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EGERTON BUILDINGS, RAMSDEN DOCK ROAD, BARROW-IN-FURNESS, CUMBRIA
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TENEMENT BUILDINGS

HISTORIC BUILDINGS REPORT

Matthew Withey

ARCHITECTURAL INVESTIGATION

ENGLISH HERITAGE

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EGERTON BUILDINGS
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BARROW-IN-FURNESS

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TENEMENT BUILDINGS

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SUMMARY

Egerton Buildings are a pair of tenement blocks in the Barrow Island district of Barrow-in-Furness – an area that was once, and to a lesser extent still is, dominated by heavy industry and had an ample stock of associated housing for workers. Egerton Buildings are situated to the south-west of Ramsden Dock Road between Michaelson Road to the north-west and Siemens Street to the south-east. They were designed in 1879 by architects Paley & Austin of Lancaster and Barrow-in-Furness and erected between 1880 and 1886 by the contractors Smith & Caird of Dundee, working on behalf of the Furness Railway Company. Built most probably to provide accommodation for the families of employees in the Furness Railway Company's nearby shipbuilding works, they consist of two identical four-storey blocks of nine tenements, making eighteen tenements in total. There are eight flats within each tenement, giving 72 flats per block and 144 flats in all. As originally planned, 128 of the flats had one bedroom and 16 had two. Each flat had an entrance hall, a kitchen/living room, a scullery and an open drying area, enclosed by railings, off which opened a water closet, a coal store and a dust or ash store. Designed in a simplified French Renaissance style, the tenement blocks are of red brick with concrete dressings. The roofs are covered with grey slates with red ceramic ridges. Only relatively minor alterations (such as renewed fenestration) have affected the exterior during the lifetime of the buildings, and the plan-form is substantially intact, but most internal details have been lost.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DATE OF SURVEY

Survey was undertaken on 19 and 20 February 2007 and on 29 April 2009

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INTRODUCTION

This report, which conforms to English Heritage's Recording Level 2 (See the 2006 English Heritage guidance document 'Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Practice') with added primary and contextual research, was produced following a request by Graeme Ives, of the English Heritage North West Region Planning and Development Team, for a fuller understanding of the origins and design provenance of Egerton Buildings and their role in the historic development of Barrow's tenement buildings and the wider Barrow Island townscape. The request was made in response to a proposal to demolish Egerton Buildings, which are not listed, to make way for an access road to a new business park. The report is intended to inform the English Heritage team in its negotiations with the North West Development Agency, Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council, English Partnerships and West Lakes Renaissance, partners in a regeneration programme currently in development for the area, and amplifies interim advice given at an early stage.

Site visits were made by the author and Simon Taylor on 19 and 20 February 2007 and by Simon Taylor and Matthew Whitfield on 29 April 2009, all members of the York-based English Heritage Architectural Investigation Team. Internal access to the building was limited to flat 6A in the north-western block and 11B in the south-eastern. Documentary research was carried out on the dates mentioned above and in late March 2007. The main source for documents, including the architects' original drawings produced for building control purposes, was the Cumbria County Record Office at Barrow-in-Furness.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The rapid emergence of Barrow-in-Furness as a major industrial centre from the mid-1840s onwards resembles patterns of growth seen at similar times in towns such as Crewe, Swindon and Wolverton – small settlements whose economies and populations swelled dramatically with the advent of the railways. But whereas the stimulus for growth in these places was the building of new engine works, Barrow's expansion was based more on the opportunities for mining and manufacturing that improved communications brought to an area hitherto regarded as remote and inaccessible. The Furness Railway Company was established in 1846[1] to transport slate and haematite iron ore from the quarries and mines of local landowners, most notably William Cavendish (1808-91), the 7th Duke of Devonshire, and Walter Francis Montagu-Douglas-Scott (1806–84), the 5th Duke of Buccleuch. Minerals were taken to the Furness Railway Company's own jetty at Barrow, close to where the Dock Museum is today, and from there by sea to markets around Britain. A jetty for wooden steamboats was added to the existing wharves in February 1849, and when further additions proved insufficient to deal with the rapid growth in traffic in the early 1850s, dredging started at the former low-water ford between the coast and Old Barrow Island. This resulted eventually in the channel that enabled the Furness Railway Company to build, in accordance with an Act of 1863, the Devonshire and Buccleuch Docks, opened in 1867 and 1873 respectively.[2]

