

Archaeological
Building
Recording
Services

**An Archaeological Standing Building Survey
Prospect House
Watling Street
Towcester
Northamptonshire**

(NGR SP 69125 48965)

On Behalf of Mr S.A Camm



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March 2019

ABRS Project No 2019-PHTN

**Planning Permission No
S/2018/2518/FUL &
S/2018/2519/LBC**

**Northamptonshire County Council
Historic Environment Record Event
No. ENN109388**

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**An Archaeological Standing Building Survey of Prospect House (Outbuildings Only),
174 Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 69125 48965).**

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Summary

This document is an archaeological standing building survey of Prospect House (outbuildings only), Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire (SP 69125 48965), commissioned from Archaeological Building Recording Services (ABRS) by Mr S.A Camm in advance of the proposed conversion of the outbuildings to residential use.

The outbuilding associated with Prospect House is a historically interesting building, if a little less interesting architecturally. Prospect House is likely to date to the early 19th century. Cartographic sources suggest the rear range has similar origins, however, there is significant evidence to indicate that the rear range has been extensively altered, if not re-built.

The history of the building is of greater interest, limited documentary references indicate the building originated as outbuildings associated the domestic dwelling, later becoming a carpenters shop and most recently a small specialist shoe factory. It is these uses which reflect the origins and evolution of such buildings in small to medium regional market towns.

The archive will be retained by ABRS under the temporary site code 2019-PHTN until deposition with Northamptonshire County Council can be arranged under the Event Number ENN109388.

1. Introduction

Archaeological Building Recording Services (ABRS) was commissioned by Mr S.A Camm to undertake an archaeological standing building survey of Prospect House (outbuildings only), Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire (SP 69125 48965 (*Figures 1, & 5*)). Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent has been granted for the conversion of the outbuildings to residential use (PA No's S/2018/2518/FUL & S/2018/2519/LBC). The buildings are traditionally built non-domestic outbuildings, believed to date from the 19th century. The Assistant Archaeological Advisor, Northamptonshire County Council, as advisor to South Northamptonshire Council has recommended that an archaeological standing building survey to Historic England Level 2 as defined in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England 2016) be carried out prior to any proposed works being carried out. The buildings are curtilage listed as part of Prospect House and located within the Towcester Conservation Area.

A Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Building Recording has not been issued, the Assistant Archaeological Advisor has been consulted and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) ABRS 2019-PHTN_WSI) submitted and approved. The building recording followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) *Code of Conduct*, and adhered to their *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (2014).



Figure 1
Site Location

Reproduced from 1:50000 map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
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The town of Towcester has a long and established history, and is reputed to be the oldest inhabited settlement in England. Roman occupation commenced in AD1 and the settlement was known as Lactodorum, located on the crossroads of Watling Street and Alchester Street, Watling Street later became the boundary between the Kingdom of Wessex and the Danelaw, Edward the Elder fortified Towcester in AD917. By Domesday, Towcester was the centre of a late Saxon Royal estate and its administrative function prospered, from the 14th century a

market and fair are recorded, the town stayed largely in the control of the manor until it was purchased by Richard Empson and later sold to the Fermor Family. From the 1750s Watling Street again became an important thoroughfare, coaches to London, Oxford, Holyhead, Shrewsbury and Liverpool arrived and departed daily, as a result there were over 20 inns, public houses and taverns in the town as well as many other supporting trades. As a result of the economic changes and increase in wealth brought about by the industrial revolution Towcester continued to thrive during the 18th and early 19th century, with new development being established along Watling Street both to the north and south of the old town.

The earliest available map of the area is “Plan of the Tithable Lands in the Parish of Towcester in the County of Northampton” surveyed by John Durham in 1844 (NRO Ref T7 (*Figure 2*)). The map suggests that the area occupied by Prospect House was not liable for tithe, therefore the accuracy is open to question, the map does show a number of buildings fronting Watling Street, all of which have projecting rear ranges, and it is possible that one of these buildings is Prospect House, or that Prospect House lay further to the north and was simply not recorded as it was not liable for tithe.



Figure 2

Plan of the Tithable Lands in the Parish of Towcester in the County of Northampton (1844).

