

DOCUMENT VERIFICATION

NEW CROSS HOSPITAL, AIR-RAID SHELTER  
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORDING

Quality Control

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING RECORDING OF AN AIR-RAID SHELTER  
AT NEW CROSS HOSPITAL, AVONLEY ROAD, LONDON BOROUGH OF  
LEWISHAM, SE14**

**COMMISSIONING CLIENT: OSBORNE HOMES**

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## **1 NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Osborne Homes are undertaking development work on sites along Kender Street and Avonley Road, London Borough of Lewisham. The site in question is on Avonley Road, in the grounds of New Cross Hospital.
- 1.2 The National Grid Reference for the site is TQ 3543 7734.
- 1.2 This report presents the results of an archaeological building recording of an air-raided shelter on the site and an archaeological watching brief on its removal. The work was carried out in accordance with the archaeological conditions set out by Mark Stephenson of the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service.
- 1.3 The air-raided shelter at Avonley Road is not listed and is outside the Kender Triangle Regeneration area.
- 1.4 A fabric analysis of the structure was undertaken with a plan and four sections produced. The structure, internally and externally, was recorded photographically in medium format.
- 1.5 The shelter was installed between late 1938 and 1940 and retains no original fixtures other than the ladder of the escape hatch.
- 1.5 No further recommendations have arisen from this phase of the project.

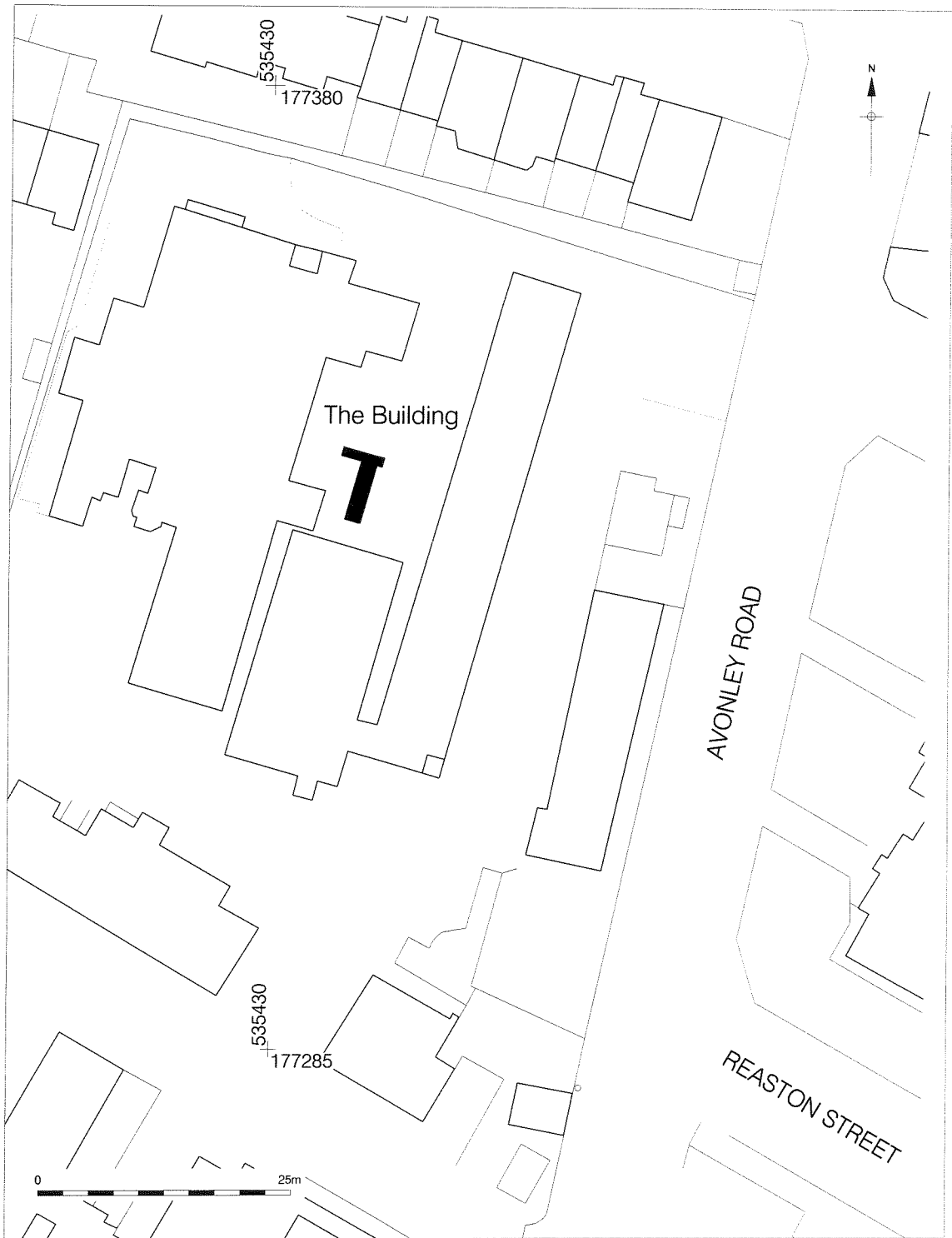
## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This work has been commissioned by Osborn Homes in advance of a proposed development in the grounds of New Cross Hospital, Avonley Road, London Borough of Lewisham, SE14 (Figs 1 and 2).
- 2.2 This report presents the results of a phase of Historic Building Recording following the recommendations of Mark Stephenson of the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service and carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited in fulfilment of the above commission.
- 2.3 The Historic Building Recording was aimed at recording surviving elements of the air-raid shelter prior to its removal as part of the site's development, and at completing a photographic survey and fabric analysis of the structure.
- 2.4 Pre-Construct Archaeology is a Registered Archaeological Organisation with the Institute of Field Archaeologists.
- 2.5 All works will be undertaken to conform with the standards laid down in the following guidance papers, documents and publications:
- Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (1997) *Analysis and Recording for the Conservation and control of works to historic buildings*
  - British Archaeologists and Developers Liaison Group (1986) *Code of Practice*
  - British Standards Institution (1998) *Guide to the Principles of the Conservation of Historic Buildings (BS 7913)*
  - English Heritage (1991) *Management of Archaeological Projects*
  - English Heritage (Clark, K.) (2001) *Informed Conservation-Understanding historic buildings and their landscapes for conservation*
  - English Heritage: *Guidance Paper 98*; GLAAS: *Guidance Paper 3-Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork in London*;
  - English Heritage: *The presentation of historic building survey in CAD* (2000)
  - IFA (1999) *Standards and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures*
- Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England (now part of English Heritage) (1996) *Recording historic buildings: a descriptive specification*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition



