W elevation, ground floor, were probably ornamental, while a pair in the opposite E elevation may once have been entrances to the E building. The W elevation also featured a row of five blocked, rectangular, 2.50m tall windows at first floor level, while the E elevation included smaller, arched, blocked windows at first floor and glazed windows at the wallhead. Both E and W walls were red brick, while the NNW elevation was of concrete blocks. The SSE elevation, the rear of the Magdalen Yard Road façade, was of white-painted stone rubble.

## 3 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 3.1 As had already been noted, most of the original ropeworks structures had been demolished, leaving the Magdalen Yard Road façade and parts of the NNW-SSE long walls. At least part of the roof over the W building (number 51) may also have been an original element.

### 3.2 Recommendations for Further Work

Alder Archaeology consider the Standing Building Record to have been compiled correctly and do not recommend further work on site in connection with the present development. However, the final decision ultimately rests with Douglas Speirs, the Dundee City area Archaeologist.

## 4 Bibliography

Ordnance Survey, *Forfarshire, Sheet LIV (includes: Dundee; Ferry Port on Craig; Forfar)*  
Survey date: 1860-1862, Publication date: 1865 (six inches to a mile, First Edition)

Ordnance Survey, *Perth and Clackmannan, Sheet LXXXVIII.NE (includes: Dundee; Liff)*  
Date revised: 1898, Date published: 1903 (six inches to a mile, Second Edition)



## Appendix 1 Photographic Register

<i>Image No</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>View</i>
1-3	Location shots, Magdalen Yard Road frontage, from E, oblique	NW
4—8	Location shots, Magdalen Yard Road frontage, from W, oblique	NE
9-10	Location shots, E end of Magdalen Yard Road frontage, from W, oblique	NE
11-15	Exterior, S elevation, E building façade	NNW
16-23	Exterior, S elevation, W building façade	NNW
24-25	Exterior, S elevation, from W, oblique	NE
26	Exterior, S elevation, W building façade	NNW
27	Exterior, S elevation, from W, oblique	NE
28-30	Exterior, S elevation, W building façade	NNW
31-32	Exterior, S elevation, from W, oblique	NE
33-34	Exterior, W elevation boundary wall, from Magdalen Yard Road	NE
35-36	Exterior, W elevation boundary wall, S end	NE
37-38	Exterior, base of S elevation façade, from W, oblique	ENE
39	Exterior, detail of façade base at W end, oblique	ENE
40-41	Exterior, detail of façade base at E end, oblique	ENE
42-43	Exterior, detail of façade base at E end	NNW
44-45	Exterior, detail of façade base at W end	NNW
46-47	Exterior, detail, “Tay Ropeworks” sign and number 51 on W building	NNW
48-49	Exterior, detail, stepped wallhead and blocked first floor window on E building	NNW
50-51	Exterior, N elevation of E building, W end	SSE
52-55	Exterior, N elevation of E building, W end (heavily overgrown)	SE
56-57	Interior, general view of E building	SE
58-62	Interior, N elevation of E building	NNW
63-64	Interior, E elevation of E building, oblique	SE
65-76	Interior, E elevation of E building, N-S	ENE