In 1848 “A Map of the Parish of Towcester in the County of Northampton” was surveyed by James Wright (NRO Ref Map/4473 (*Figure 3*)) and revised in 1855. It is the first map on which Prospect House can be clearly identified. The proposed development area is clearly visible as a linear range projecting from the rear of the building and forming the southernmost boundary of the plot. A coloured version (NRO Ref Map 6490) which cannot be re-produced indicates that the frontage building and the south westernmost bay of the rear range were domestic, the remainder, being coloured grey were non-domestic buildings. The map identifies the plot as 161, unfortunately, there is no key attached to provide any further

information. The long narrow nature of the plot would suggest that it may have originated as a medieval burgage plot.



Figure 3
A Map of the Parish of Towcester in the County of Northampton (1848).



Figure 4
Second Edition Ordnance Survey (1900).

The first edition Ordnance Survey was published in 1885, it is the first modern representation of Prospect House. The second edition Ordnance Survey published in 1900 is the first reproducible edition available (NRO Ref LVI.6 (*Figure 4*)) and is identical to the first edition, which was viewed online. The footprint of Prospect House matches that recorded in 1848, indicating not significant building works had been undertaken. The rear range consists of five bays. There is a well recorded to the north west, it may be indicate a small scale industrial use as wheelwrights, for example frequently had their own wells for a reliable water source.

There is, unfortunately a lack of clear documentary evidence relating to Prospect House, trade directories spanning 1860 to 1940 record a number of named houses, such as Berry House and Bank House, both on the High Street, the lack of an address including Prospect House suggests that the building was not known by that name at the time or was not of significant status to merit inclusion under that name.

The clearest documentary evidence relating to Prospect House and its outbuilding comes in Bulletin of Industrial Archaeology in CBA Group (No 15, Jun 1971 pp8 (NRO Ref ROP 903)). As indicated by Mr Camm the outbuilding was formerly the premises of GT Law & Son – Rugby Boot Maker; Northamptonshire is well known for its shoe industry with numerous small manufacturers dispersed throughout the County. GT Law originated in Wimbledon in the early 20th century, Law, an accomplished track athlete began by making his own track shoes and was persuaded by friends set up a work shop making track shoes commercially. Following the bombing of Wimbledon in 1940, Law moved to Towcester and commenced production in 1946, the Wimbledon shop and workshop were retained and managed by his son. GT Law remained in Towcester until at least 1970 when the workshop was managed by CW Law.

A visit to the premises by members of the Northamptonshire Industrial Archaeology Society in 1970 described the premises as a former carpenters shop, of which some evidence remained and well lit with large areas of glazing on the north wall and roof. At the time of the visit 3 people were employed at the workshop.

It is unclear when production ceased at the site. However, worth noting is that the workshop was reputedly that used for making the track shoes worn by Sir Roger Bannister when he broke the four minute mile on May 6th 1954. The track shoes were made from rabbit skin purchased from a butchers on the junction of Watling Street and Northampton Street, some 8 doors down from the Prospect House, the building, now an Estate Agents retains a butchers window on the Northampton Street frontage.

Prospect House was listed at Grade II in 1951 (HER Ref 13/215, NHLE 1040827). The listing description describes the buildings as...

“House. Early C19, probably with C16/C17 origins. White painted and stuccoed brick with Welsh slate roof and brick end stacks. 2-storey, 3-window range of 10-pane unhorned sashes with brick cambered heads. Storeyband similar, unhorned sash on ground floor with stucco lintel either side the central doorway, which has stucco architrave and deep flat hood with panelled soffit, on large cut brackets. 4-panel part-glazed door. To rear are 2-storey extension and a 1-storey painted rubblestone extension. 2 flat-roofed dormers. Rear wall shows that earlier house has been raised a storey at early C19 rebuilding. Interior not inspected”.

2. Aims and Methodology

The specific objectives of the standing building survey were as follows:

- To provide a comprehensive written, drawn and photographic record of the building prior to the permitted conversion, as it represents upstanding archaeological/historical remains of local, regional or national importance.
- The project report will provide a comprehensive review of the local and regional historical context of the structures recorded by the project, making reference to the appropriate regional research agendas.
- The project will produce a high quality, fully integrated archive suitable for long-term deposition in order to ‘preserve by record’ the buildings in their current form prior to conversion and/or demolition.