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Figure 1  
 Site Location  
 1:20,000



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Figure 2  
Building Location  
1:625

### **3 METHOD**

#### **3.1 General**

3.1.1 The archaeological building recording of the air-raid shelter at New Cross Hospital, Avonley Road, London Borough of Lewisham, SE14, was aimed at recording the structure prior to its removal as part of on-going development, and at producing a photographic survey and fabric analysis of the same.

#### **3.2 Assessment**

3.2.1 Fieldwork on the site was carried out by James Dixon in February 2005. A watching brief on the removal of the shelter was carried out by Fiona Keith-Lucas in June 2005.

#### **3.3 Recording**

3.3.1 Sections and plans of the structure were produced on-site and drawn up in AutoCAD according to the guidelines of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (now English Heritage).

#### **3.4 Photography**

3.4.1 The interior and exterior of the structure were recorded photographically in colour and black and white medium format, and on colour and black and white 35mm film.

#### **3.5 Fabric Analysis**

3.5.1 A general fabric analysis of the air-raid shelter was carried out during the archaeological building recording exercise. Elements of the structure not visible during this phase were recorded by written description during the watching brief phase.

#### **3.6 Site Archive**

3.6.1 The site archive will be comprised of the current report and the drawings and photographs produced during the recording and watching brief phases of work and will be organised so as to be compatible with the other archaeological archives produced in the Local Authority area. The archive will be held at the London Archaeological Archive Resource Centre (LAARC).



## 4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 New Cross Hospital was known as South Eastern Hospital until 1948. Although it has not been possible to trace the exact date of the installation of this particular air-raid shelter (possibly due to its relatively small size), the London Borough of Lewisham Council minutes show that the Borough began the installation of air-raid shelters in late 1938. It can thus be assumed that the shelter at Avonley Road was built at sometime between late 1938 and late 1940, which saw the beginning of the Blitz.
- 4.2 The hospital suffered fairly extensive air-raid damage from a raid on September 7<sup>th</sup> 1940 and again in March 1941, April 1941, April 1943 and June 1944<sup>1</sup>. Due to war damage, the treatment of residential patients was temporarily halted in March 1941, but the South Eastern Hospital remained a casualty hospital until December 1941 when it was withdrawn from the Emergency Hospital Scheme (a wartime designation for hospitals able to treat mass casualties)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Anon. Undated. *File of Correspondence between the L.C.C. and South Eastern Hospital Committee on air-raid damage 1940 to 1944* (PH/Hosp/3/157)

<sup>2</sup> Anon. March 1935-1946. *Minutes of the South Eastern Hospital Committee*. 2.L.C.C. (LCC/MIN/2668)

## 5 BUILDING RECORDING

- 5.1 The air-raid shelter at Avonley Road is of small size and very simple design, yet incorporates the integral features of larger, more complex shelters. The shelter as whole lies within a mound formed by back-filling the hole created to insert the shelter itself.