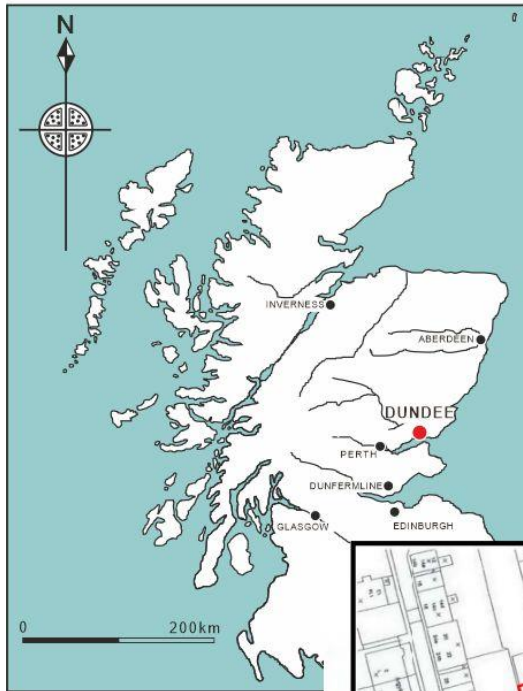
77-79	Interior, S elevation of E building at partition between modern plasterboard area and bare walls	SSE
80-81	Interior, W elevation of E building (concrete blocks), oblique	NW
82-83	Interior, detail, roof over N end of E building	NNW
84-85	Interior, plasterboard section of E elevation, E building, obliques	SE, NE
86	Interior, S elevation of plasterboard section, E building	SSE
87-89	Interior, white-painted section of E elevation, E building, S of plasterboard, oblique	SE
90-91	Interior, wallhead and gable end, SSE elevation of E building	SSE
92-93	Interior, steel roller shutter door, E end of SSE elevation, E building	SSE
94	Interior, wallhead and gable end, SSE elevation of E building	SSE
95-96	Interior, W end (ground floor) of SSE elevation, E building (window embrasure)	SSE
97-98	Interior, detail, stone (black painted) exposed around modern heating vent, W elevation, E building	WSW
99-100	Interior, NNW elevation of enclosed office, E building	NNW
101	Interior, detail, moulded wooden door frame, enclosed office, E building	NNW
102-103	Interior, detail, window in W elevation, office toilet, E building, oblique	W
104-105	Interior, detail, moulded wooden door frame, enclosed office, E building	SSE
106	Interior, W end (ground floor) of SSE elevation, E building (full width, enclosed office)	SSE
107-108	Interior, general views of lower plasterboard section, E building	SW, SSE
109-111	Interior, detail, concrete stairs from lower to upper plasterboard section, E building	NNW
112-145	Exterior, brick walls running NNW from buildings to end of site	W, SW, NW, E, SE, NE
146-147	Exterior, NNW end boundary wall of site	NNW
148-149	Exterior, NNW elevation of W building	SSE
150-153	Exterior, wallhead of central brick wall (W wall of E building) built-up with concrete blocks	SE, ENE
154-155	Interior, general views of W building	SSE
156-158	Interior, detail, roof of W building	-

159-160	Interior, detail, windows in E elevation wallhead, W building, oblique	E, SE
161	Interior, E elevation of W building, oblique	SE
162-164	Interior, blocked windows in W elevation wallhead, W building, oblique	W, SW
165	Interior, SSE elevation, W building	SSE
166-168	Interior, detail, blocked windows in E elevation, W building	ENE
169	Interior, E elevation of W building, oblique	SE
170	Interior, detail, blocked ground floor archway, E elevation, W building	ENE
171	Interior, detail, blocked and open windows in E elevation, W building	ENE
172-173	Interior, detail, blocked/dummy archways, W elevation, W building	WSW, SW
174	Interior, detail, blocked windows in W elevation wallhead, W building	WSW
175-176	Interior, W elevation, W building, oblique	SW
177-178	Interior, NNW elevation, W building	NNW
179-183	Interior, SSE elevation, W building	SSE

## Appendix 2 Discovery & Excavation in Scotland Entry

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Dundee City
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Tay Ropeworks
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	DD61
<b>PARISH:</b>	Dundee
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	C Fyles
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	Alder Archaeology Ltd
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Standing Building Record
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	NO32NE 27
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	Rope Works (19 <sup>th</sup> Century)
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	None
<b>NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)</b>	NO 39171 29434
<b>START DATE (this season)</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> August, 2021
<b>END DATE (this season)</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> August, 2021
<b>PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)</b>	None
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (May include information from other fields)	The C-listed façade of a former ropeworks and newer buildings to the rear were recorded in advance of the demolition of the buildings and reconstitution of the façade as part of a new housing development. The base of the façade possibly dates from 1837, with the first floor from 1910. The rear buildings were found to incorporate brick and stone standing walls deriving from the original ropeworks, most of which had already been demolished.
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	None
<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:</b>	-
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	Carriden Homes Ltd
<b>ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Alder Archaeology Ltd, 55 South Methven Street, Perth PH1 5NX
<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>	<a href="mailto:director@alderarchaeology.co.uk">director@alderarchaeology.co.uk</a>
<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION</b> (intended/deposited)	HES (intended)