Desk-based research included the analysis of readily available documentary and cartographic sources including Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record (HER) & Northamptonshire Records Office (NRO).

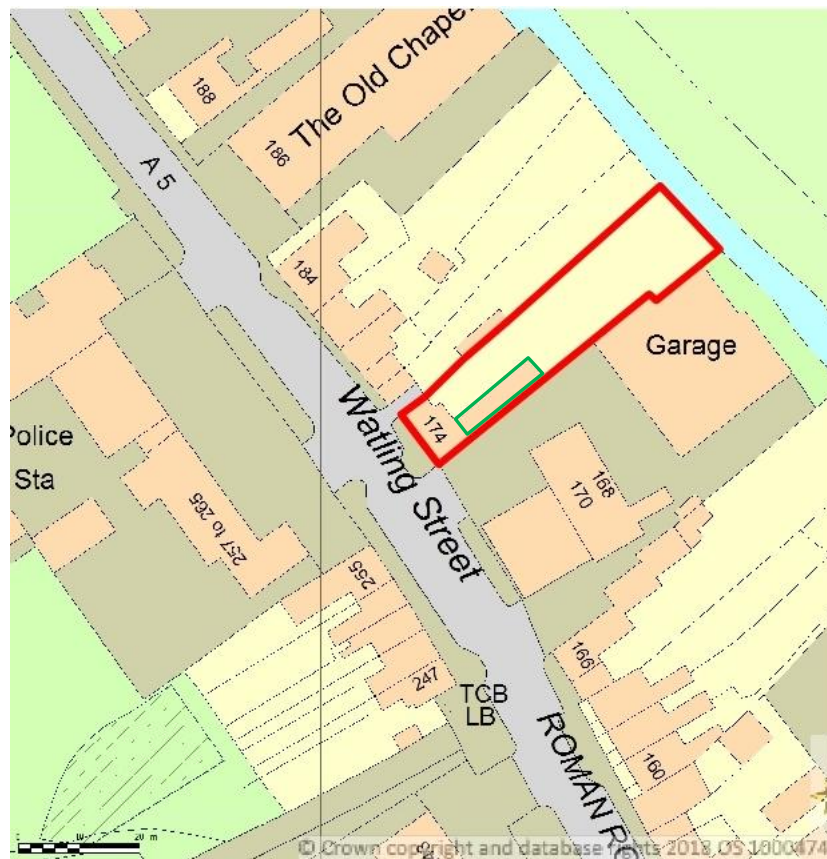


Figure 5
Plan of the Proposed Development Area in Red, Recorded Buildings in Green.
(Provided by client 1:1250).

The Historic Building Recording verified existing measured survey drawings (supplied by the client) and completed a photographic (35mm monochrome negative) and written record of the building to the equivalent of Historic England Level 2. An ordered archive has been compiled and will be retained by ABRS until deposition with Northamptonshire County

Council can be arranged under the Event Number ENN109388. An Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) record has been completed.

Orientation: The building subject to this historic building recording is part of a linear range projecting from the rear elevation of Prospect House, the range is orientated north east – south west (*Figures 5 & 16*). The principal elevation is that facing the north west. Where the terms ‘left’, ‘right’, ‘front’ and ‘back’ etc are used in the report, this is in relation to this principal elevation, as viewed from the north west. For the purposes of this historic building recording a number identification has been allocated to identify each room.

All historic maps are reproduced with north to the top of the page, following Ordnance Survey standards unless indicated otherwise with appropriate north arrow and key.

As far as is known, no previous historic building recording has been undertaken of the buildings.

The site visit was carried out by Gerwyn Richards on March 22nd 2019.