Instrumental in much of this development was Sir James Ramsden (1822-96), who first served as a locomotive superintendent for the Furness Railway Company in 1846, before rising to the position of company secretary. On becoming managing director in 1866 he initiated an ambitious programme of expansion and diversification. That year he merged his own iron-production company with Schneider, Hannay & Co. to form the Haematite Iron & Steel Co., taking over operations at the former company's works at Hindpool.[3] Then in April 1870 the Barrow Iron Shipbuilding Co. was founded.[4] This necessitated large-scale extensions to the docks: a graving dock opened at the mouth of Devonshire Dock in August 1872; Buccleuch Dock opened in February 1873, the same year that Barrow was recognised for the first time as an independent port; Ramsden Dock followed in March 1879 and the enormous Cavendish Dock came into existence at the same time, though it was never officially opened and was only ever used as a feeding dock for the others.[5]

These expansions required manpower, and the huge influx of workers from Ireland, Cornwall, Scotland and Staffordshire may be traced to this period in the 1860s and 1870s.[6] Census returns for 1851 show just 448 inhabitants in Barrow proper, with 39 in Old Barrow and a further 18 in Hindpool.[7] Of these, only a few were connected with the emerging industries: nine ore-loaders, four shipping agents, three shipbuilders and two iron-ore agents. By 1866 the population of Barrow-in-Furness stood at 16,000 and was rising quickly.[8] Between 1872 and 1874 it jumped from 28,000 to 35,000.[9] It reached a plateau at a little over 47,000 in 1881, by which time immigration had ceased to be a major factor (though it did come to the fore again during the First World War – the population of the town peaked at more than 74,000 in 1921).[10] Ramsden himself facilitated much of this influx, forming the Barrow Steam Navigation Company in 1867 with his colleague Robert Little (d.1909) and Sir James Allport (1811-92) of the Midland

Railway Company.[11] Passenger services were established at this time between Barrow and Belfast, with regular services commencing in 1870 between Barrow and Glasgow, and in 1872 between Barrow and Rotterdam.[12]

Provision of new housing and social infrastructure for employees of the Furness Railway Company commenced as early as 1848-9, when the cottages of 1-20 Salthouse Road (now demolished) were built in a recently-acquired field at Rabbit Hill, and a school opened nearby.[13] Newland Street, St James Terrace and Burlington Terrace, all since demolished, were built between 1851 and 1853 with fifteen, seven and ten houses respectively.[14] In response to the erection of the blast furnaces at Hindpool in 1859 'a grid-iron of streets of uniform type dwellings for workpeople sprang up in the immediate vicinity; what they lacked in aesthetic appeal they perhaps made up for in sound construction, wide streets and adequate sanitation – a marked contrast to the slums which had sprouted, a decade or two earlier, in the older Lancashire industrial towns'.[15] The furnaces are long gone, their existence hinted at only by street names such as Ironworks Road and Bessemer Way (the Bessemer process, introduced from 1856, is a method for making steel), but the grids of streets they precipitated still lie to the south and south-east of Chatsworth Street. The housing is of a type commonly found in the industrial towns of northern England: modest, brick-built, two-storey and terraced. The builder William Gradwell (fl.1855-82), later a mayor of Barrow, was particularly active in this first phase of mass house-production.[16]

Such provision as there was could hardly cope, however, with the great tides of incomers attracted to Barrow during the 1860s and 1870s. The demand for new housing was such that desperate, if supposedly temporary, solutions were occasionally sought. In 1873, for instance, the Barrow Iron Shipbuilding Company erected thirty rows of wooden huts to accommodate some 3,000 of its workers on Barrow Island, on a site without proper drainage or lighting, and with nothing in the way of social amenities.[17] Though no documentary evidence has yet been found to support the suggestion, it was probably at this time that high-density tenements were suggested as the most viable solution to a problem that may otherwise have proved insurmountable.

