

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT  
AND BUILDING APPRAISAL  
OF BUILDINGS ON THE SOUTH SIDE  
OF SYLVESTER STREET / GARDENS,  
SHEFFIELD, 2006**



**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT  
AND BUILDING APPRAISAL  
OF BUILDINGS ON THE NORTH SIDE  
OF SYLVESTER STREET / GARDENS,  
SHEFFIELD, 2006**

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OS Grid Ref. SK 3537 8647 (centred)  
TPAU Project Code: MSS.2  
File Name: MSS2-Rept.doc  
June 2006

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## SUMMARY

- **Background.** This archaeological assessment and building appraisal was carried out by Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit on a commission from John Seifert Architects Ltd.
- **Location and description.** The site is known as Site C, the north part of a larger development site lying between Sylvester Street and Mary Street and centred around the Porter Brook. The site lies near the southern edge of the city centre of Sheffield, close to St Mary's Road, part of the inner ring road.
- **Proposed scheme.** New residential units are planned, with some open space around the Porter Brook.
- **Post-medieval development.** In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the south-east part of the town centre was on open land known as Alsop Field. Residential development started in the 1770s in a grid pattern of streets, but the intended plan was never finalised. Sylvester Street and Sylvester Gardens were laid out in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and attracted a mixture of steel and associated manufacturers.
- **The buildings.** The site is mainly occupied by brick buildings and open-frame sheds of 20<sup>th</sup> century date, some in the position of earlier courts and former parts of a larger grinding works. One narrow two-storey workshop at the east end is on the same irregular footprint of an earlier building facing Court No. 6. The only other buildings of note are an office-block on Sylvester Street and part of the former grinding works.
- **Grinding Works.** Ward's Wheel is shown on maps dating from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, situated between a leet and the Porter Brook. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the leet had been filled in and the wheel had developed into the Porter Island (Grinding) Works. This was probably a speculative development with space rented out to grinders who in turn served a number of adjacent cutlery works, including the larger Sylvester Works situated to the west on Sylvester Street. The grinding works was eventually reduced in size to the three-storey workshop that remains today.
- **Later development.** The site was eventually to become mainly occupied in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Bernard Works, a specialist knife manufacturer which carried out all the necessary processes under one roof.
- **Post-war development.** The site is now largely unoccupied although the north-west part still houses motor trade workshops. The general area is slightly run-down but is close to Hallam University and is seen as having development potential.
- **Archaeological potential.** The site has a little archaeological potential as the former leet and wheel were infilled and have not been built on since. .
- **Recommendation.** Although not listed the grinding works is a notable reminder of the cutlery trade carried out in this particular area of the city centre and ideally should be retained and sympathetically restored to its new function.

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**Fig 3** Location of Site C (red outline) and surviving grinding works building (yellow) shown on an Ordnance Survey map of Sheffield dated to 1890 (scale 10 feet to the mile; 1:528). Scale 1:500.

**Fig 4** Location of Site C (red outline) and surviving grinding works building (yellow) shown on an Ordnance Survey map of Sheffield dated to 1894 (scale 25 inches to the mile; approx. 1:2500). Scale 1:500.

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**Plates 9, 10:** Views of the interior of the former grinding works, Sylvester Street, Sheffield. **9:** reinforced flooring and a steel column at ground floor; **10:** lighting on the second floor.

## **1. Project Background**

This archaeological assessment and building appraisal was carried out by Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit on a commission organised through John Seifert Architects Ltd. It is in relation to the proposed redevelopment of a site on the south side of Sylvester Street / Gardens in Sheffield (Fig. 1). The site lies near the southern edge of the city centre of Sheffield, close to St Mary's Road, part of the inner ring road (see Fig. 1). It is here referred to as Site C, part of a larger potential development area, and covers an irregular-shaped elongated area on the north side of Porter Brook. Site A, the site of the former Mary Street Steel Works on the south side of Porter Brook, has been covered in a previous report entitled 'An Archaeological Assessment and Building Appraisal of the Site of the Former Mary Street Steel Works, Sheffield, 2006.'

Although none of the buildings within the site are listed, the site lies within the Cultural Industries Quarter Conservation Area of Sheffield. As such, planning regulations require that a detailed assessment of archaeological importance and potential, together with an appraisal of architectural and historic interest of the site and its buildings are made to inform the planning process. A rapid appraisal was made of Site C in March 2006. Following this a more detailed record was required. To this end a documentary search at the Archives Office and Local Studies Section of Sheffield Central Library was made, and during a second site visit a photographic record was compiled and drawings produced from measurements taken. This report includes a CD with the photographic archive and Fig. 16 shows their respective viewpoints. Although the photographs were taken in digital form, a set of black and white prints will be included in the site archive for long-term storage. Several are included as plates within this report. The general format of this report largely follows that of the author's earlier Mary Street report.

## **2. Historical Background**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the south-east part of Sheffield's town centre was on open land known as Alsop Field, as shown on Gosling's map of 1736 (reproduced in Fine 2003, 55). Select residential development of the area was started by the Duke of Norfolk in the 1770s in a grid pattern of streets, but the intended plan was never finalised (Harman and Minnis, 2004, 135). Following the lifting of restrictions, various trades appeared in the area and workshops were built alongside or close to houses, and large cutlery manufacturers moved into the area in the 1820s. Streets south of Matilda Street including Sylvester Street and Sylvester Gardens were laid out in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and attracted a mixture of steel and associated blade and tool manufacturers.

Sylvester Street first appears on a map of 1808 and Leather's map of 1823 (reproduced in Fine 2003, 66) shows Ward's Waterwheel just to the south of it, situated close to a leet that ran to the north of Porter's Brook. It may have been associated with the so-called Sylvester Works, situated to the west on the street of the same name. This wheel is better shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1851 (Fig. 2). This map also shows some housing alongside Sylvester Gardens, the name

itself indicative of an intended residential area; otherwise, there was little industrial working in the vicinity apart from the Sylvester Works, west of and outside the area being considered here.

Site C was fronted on the north side by the long narrow Sylvester Gardens up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after which Sylvester Street was extended eastwards beyond its previous ending at Arundel Street. Whilst the 1890 map (Fig. 3) shows many small courtyards on the north side of the lane these had been cleared away shortly afterwards when the 1894 Ordnance Survey map was surveyed (Fig. 4), in anticipation of the wider Street's extension eastwards. Similar courts had also sprung up on the south side of Sylvester Gardens around the Porter Island Works and these were still there in 1894. Figure 4 shows a remaining irregular linear southern boundary that preserved the line of the infilled leet shown on the earlier 1851 map.

On the map of 1851 Ward's Wheel is shown occupying most of the south side of Site C (Fig. 2). This was named after its owner William Ward. In the 1865 Post Office Directory it is named the Porter Island Grinding Wheel, with Ward still its proprietor. Two spring knife manufacturers are also listed on the Gardens. To the west on Sylvester Street Thomas Ellin & Company at the Sylvester Works was making various knives, with the corporate name Vulcan.

Kelly's Directory of Sheffield for 1883 lists a mixture of activities on Sylvester Gardens: the Porter Island Grinding Wheel, three industrial works and several shopkeepers and craftsmen. White's 1900 directory is more confusing as Thomas Ellin's cutlery works is here listed on the Gardens, along with a steel wire manufacturer and a scythe maker. There is no longer any mention of a grinding works. Although by the time of Kelly's 1931 Directory the Gardens had shrunk in length, a mixed assortment of industrial activities were listed, along with Greek and Rumanian Consulates. There was a Speedwell Steel Works, a Pelham Works and various engineers, including motor engineers. Again there was no mention of a grinding works. The pattern of buildings around the grinding works, the outline of which can still be seen on the 1923 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 5), had certainly changed by then.

One of the present-day buildings fronting Sylvester Gardens bears the sign A. R. Heathcote & Co. Ltd. This name of knife manufacturers is associated with the so-called Bernard Works that was to occupy most of the area covered by Site C. The map of 1954 shows only a small part of the area not covered by roofing by this time (Fig. 6). The name Heathcote is also shown on the Goad insurance plans of the area, updated to 1934, although at that time other concerns were also present (Fig. 17). Most of Site C was still owned by the Heathcote company up until its closure in recent times.

### **3. Archaeological Assessment**

There is a small potential archaeological aspect to the site. The origin of Ward's Wheel is unknown but it probably represents a later development on the Porter Brook, built in anticipation of the southward expansion of the town in the late 18<sup>th</sup>

century. There is no evidence that it originated as a corn mill. It is not mentioned in the definitive work of this subject – Crossley 1989 (see references). Part of the wheel and its associated leet may survive within the development area, on the east side of the remaining grinding works, although the latter having previously been larger may have obliterated rather than incorporated the earlier water-power structure. The close proximity to Porter Brook means that earlier archaeological remains on the site cannot be fully ruled out as the river's course may have meandered through the site in earlier times.