3. Description of the Building

The building consists of a linear range aligned east – west abutting the rear elevation of Prospect House, 174 Watling Street (*Figures 5 & 16*). The range is a three bay brick and masonry-built single storey building under a pitched roof to the west and a north light roof to the east (*Figure 6*). There are two distinct phases of brickwork visible on the principal (north facing) elevation. To the west are 9inch x 2 ½inch x 4inch apparently handmade bricks laid in a Flemish Bond (alternate header and stretcher bricks in each course), which would suggest an earlier 19th century date for the bricks. The far easternmost bay, (3) and the east facing gable is built of 9inch x 3inch x 4inch bricks, this time in a Flemish Garden Wall bond (three stretcher bricks to one header brick in each course), although painted the bricks have the look of mid 20th century Fletton bricks, which suggests this eastern bay was probably rebuilt in the modern era. The rear wall is rubble built, there is clear evidence of a blocked opening towards the centre of the building, potentially a cross passage (*Figure 7*). Although not as clear there also appears to be a straight joint between (1) and (2) which does appear to support cartographic evidence of different bays.

The large expanse of glazing mentioned in 1971 is still clearly apparent as is what appears to be a blocked opening towards the centre of the building, suggesting an earlier floor plan (*Figure 8*). The large windows are all modern timber casement windows. An earlier sash window remains within (1), the box being set back from the face would suggest this window dates to the early 18th century as from the late 18th century onwards the box would have been concealed within the masonry.

Interestingly, there are two distinct phases of roof, (1) to the west is under a plain tile pitched roof, bays (2) and (3) to the east are under a north light roof of Welsh slate. The pitched roof is likely to be an early, if not original roof while the north light roof is almost certainly a mid 20th alteration carried out when the building was used as a workshop.

Access to the building is via a modern opening into (3) to the east or an original opening into (1) to the west, there is no internal access between (1) and (2). There is access between (1) and the frontage range, the 18th or early 19th century architrave on the opening would

suggest this is an earlier opening, again supporting cartographic sources which indicate these westernmost bays were domestic. There is a brick-built fireplace on the easternmost wall (*Figure 9*), like the external bricks these bricks are again handmade and probably late 18th or early 19th century in date. The presence of the fireplace again confirms the bay had a domestic origin, however the lack of headroom, as indicated by the exposed tie beam in the western wall (*Figure 10*) would suggest a room of not particularly high status.

Access to (2) and (3) is via a modern plank door at the eastern end of (3), the two bays are unequally divided by a breeze block wall, (3) being the larger of the two bays (*Figure 16*). Within the breeze block wall is a timber sliding door, the mid 20th century door retains its "Office" sticker, confirmation of the commercial use of the building (*Figure 11*). Beyond the historic fabric and plan form there is little of architectural or historical interest or any indication of previous function and use (*Figures 12 & 13*). There is however a work bench which is clearly of some significant age which is reputedly the bench on which Sir Roger Bannister's shoes were made (*Figure 14*).

The roof above (2) and (3) is carried on a pair of deal built north light trusses (*Figure 15*) and unusually, the glazing bars are finished with a similar chamfer to that seen on the windows, a somewhat extravagant flourish, perhaps carried out because of the low roof.

4. Conclusion

The outbuilding associated with Prospect House is a historically interesting building, if a little less interesting architecturally. The building occupies part of a probably medieval in origin burgage plot, the frontage building is likely to date to the early 19th century, but almost certainly with an earlier core. Cartographic sources suggest the rear range has similar origins, however, there is significant evidence to indicate that the rear range has been extensively altered, if not re-built, including the addition of a later 20th century north light roof.

The history of the building however is of greater interest, documentary references indicate the building originated as outbuildings associated with Prospect House, later becoming a carpenters shop and most recently a small specialist shoe factory in which a very famous pair of track shoes were made. It is these uses which reflect the origins and evolution of such buildings in small to medium regional market towns.

5. Archive & Publication

The site archive consists of

- 1 A3 permagraph sheets containing plan, profile & notes
- 2 A3 paper sheets containing plans, elevations & profile
- 1 DVDs containing 46 digital images
- 46 B&W negatives & contact sheets
- 2 A4 contact sheets
- 2 A4 photo record sheets
- 1 A4 handwritten notes
- 1 Unbound copy of this report

The archive will be held by ABRS under the temporary site code 2019-PHTN until deposition with Northamptonshire County Council can be arranged under the Event Number ENN109388.