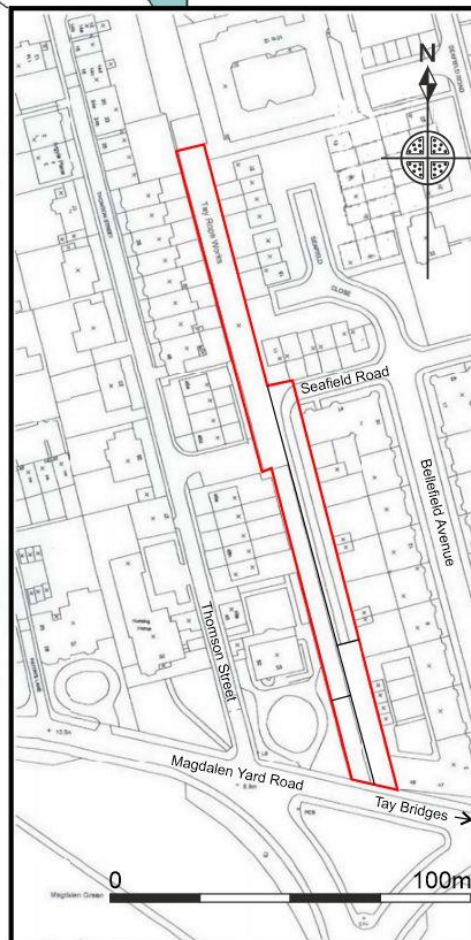
Illus 1



## Tay Ropeworks Magdalen Yard Road, Dundee

### Site Location

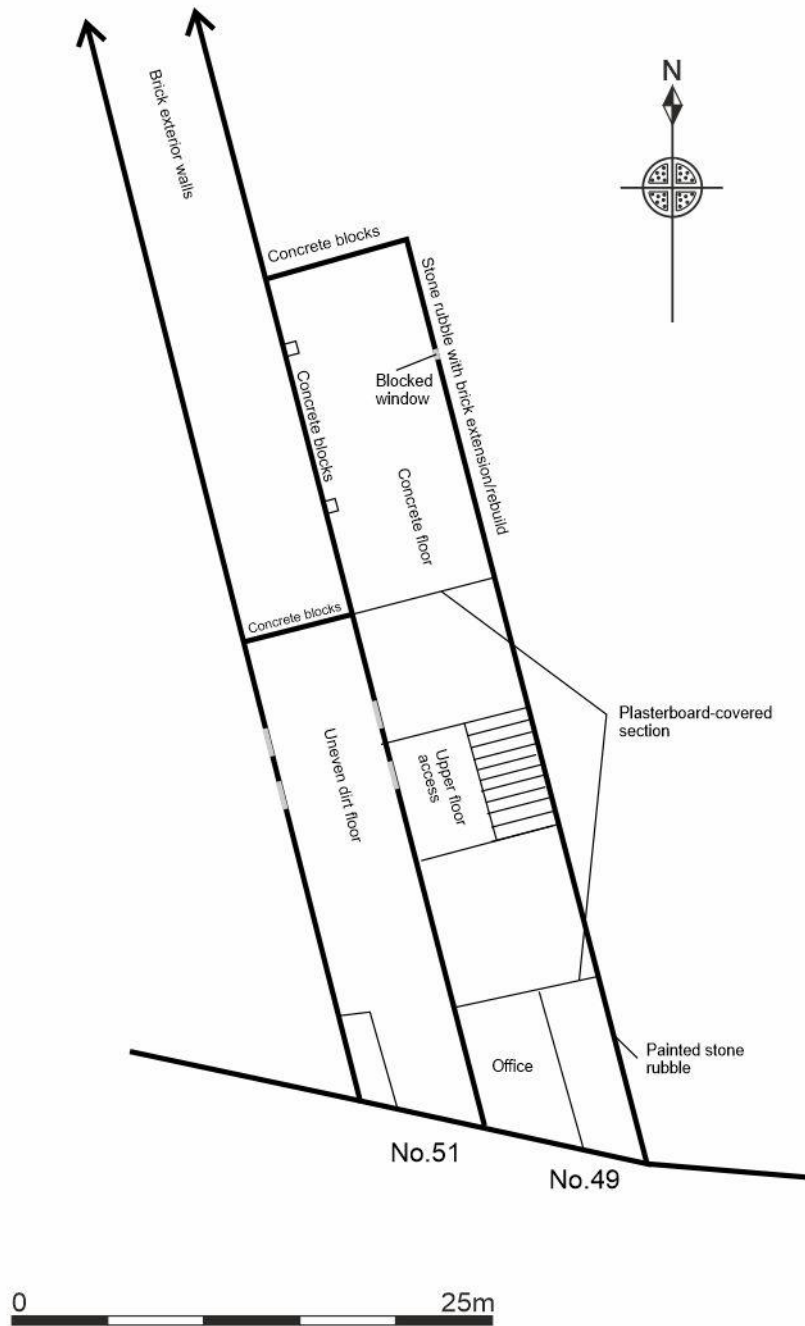
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Illus 2 Floor plan of E and W standing buildings