#### **4. The Buildings**

Most of the buildings and structures within Site C are 20<sup>th</sup> century in date and of little historic or architectural merit (Fig. 10). There is a continuous built frontage on the north side with no side service access, as is characteristic of other streets in the area (Plate 1). The main site access was incorporated into the Heathcote company offices where Sylvester Gardens now begins. There was a smaller doorway at the far east end and a footpath access across the Porter Brook (later blocked off). Infill development behind the street consists largely of open, tall steel-framed sheds with skylighting, and some first floor offices (Plate 3). A three-storey brick building is the exception to this (Plate 2). Very little industrial plant or fittings remain to show what activities took place on the site. There remains part of a travelling crane in the eastern sector.

Within the area of open sheds there remain some earlier brick structures in the east part of the site. This includes a narrow two-storey range set at an odd angle to the north site boundary. It is open at ground floor level and has offices above (Plate 4). The footprint of this building follows that of part of an earlier court, although the brickwork is at least late 19<sup>th</sup> century in date and there are no indications of internal division, as the supposed earlier building had. Across what was an open courtyard (later roofed over) there is the remaining west wall of a larger building; both buildings are shown on the 1923 map (Fig. 5). To the west of the narrow workshop there is a toilet block, set in the angle where the former leet joined the Porter Brook, and a series of open sheds, mainly orientated north-south (Plates 5, 6).

##### **Offices**

On the north side of the site there is the former two-storey offices of A. R. Heathcote & Co. Ltd. This was previously suspected as being a partial survival from a former terrace of small early 19<sup>th</sup> century court units shown on the 19<sup>th</sup> century maps, perhaps adapted for industrial use. However, closer inspection and measurement of the building shows that it was built after 1890 once the courts had been demolished. It consists of a two-storey, three-range office, incorporating a site entrance passage on the ground floor. Three of its rooms were heated so it may have doubled as living accommodation for a site manager. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the street elevation was provided with an added brick skin. The building has been much altered and extended to the rear. See Figure 11 for the ground and first-floor plans.

## Grinding works

The most interesting and noteworthy building that remains within Site C is a 3-storey tall, 5-bay long and 2-bay deep building which was the west part of the former Porter Island Grinding Works, built sometime between 1850 and 1890 (Plate 2). It is approximately 17.5m long and 8m wide (57 x 26ft), which probably represents the size of medium-sized works. The far east bay contains a lift-shaft and a staircase.

At ground-floor the south elevation has a series of infilled openings, probably one per bay, and there is a raised thin stone course included amongst the brick coursing (Fig. 12; Plate 7). The north side is now partly obscured by breezeblock and new openings for adjoining modern garage workshops, and at first floor level there are blocked windows showing (Plate 8). The west end has a large infilled doorway (and surviving letterbox), whilst the east end has an opening for the lift shaft and a similar blocked opening into what is now the stairwell.

Internally, the building has 4 open bays, with single rows of cast-iron columns on the lower floors, and brick jack arches supporting concrete flooring (Plate 9). The casement windows are large and square, generally with 9-panes, and do not fit a regular symmetrical plan (Fig. 12-14). Two bases for heavy equipment still show at first floor level and one on the upper floor. The top floor is open to the steel-framed roof (Plate 10). The west wall has single doors for an external fire escape from the upper floors.

The east end of the building shows signs of alteration, especially where the staircase rises. There are several blocked doorways, two together on the internal west ground floor wall – which suggest that the building may once have had a cellar. There is also a now external blocked doorway at first floor level and the present doorway has been much wider. This suggests that the staircase is not original, which is supported by its positioning in relation to windows in the south wall. Instead, there is reason to suspect that a lift was previously situated where the staircase is now positioned. What the other blocked-off openings represent is not clear as taking-in doors tend to be uncommon amongst such buildings in Sheffield (Beauchamp in Symonds, 83). There is also a curious opening in the floor of the first floor, fourth bay, next to the staircase entrance, suggestive of a hoist entry. Two smaller openings can be seen in the ceiling of the second bay at ground floor level.

The arched floors are quite thick and were designed to take weighty equipment (Fig. 15). This is indicative of there having been grinding troughs on each floor, although only three raised bases now remain to indicate placement. The building is strictly functional in design and has no adornment showing. It is representative of the vernacular style of most of the workshops built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which emphasises the low cost, speculative nature and multi-purpose nature of much of the industrial building then (Beauchamp in Symonds, 105). The high number of blocked openings visible in the building may also indicate its use as a tenement workshop, which may also explain its absence from mention in the later directories in connection with any of the adjacent cutlery manufacturers.

## 5. Recommendation

Most of the buildings on Site C are of very late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century date and are of little historic importance. Some of the structure, especially at the east end, may be replacement work after 1945 as the Arundel Road area was affected by wartime bombing. The grinding works is the one noteworthy building remaining, being a complete and discrete former workshop with little internal alteration. It appears to be structurally sound. It has probably escaped previous attention from students of the subject because of its position, hidden behind more modern structures and its somewhat derelict appearance from the street. If only in the interests of building diversification and the mixing of old and new in new Cultural Quarter developments, it is worthy of retention and reuse.

## 6. References

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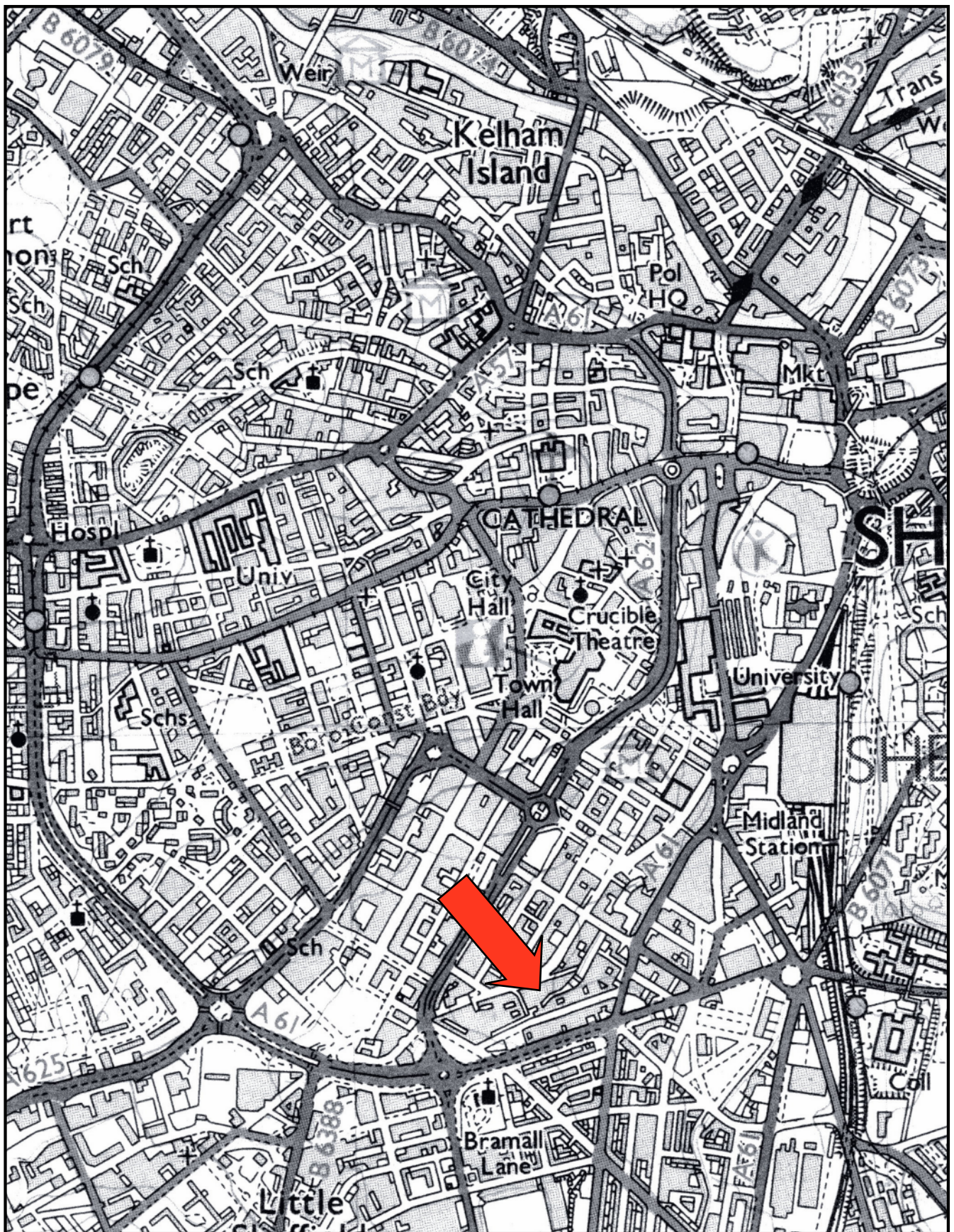
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Symonds, J. (ed) 2002. *The Historical Archaeology of the Sheffield Cutlery and Tableware Industry 1750-1900*. BAR British Series 341, Oxford.