A version of the summary (above) will be submitted to the editor of the local journal for inclusion in the next edition.

5.1 OASIS Record Summary

INFORMATION REQUIRED	UPLOADED AS
OASIS No	archaeol30-348380
Project Name	An Archaeological Standing Building Survey of Prospect House (Outbuildings Only), 174 Watling Street, Towcester, Northamptonshire.
Site Co-ordinates	SP 69125 48965
Project Type	Standing Building Recording
Project Manager	Gerwyn Richards
Previous/Future Work?	No/No
Current Land Use	In Use As Building
Development Type	Residential
Prompt	NPPF
Archive Recipient	ABRS

6. References & Sources

CBA. 1971 *Bulletin of Industrial Archaeology in CBA Group* 9. No 15

Historic England. 2016 *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*. London.

M^cKay, W.B 1945 *Building Craft Series, Brickwork*. Longmans, Green & Co.

Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Accessed March 2019.

Northamptonshire Records Office (NRO). Accessed March 2019.

7. Colour Plates



Figure 6
Principal Elevation (Looking South – South West).



Figure 7
Rear Elevation (Looking North – North East).



Figure 8
Principal Elevation Showing Extensive Glazing & Blocked Opening (Left) (Looking South East).



Figure 9
(1) Fireplace on Easternmost Wall (Looking East – North East).



Figure 10
(1) Exposed Tie Beam in Westernmost Wall (Looking South West).



Figure 11
(3) Signage on Cross Wall Door.



Figure 12
(2) General View (Looking South West).