Plate 1 The entrance to the shelter

- 5.2 The shelter is entered by means of eleven concrete steps leading down from its east side. The roof above these steps is of a single moulded concrete slab (Fig 4) and there are further concrete slabs on either side of them. The whole of the entrance is beneath soil, with the exception of the very top of the steps. During the watching brief phase of the archaeological recording of the site, it was observed that the concrete of the entranceway cover-slab was reinforced with a square grid of 6mm twisted-square steel bars and that the steps themselves were reinforced by a sheet of corrugated iron held in place by a wooden stake.
- 5.3 Immediately at the bottom of the steps, the shelter extends at right angles to the lobby, creating a blast-baffle. The main room of the shelter is entered through a wooden door and frame, the door opening outwards to counter it being blown inwards, in the direction of the shelter's occupants. The door is held in a dome-shaped slab of pre-cast concrete. Inside the main room of the shelter, there are no original fittings evident and it has been most recently used for storage. The structure of the main shelter consists of four main elements. The east and west walls of the shelter are of pre-cast concrete around 010cm thick, bearing evidence of having been cast against 268 x 015cm wooden planking. These rest upon a concrete floor slab, 013cm thick and reinforced with 10mm round steel reinforcing bars. The roof of the main structure is a single domed piece of pre-cast concrete, again around 010cm thick. This shows signs of having been cast against 137 x 006cm wooden planking.

This was seen to be reinforced with 4mm round steel wire. The entirety of this main room was painted white.



Plate 2 The shelter interior with escape hatch and ladder to the rear

- 5.4 At the south end of the main room is a further concrete slab holding a doorway and wooden frame the same size as that at the north end (Fig 4), but with no door, this being to prevent loss of access to the escape hatch in the event of a collapse. Through this doorway, the escape hatch itself is built up in pre-cast concrete below ground and in brick above ground, the aim of this being to lessen the chances of being trapped underneath collapsed slabs of concrete. The hatch itself, a 10mm thick iron plate resting on the bricks, is reached via an eleven rung steel ladder (Fig 4) set into the concrete of the escape hatch shaft. Within the escape hatch section of the shelter, ventilation is provided via two ventilation holes, one blocked and one holding a plastic down-pipe (Fig 4).



Plate 3 Exterior of shelter showing escape hatch (left) and area of entrance (right)