# ILLUSTRATIONS





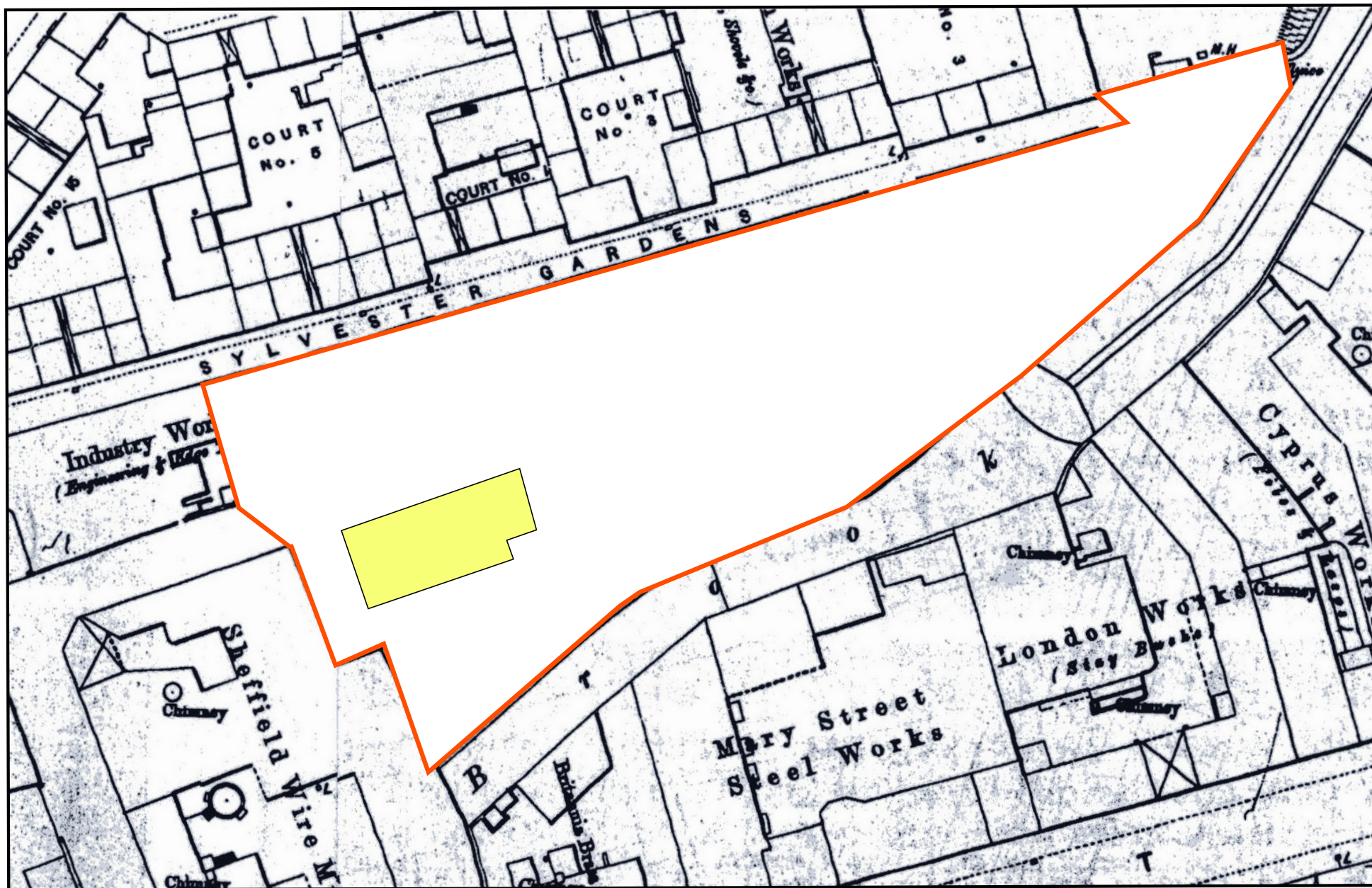
**Fig. 1** Location of the Site C, Sylvester Street near the centre of Sheffield. Scale 1:10,000 (Ordnance Survey map reproduced with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright Licence No. AL 100020618).





**Fig 2** Location of Site C (red outline) and surviving grinding works building (yellow) shown on an Ordnance Survey map of Sheffield dated to 1851 (scale 5 feet to the mile; 1:1056). Scale 1:500.