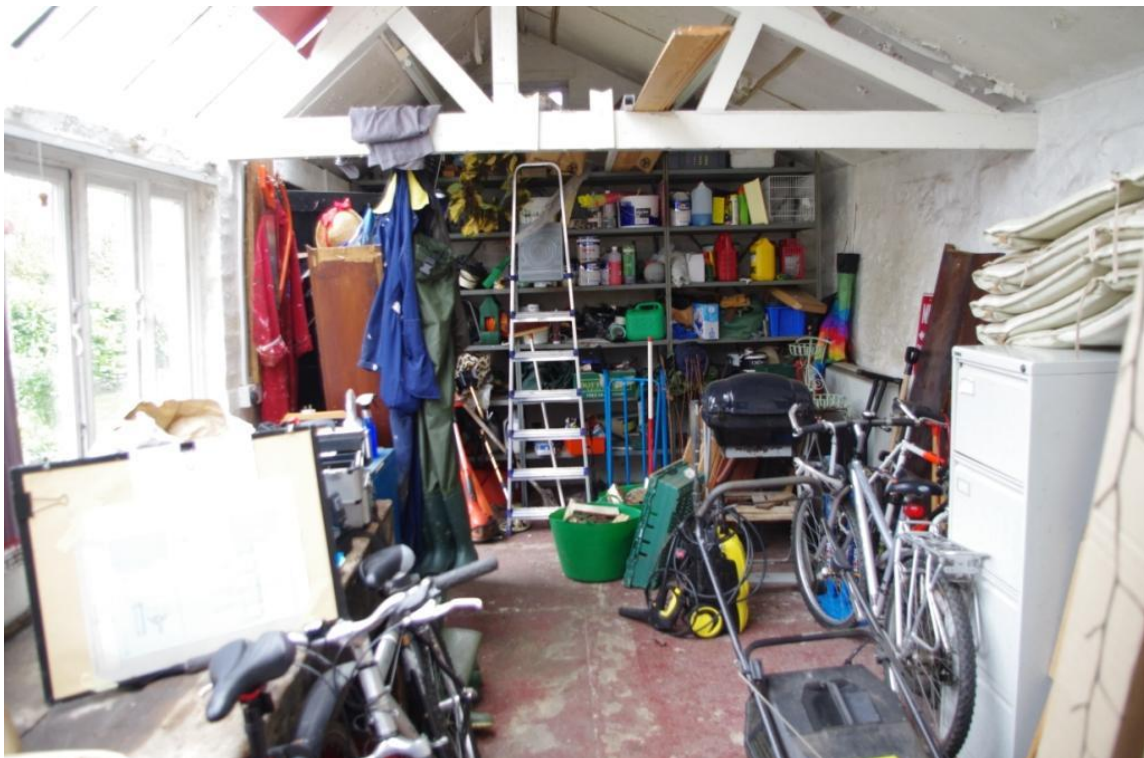


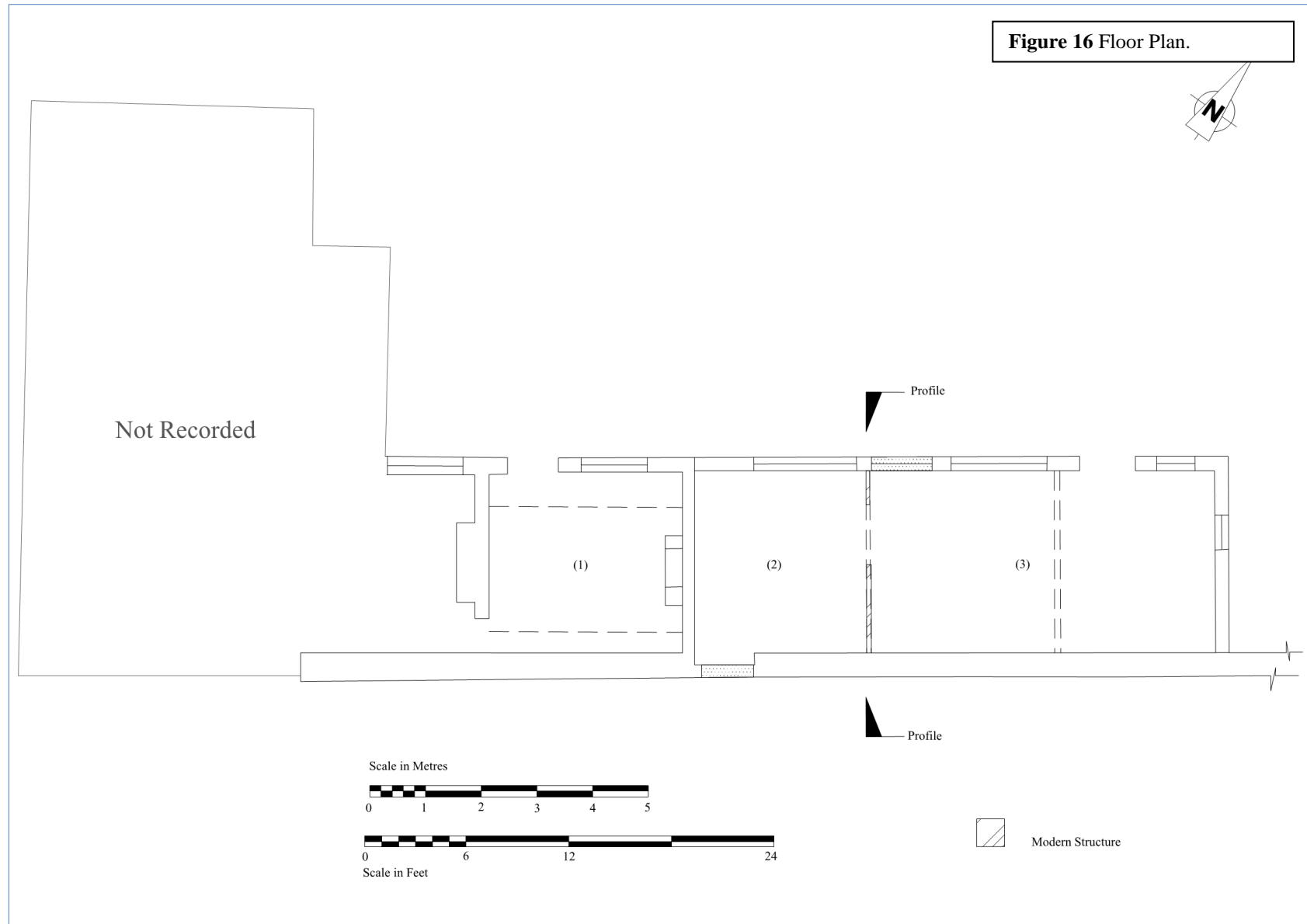
Figure 13
(3) General View (Looking North East).