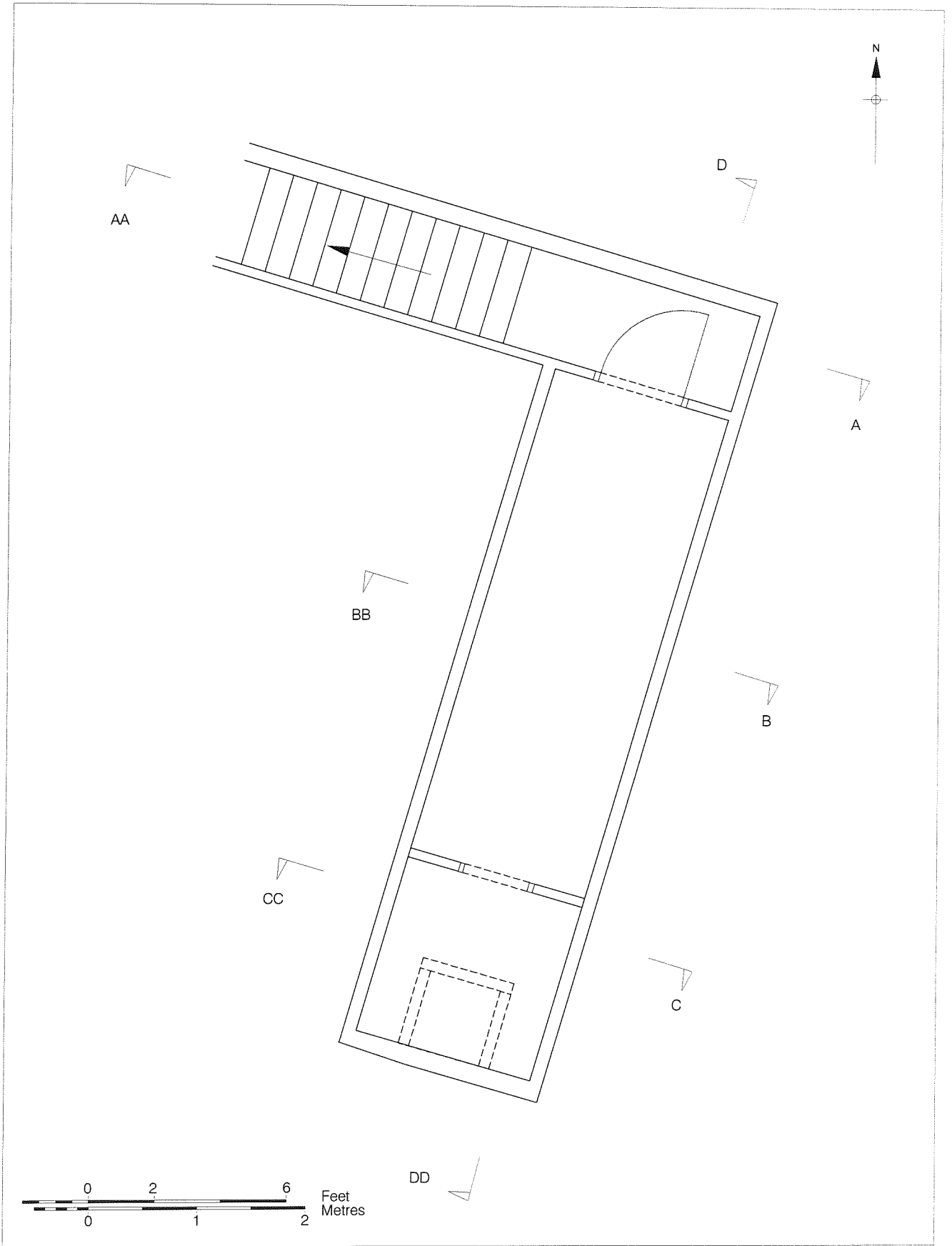


Figure 3  
Plan Of Air Raid Shelter  
1:50

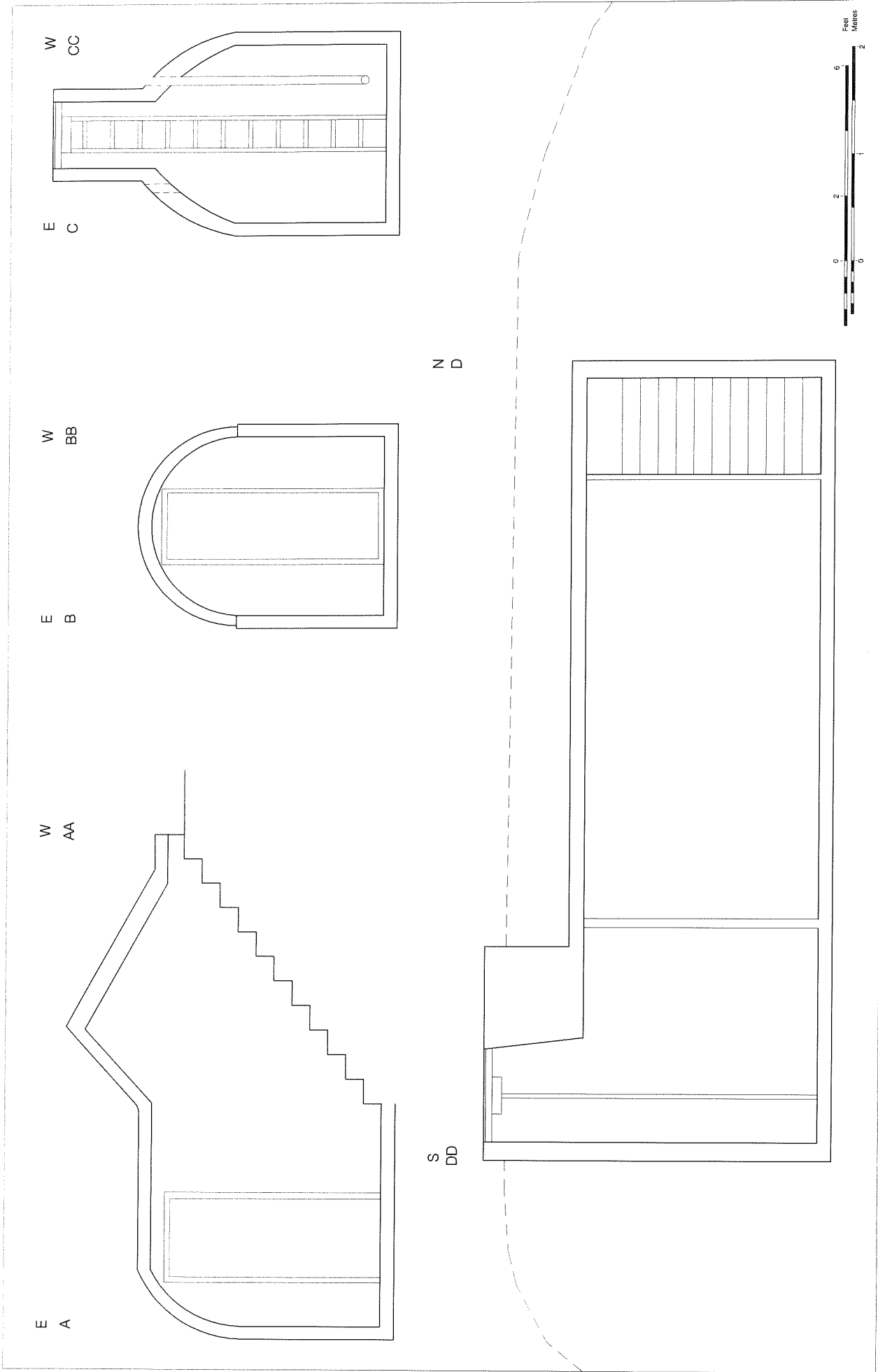


Figure 4  
Sections  
1:50

## **6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The air-raid shelter at New Cross Hospital was constructed between late 1938 and 1940 to a regular design and using a simple method of fitting together pre-cast concrete blocks produced by pouring concrete over a softwood frame. The blast-baffle to the north end of the structure has concrete stairs added and, to the south of the structure, the escape-hatch room is built up in brick above ground-level.
- 6.2 New Cross was heavily bombed during the Second World War and more extensive air-raid shelters were available in the close vicinity of the hospital. The shelter was intended for short-term use by around twenty occupants. The lack of ramp-access and small size of the shelter suggests that it was not intended to be used by patients and was more likely to have been used by hospital staff. The lack of sanitary facilities shows that it was not intended for prolonged use.
- 6.3 No further recommendations have arisen from this phase of work.

## **7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

7.1 Pre-Construct Archaeology would like to thank Mark Wellbelove of Osborne Homes for commissioning the work and the staff of Osborne Homes for their assistance on site.

7.2 James Dixon would like to thank Victoria Osborn and Fiona Keith-Lucas for their work on site, Cheryl Blundy for photography and Ken Sabel and David Divers for project management. Further thanks go to the Imperial War Museum, Lewisham Local Studies Library and Mr Roger Thomas for assistance with documentary research.

## APPENDIX 1 OASIS INFORMATION

**OASIS ID: preconst1-9794**

### Project details

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Project name                           | Air-Raid Shelter, Avonley Road, New Cross                                    |
| Short description of the project       | Archaeological recording of a WWII period air-raid shelter prior to removal. |