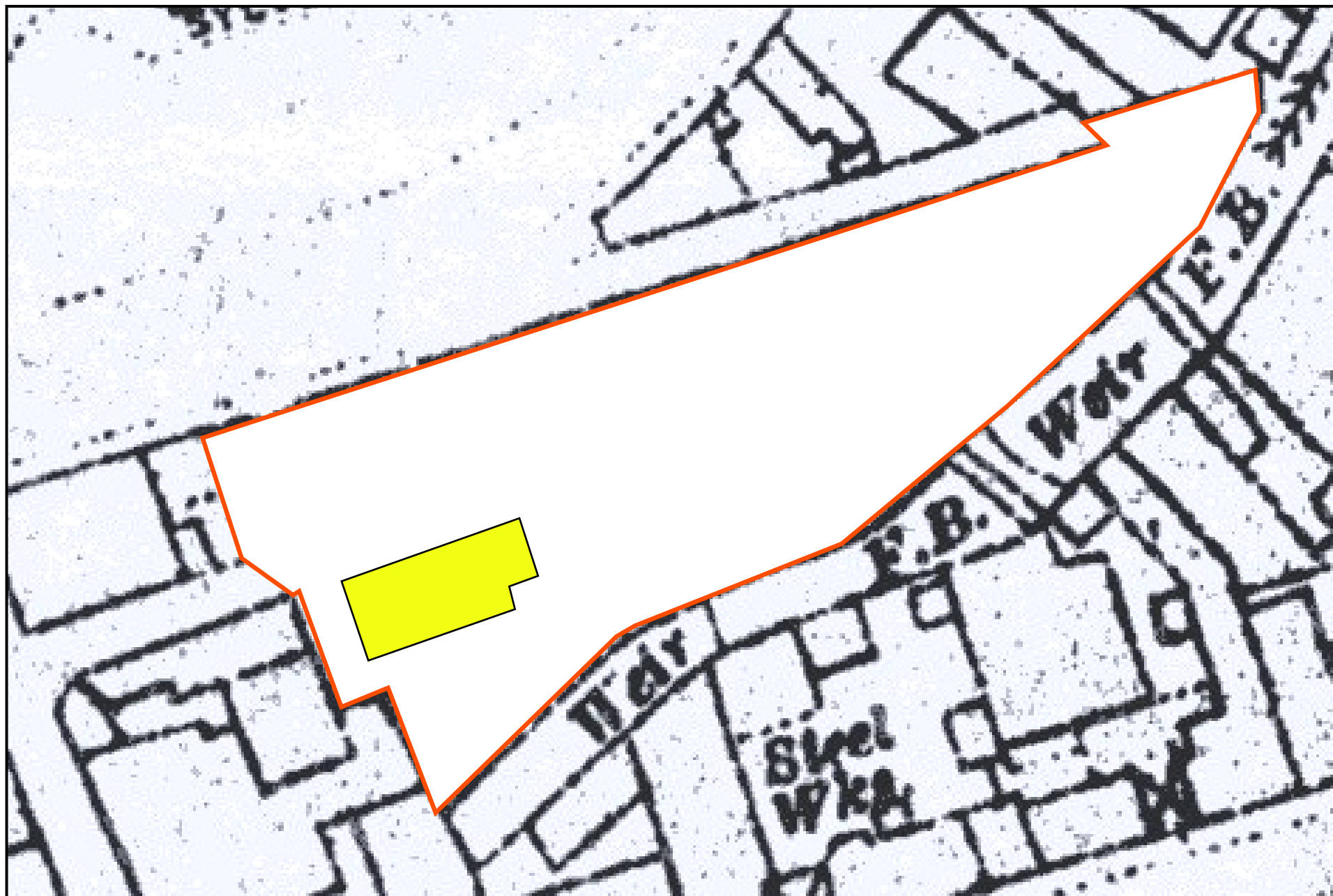


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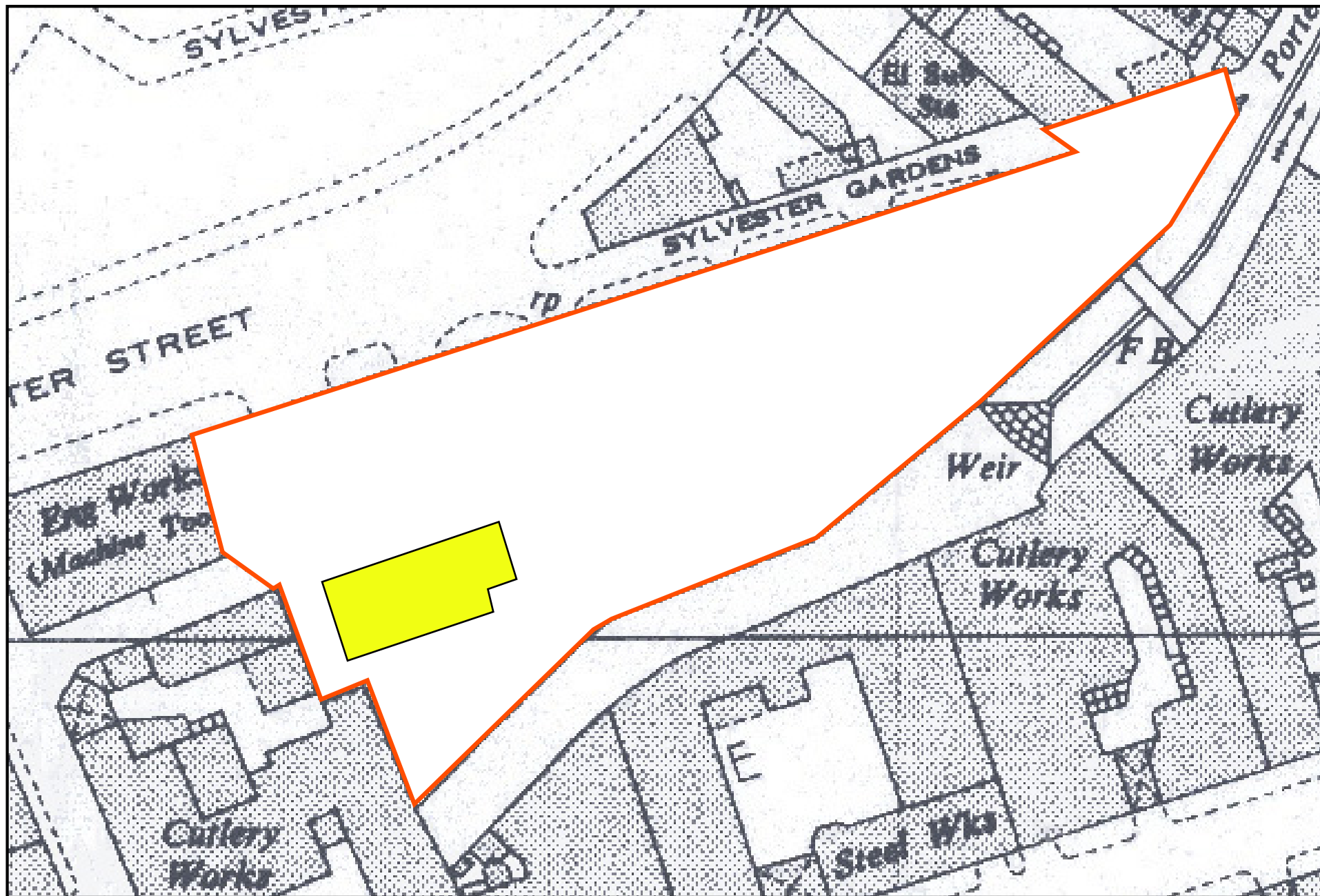




**Fig 4** Location of Site C (red outline) and surviving grinding works building (yellow) shown on an Ordnance Survey map of Sheffield dated to 1894 (scale 25 inches to the mile; approx. 1:2500). Scale 1:500.

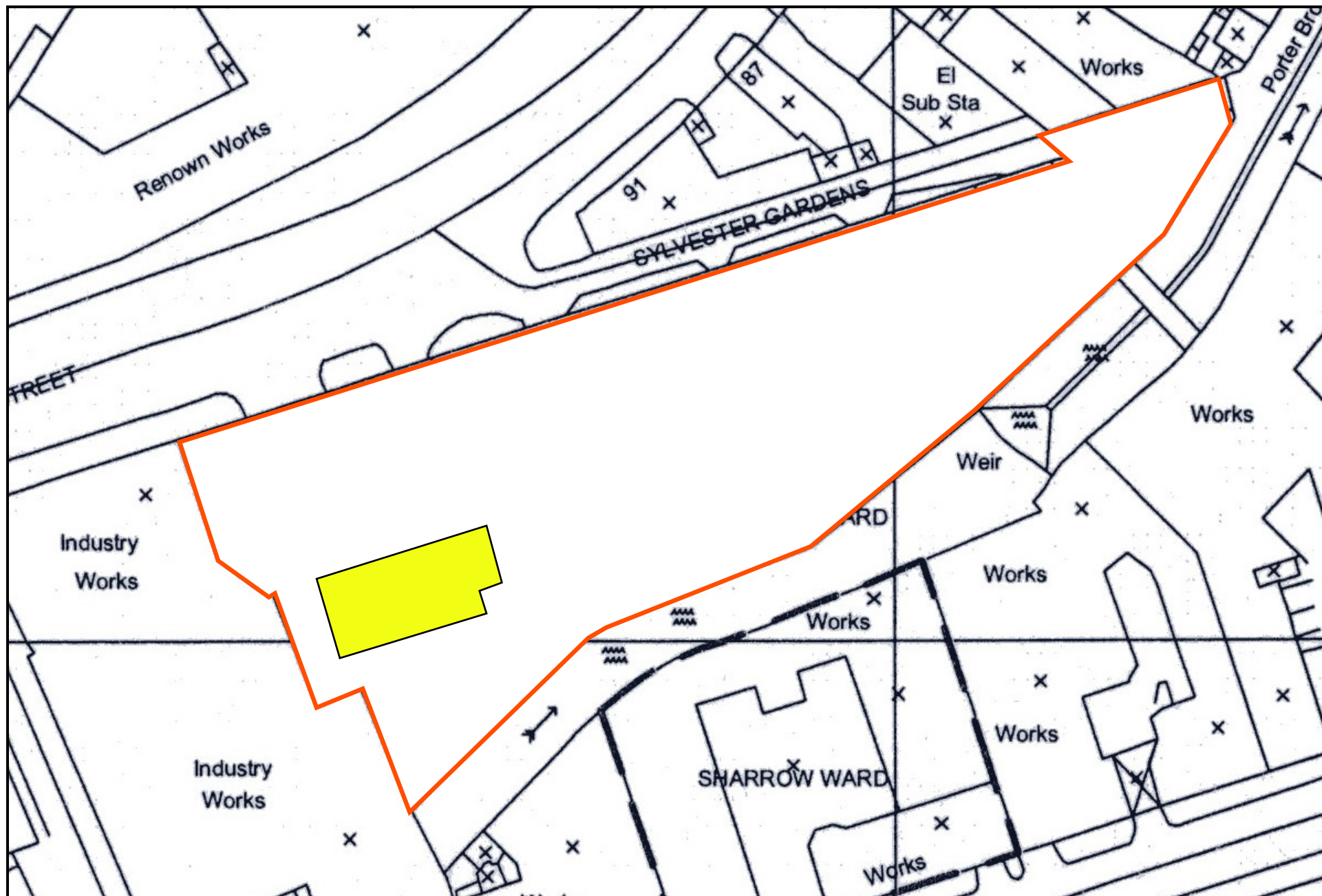


**Fig 5** Location of Site C (red outline) and existing grinding works building (yellow) shown on an Ordnance Survey map of Sheffield dated to 1923 (scale 25 inches to the mile; approx. 1:2500). Scale 1:500.