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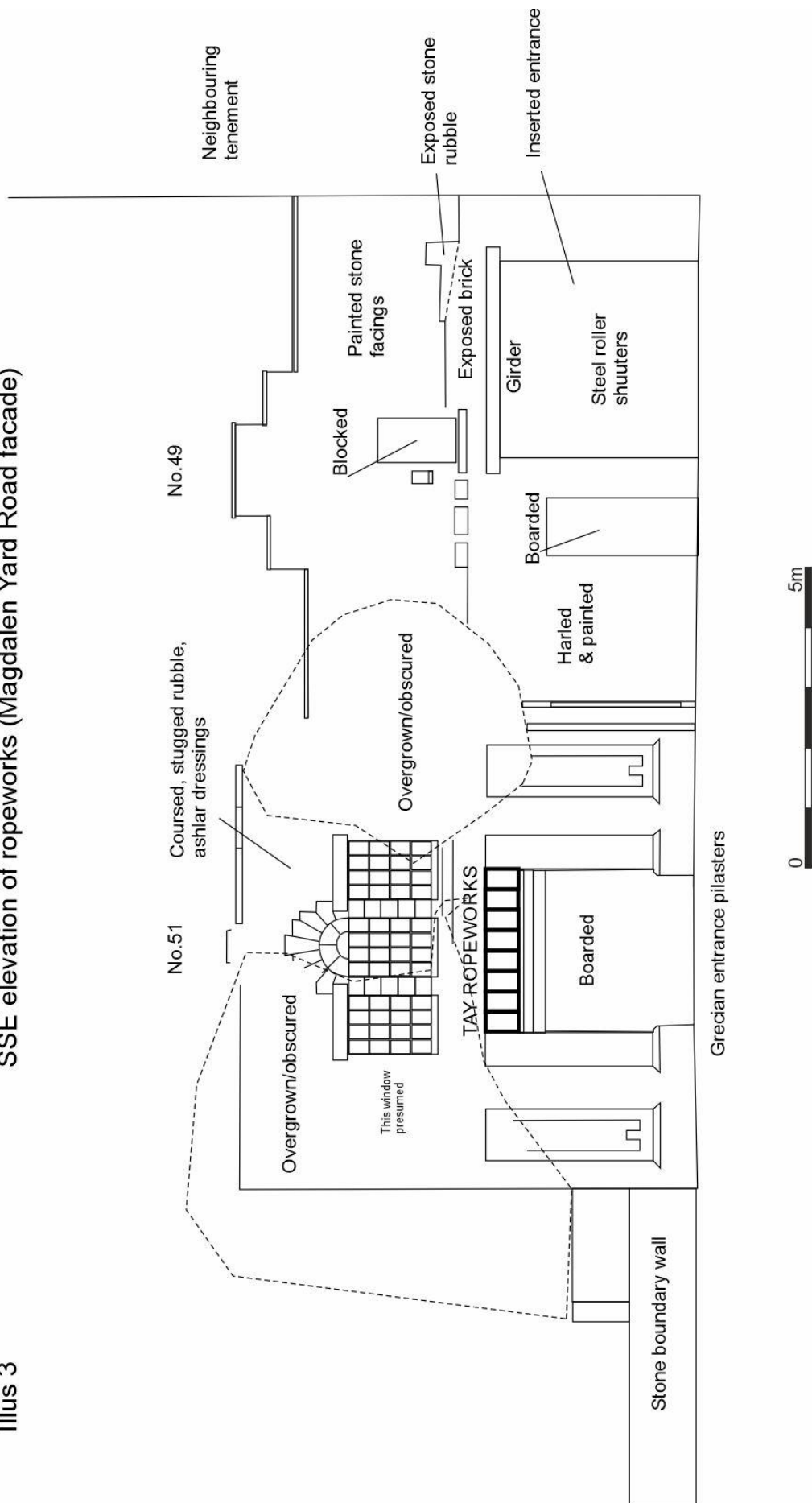
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Illus 3

SSE elevation of ropeworks (Magdalen Yard Road facade)





*Magdalen Yard Rd façade*

*W end of same*



*Detail, Grecian decoration*



*Detail, embossed sign*



*Detail, stepped gable*



*General view, interior of E building*