| Previous/future work                   | Not known / No   |
| Any associated project reference codes | NXH05 - Sitecode   |
| Type of project                        | Building Recording   |
| Site status                            | None   |
| Current Land use                       | Other 2 - In use as a building   |
| Prompt                                 | Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG15                              |

### Project location

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Country                 | England  |
| Site location           | GREATER LONDON LEWISHAM DEPTFORD AND NEWCROSS New Cross Hospital |
| Postcode                | SE14   |
| Study area              | 20.00 Square metres  |
| National grid reference | TQ 3543 7734 Point   |

### Project creators

|                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Name of Organisation      | Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd |
| Project brief originator  | English Heritage              |
| Project design originator | Ken Sabel/David Divers        |



|                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Project director/manager | Ken Sabel          |
| Project supervisor       | James Dixon        |
| Sponsor or funding body  | Osbourne Homes Ltd |

**Project archives**

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Physical Archive Exists? | No  |
| Digital Archive Exists?  | No  |
| Paper Archive recipient  | LAARC   |
| Paper Media available    | 'Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes','Photograph','Plan','Report','Section' |

**Project bibliography**

1

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Publication type              | Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)  |
| Title                         | Archaeological Building recording of an Air-Raid Shelter at New Cross Hospital, Avonley Road, London Borough of Lewisham, SE14 |
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