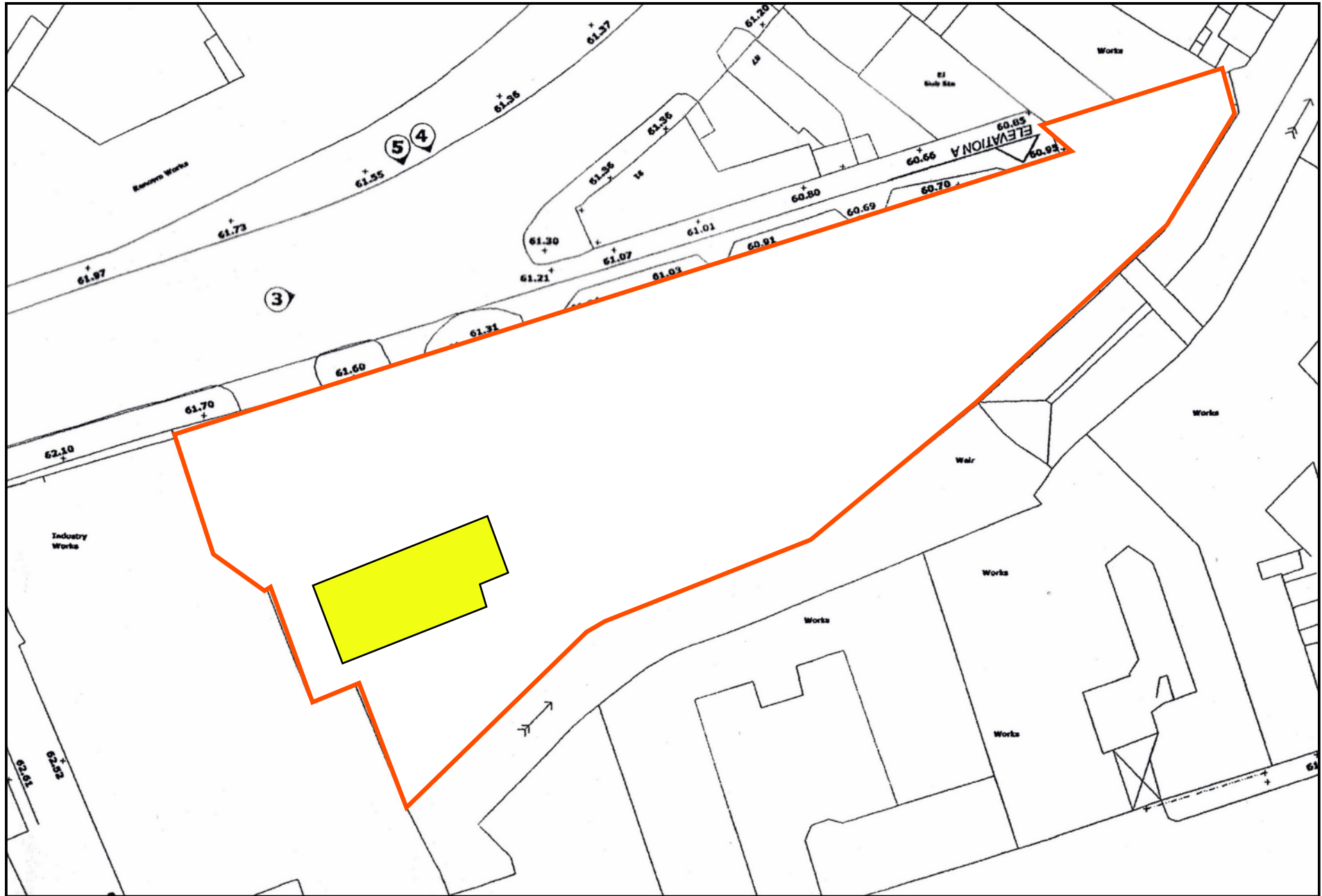


**Fig 6** Location of Site C (red outline) and existing grinding works building (yellow) shown on an Ordnance Survey map of Sheffield dated to 1954 (scale 1:2500). Scale 1:500.





**Fig 7** Location of Site C (red outline) and existing grinding works building (yellow) shown on a recent Ordnance Survey map of Sheffield. Scale 1:500.  
(Ordnance Survey map reproduced with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright Licence No. AL 100020618).



**Fig 8** Existing site plan of Site C (red outline) and existing grinding works building (yellow). Scale 1:500.  
*Plan courtesy of John Seifert Architects.*





**Fig 9** Proposed site plan of Site C (red outline) and existing grinding works building (yellow). Scale 1:500.  
*Plan courtesy of John Seifert Architects.*