Figure 14
(3) Original Workbench.



Figure 15
(3) Roof Truss (Looking South West).



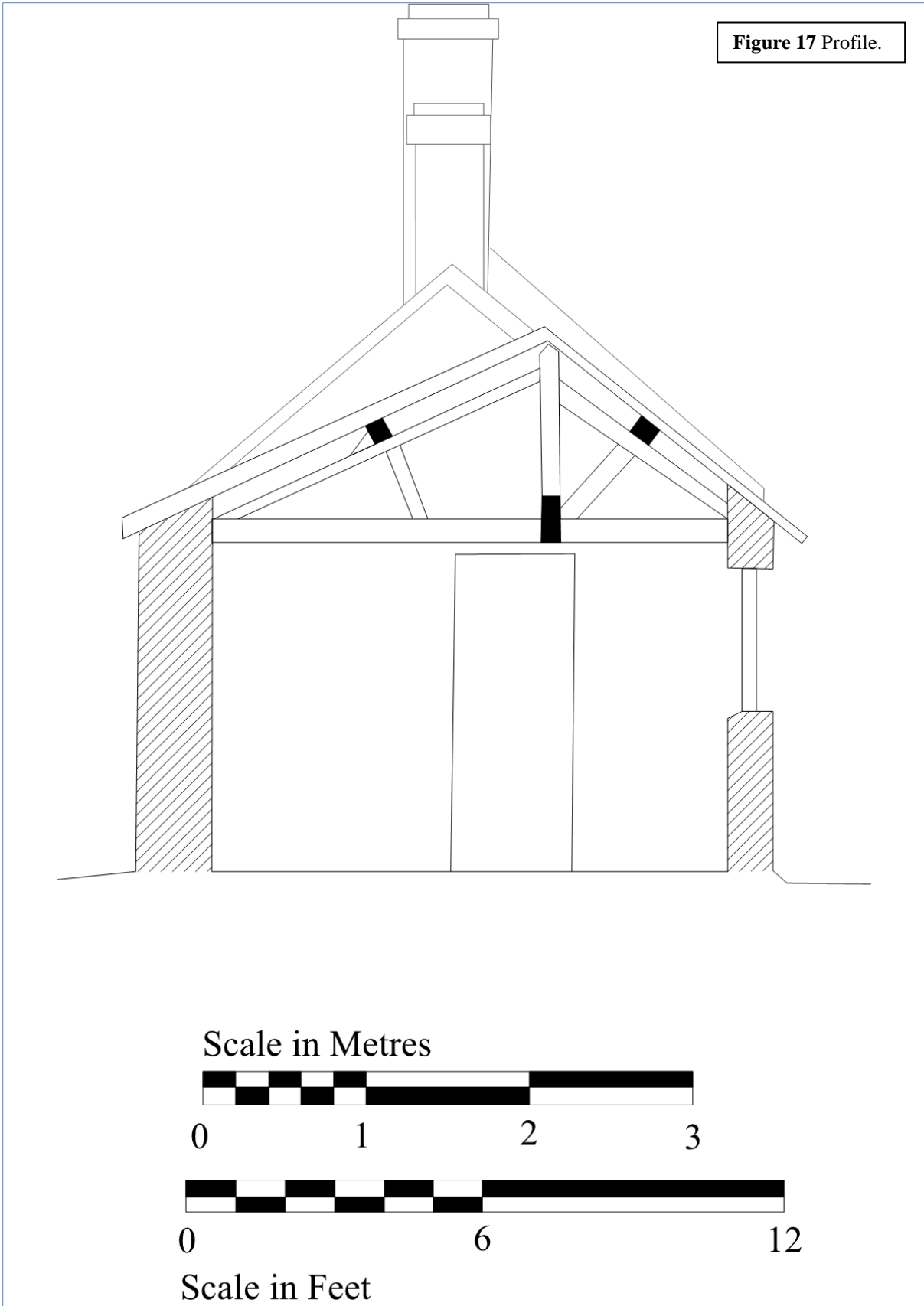
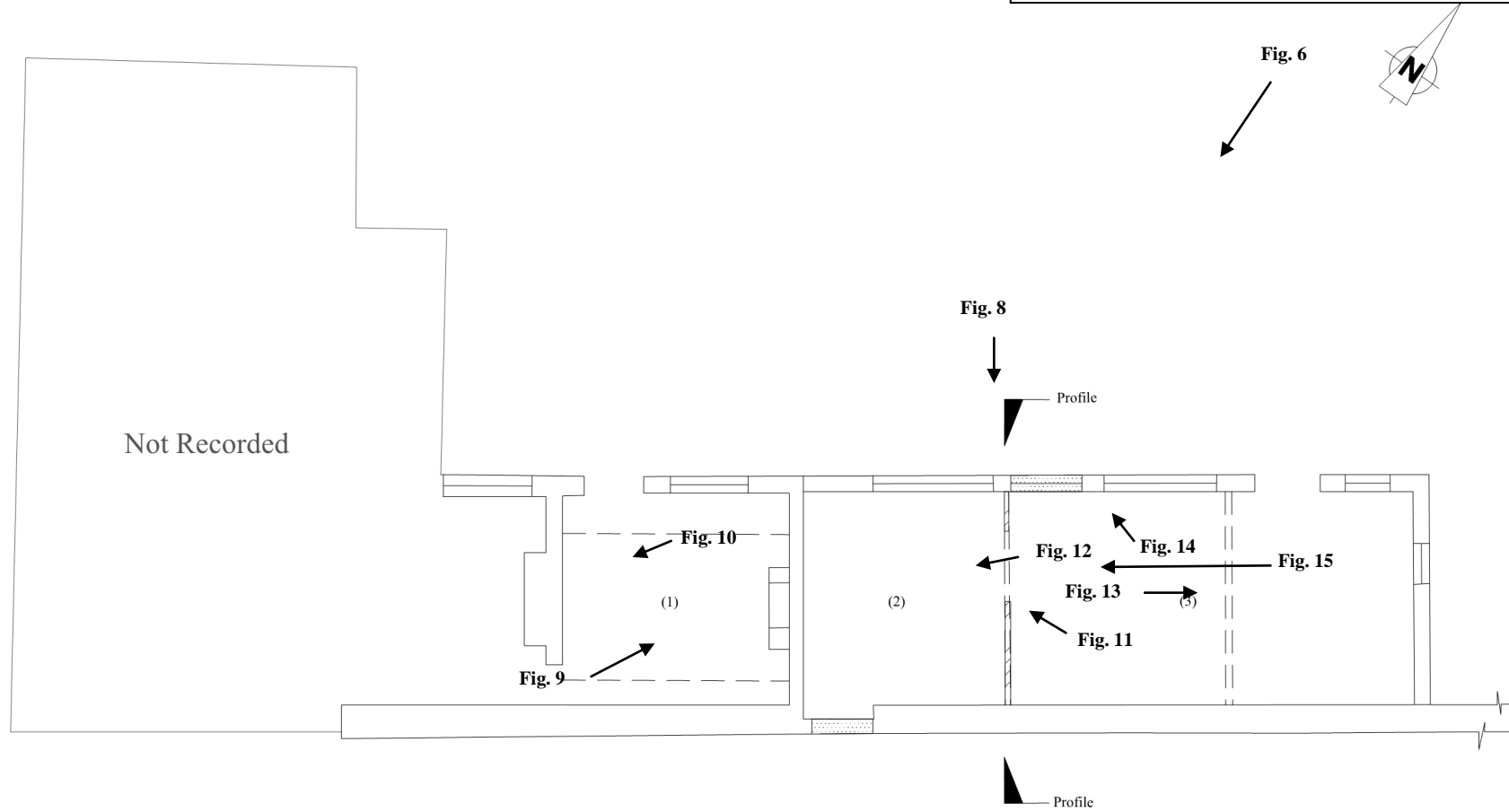
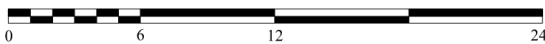


Figure 18 Locations of Photographs Included in Report.




Scale in Metres



Scale in Feet

Fig. 7

 Modern Structure

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