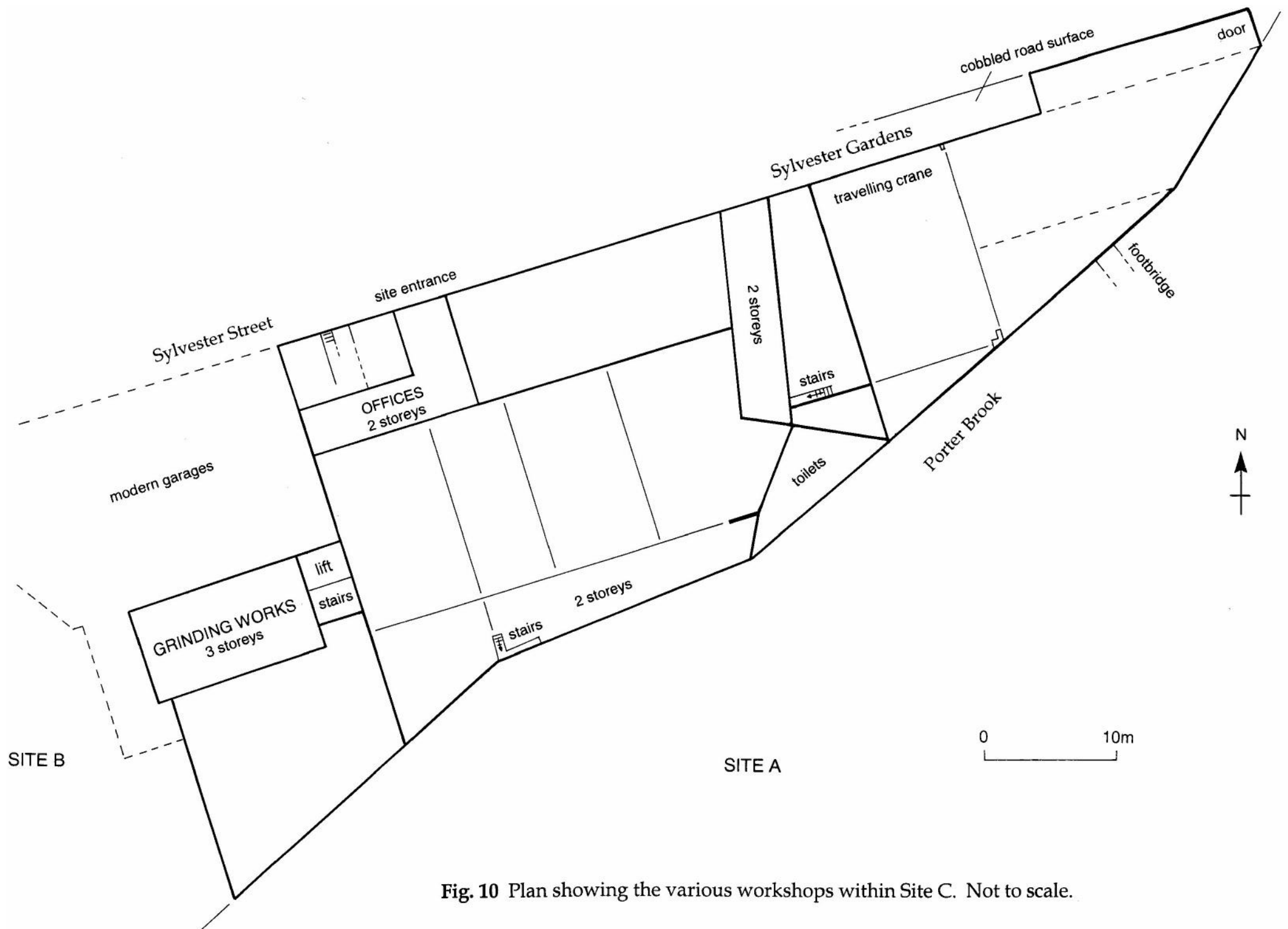
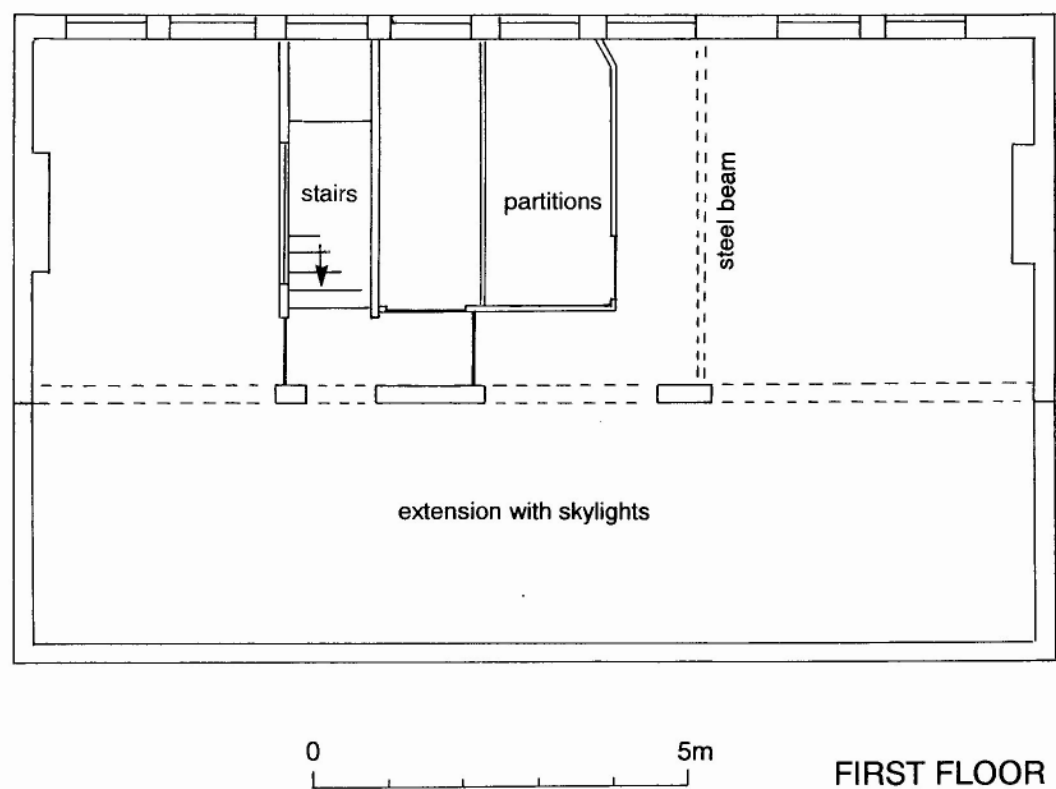
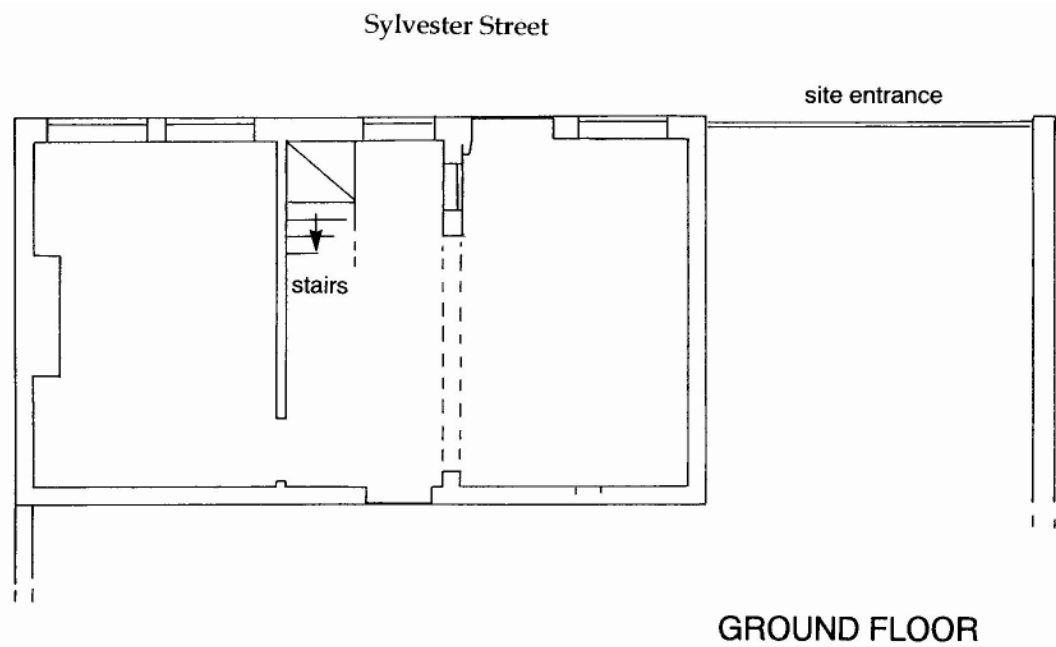
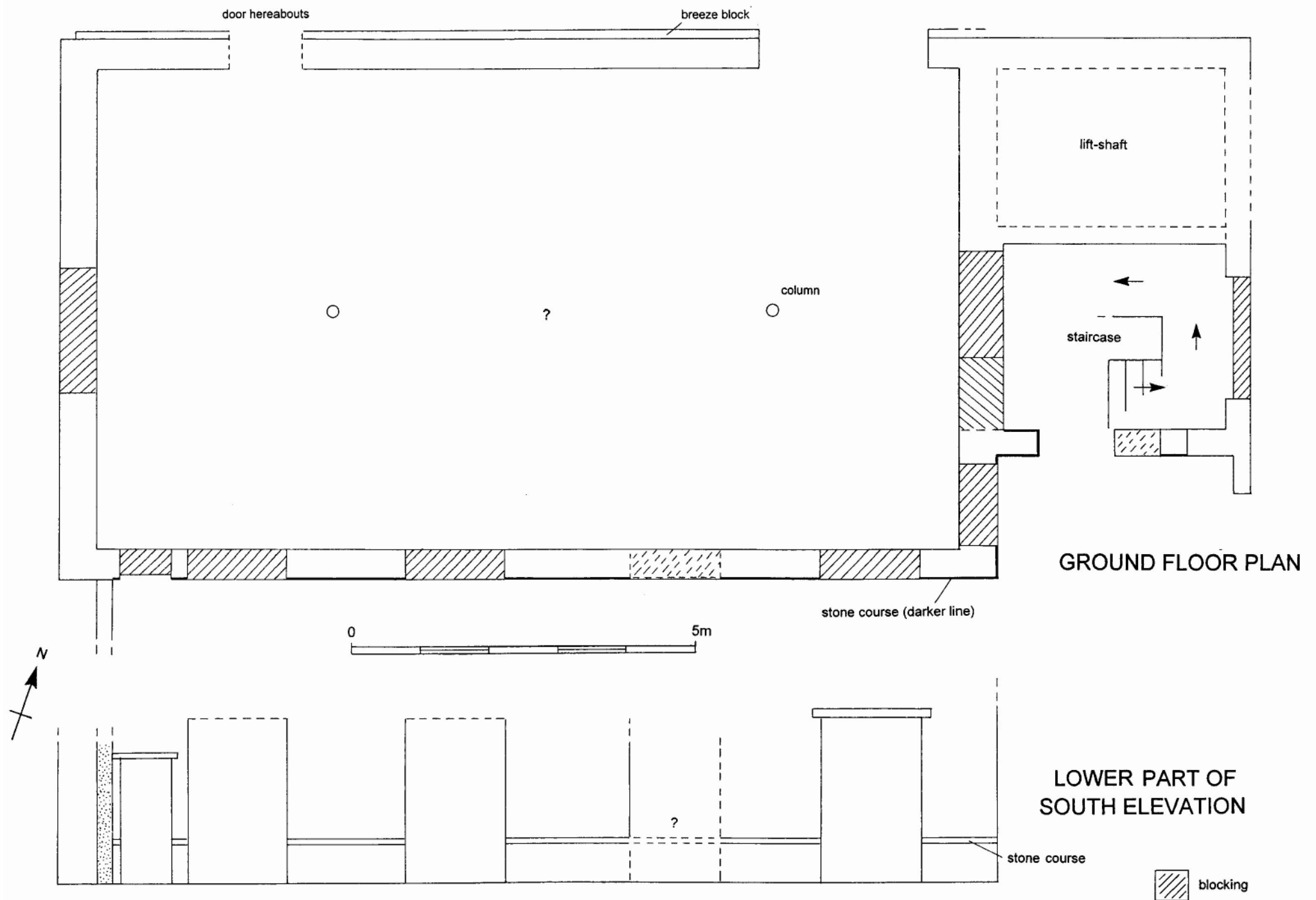


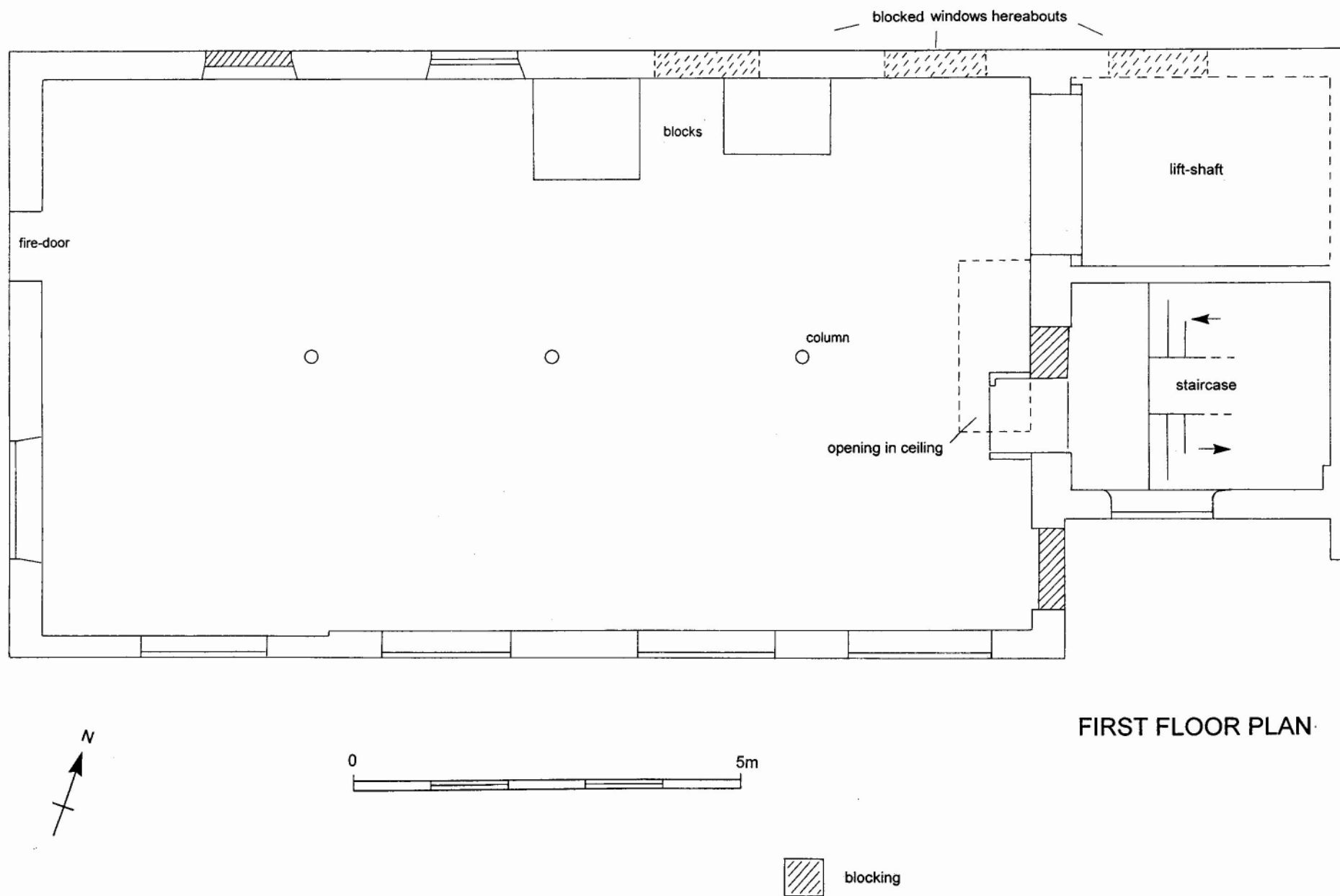
Fig. 10 Plan showing the various workshops within Site C. Not to scale.



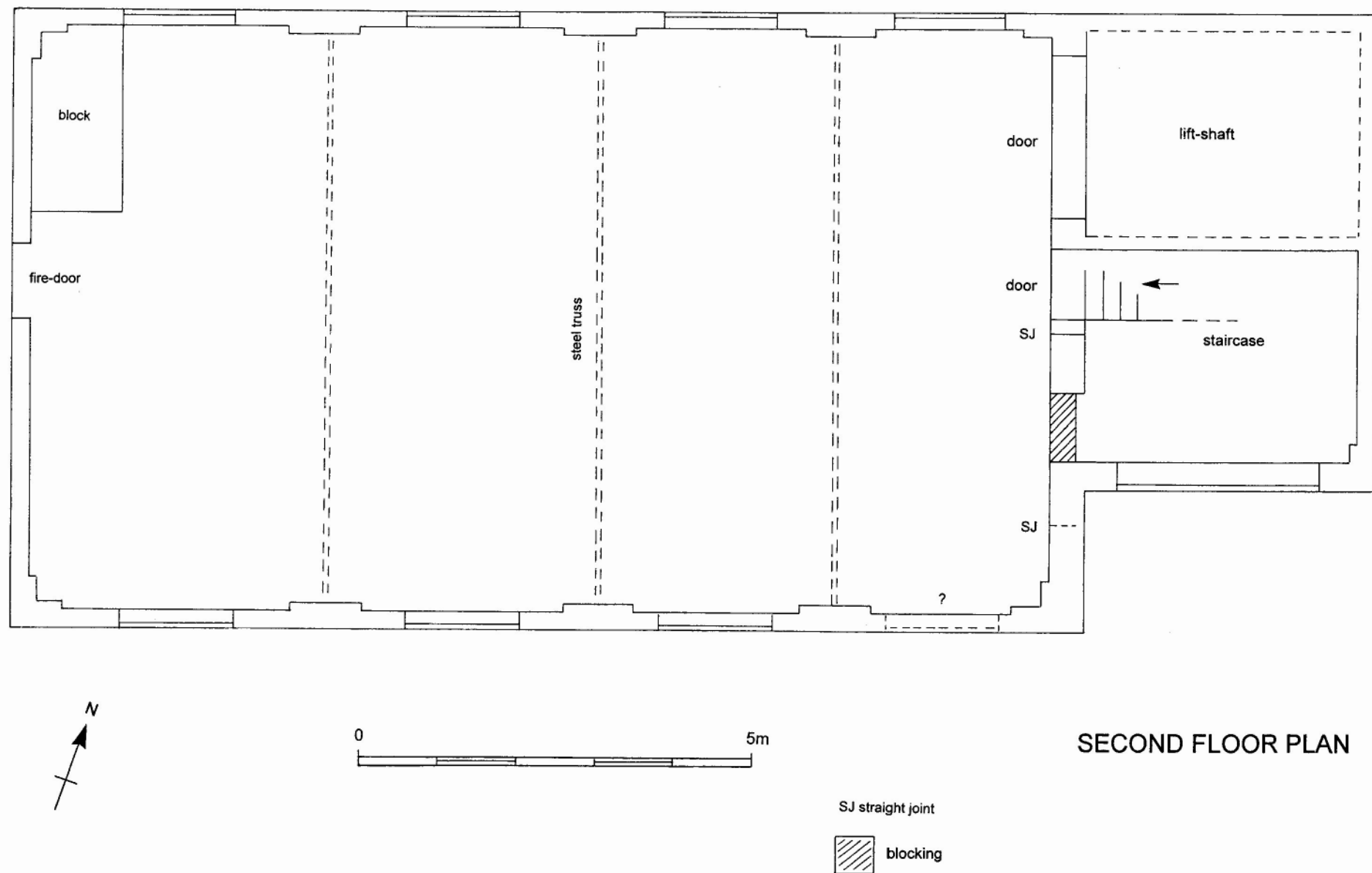
**Fig. 11** Ground floor and first floor plans of the former house / offices on Sylvester Gardens. Scale 1:100.



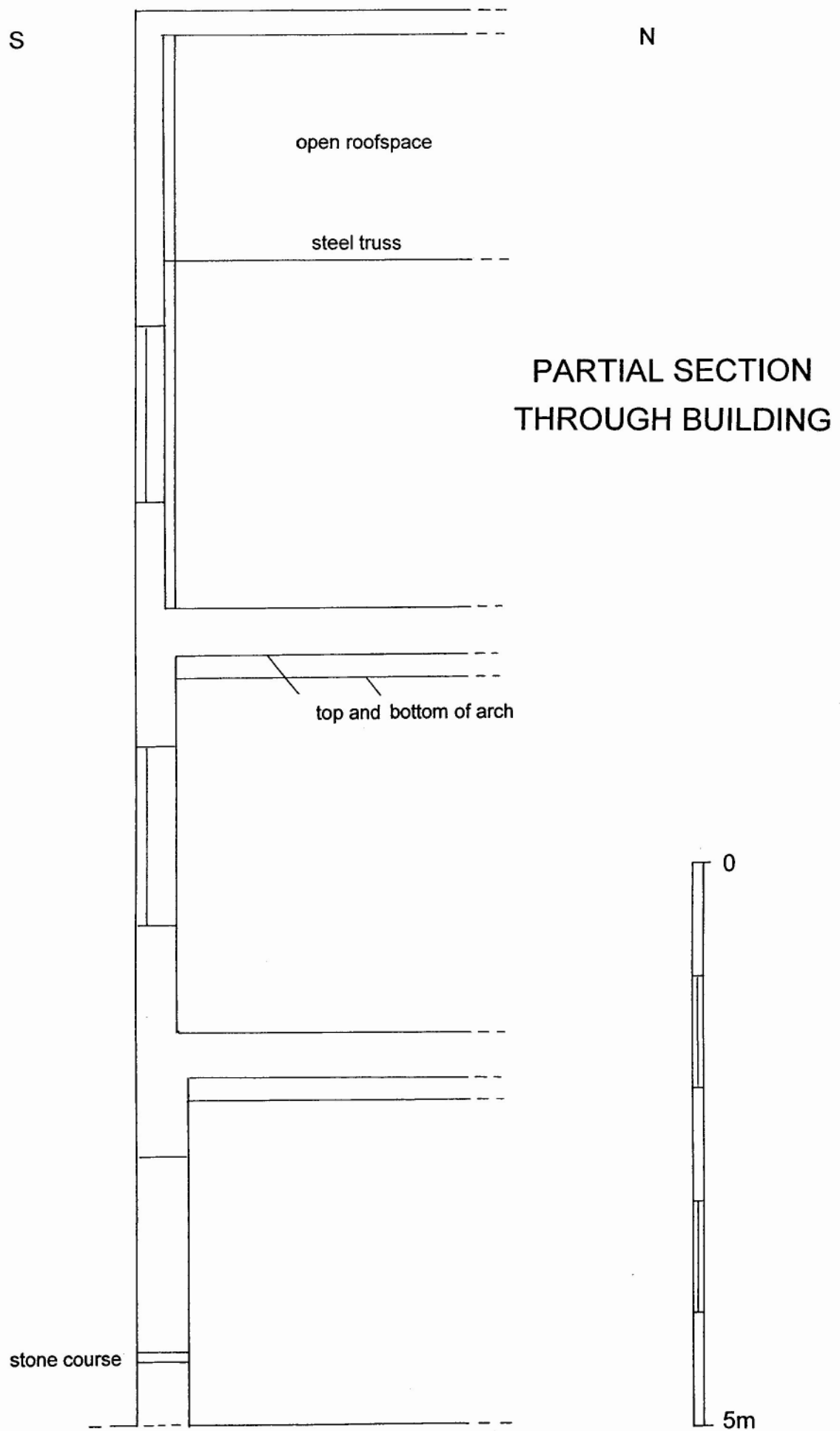
**Fig. 12** Ground floor plan and lower part of the south elevation of the former grinding works, Sylvester Street, Sheffield. Not to scale.



**Fig. 13** First floor plan of the former grinding works, Sylvester Street, Sheffield. Not to scale.



**Fig. 14** Second floor plan of the former grinding works, Sylvester Street, Sheffield.  
Not to scale.

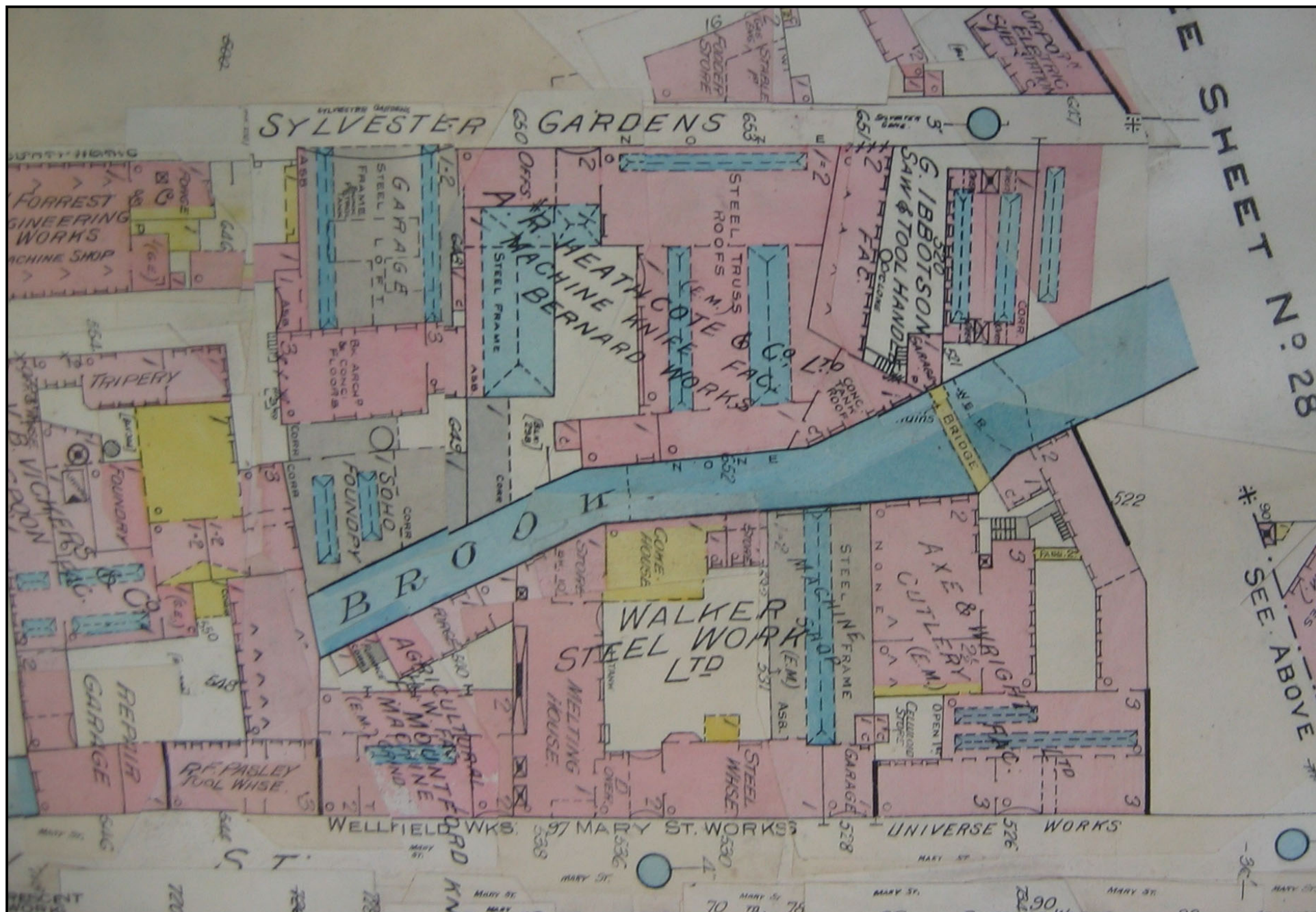


**Fig. 15** Partial section showing relative floor heights in the former grinding works, Sylvester Street, Sheffield. Scale 1:50.



Fig. 16 Plans showing viewpoints of the archival photographs. Not to scale.





**Fig. 17** A Goad Insurance Plan of the Sylvester Gardens - Mary Street area of Sheffield, surveyed 1896, revised to 1934 (Sheffield Central Library Ref. 104015, 912.4274 SF).



1



2

**Plates 1, 2:** Views of the north side of Site C on Sylvester Street / Gardens, Sheffield.  
**1:** a length of the present street frontage; **2:** the top part of the former grinding works.



**3**



**4**

**Plates 3, 4:** Views of the industrial working areas in the east part of Site C, behind Sylvester Gardens, Sheffield. **3:** looking from the north-east end of the site; **4:** ground floor of one of the oldest remaining workshops.



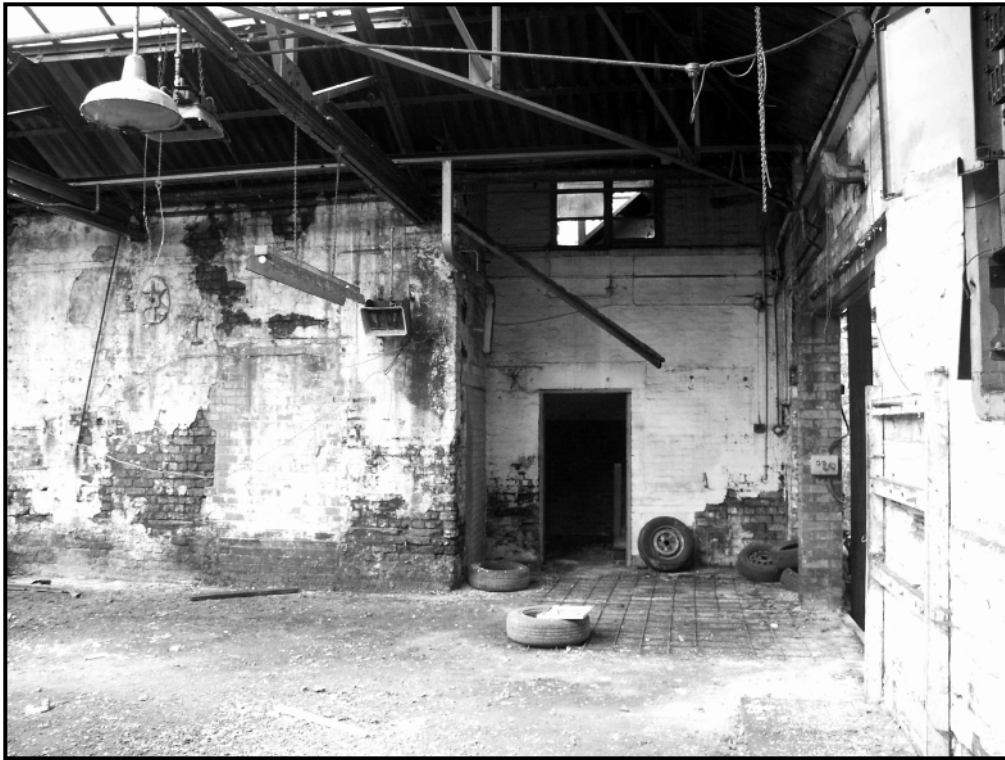


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**Plates 5, 6:** Views of the industrial working areas in the central part of Site C, Sylvester Street, Sheffield.



7



8

**Plates 7, 8** Views of the exterior of the former grinding works at Sylvester Street, Sheffield. **7:** the south-east corner with staircase / lift area to right; **8:** blocked windows of the first floor on the north side, showing within a modern garage.



9



10

**Plates 9, 10:** Views of the interior of the former grinding works, Sylvester Street, Sheffield  
**9:** reinforced flooring and a steel column at ground floor; **10:** lighting on the second floor .