Tenements would certainly have had their critics. Though as a building-type, they do enjoy a tradition of sorts in England, they were thoroughly out of favour by the 19th century and their associations with cramped conditions and the spread of disease were deeply-rooted in the minds of many. By the middle of the century, however, they were being used experimentally by philanthropic organisations in London as a way of housing large numbers of people in limited space, though there was still much questioning of the tenement's ability to meet acceptable standards for light and ventilation.[18] The tenements at Streatham Street in Bloomsbury, designed by Henry Roberts (1803-76) and built in 1849 by the Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes, were a successful and, in London at least, influential example of the type, and many similar developments were built during the following decades. They were less common outside the capital, though the Leeds Industrial Dwellings Company erected four-storey tenements at Shannon Street in 1867 (now demolished) to designs by Richard Adams (d.1883) and John Kelly (1840-1904). This development worked on the same open-gallery access system that had been used for many of the recent tenements

in London.

The tenements built in Barrow during the 1870s and 1880s used recessed internal stair-wells rather than galleries. This feature owed more to developments such as Columbia Square in London's Bethnal Green, designed by Henry Darbishire (1825-99) and completed in 1862 for the noted philanthropist and social reformer Angela, Baroness Burdett-Coutts (1814-1906). Closer geographically and in date, the tenements of St Martin's Cottages, erected in 1869 by the Corporation of Liverpool (and demolished in 1977), may have been even more influential, and certainly the entrances and balconied landings are very similar to those that followed soon after in Barrow.

Further influence may be traceable to the huge numbers of tenements being built at this time in Scotland. For instance, one contemporary newspaper reports that tenements begun in 1871 at Hindpool were intended to provide 'accommodation for the operatives to be employed at the Jute Works'.[19] This suggests that the project could possibly be seen as part of a targeted attempt to lure workers from Dundee, then a major centre for jute-processing and shipbuilding. Many married men would have been discouraged from coming to work in the ironworks and shipyards of Barrow because of the lack of employment opportunities for their wives. The Barrow & Calcutta Jute Company was founded by James Ramsden in 1870 partly as an attempt to assuage these doubts, as well as forming an effective if short-lived challenge to Dundee's domination of the Atlantic market for jute products.[20]

The jute works in Barrow were built by the Dundee-based partnership of Smith & Caird,[21] as was the large block of flats nearby in Hindpool, 'possibly because it was felt this firm knew how to erect flats "on the Scotch model"'.[22] Ramsden had purchased the estate of Hindpool on behalf of the Furness Railway Company in the mid-1860s, and in the early 1870s a sister firm, the Haematite Iron & Steel Company, commissioned Smith & Caird to erect what eventually became known as Scotch Buildings (demolished 1956), a triangle of tenements housing around a thousand people in 260 flats on Duke Street, Blake Street and Walney Road, just a stone's throw from the iron and steel works.[23] On the Walney Road side an alleyway, fittingly named Tay Street (probably after Dundee's river), gave access to the internal courtyard, in which were situated three communal wash-houses.[24] The outer elevations, three and four storeys in height, were faced with local Hawcoat sandstone. Shops were situated on two of the corners of the triangle, with the Barrow Haemetic Company's clubroom (later the Hindpool Working Men's Club) on the third.[25]

Erected at roughly the same time as Scotch Buildings, the Grade II* listed main block of Devonshire Buildings (1872-5) on Michaelson Road, Barrow Island, provided housing for workers at the Devonshire Docks, opened in 1867, and especially at the yards of the nearby Barrow Iron Shipbuilding Company, formed in 1870. The block was designed by Paley & Austin[26] and built, once again, by Smith & Caird for the Furness Railway Company. It is faced with red sandstone, and has mansard roofs, dormers – six of these breaking through the cornice as coped gables – and an octagonal tower at the northern end (Fig 1). In its details it rather resembles the much-praised, Paris-inspired tenements being built at a similar time to replace slum properties on streets such as the Gallowgate

in Glasgow.[27]

Fig 1: Devonshire Buildings, built in 1872-5, from Michaelson Road. (DP146627)

The north-western block of Egerton Buildings was conceived in 1879 and built in 1880 as an addition to Devonshire Buildings; indeed the designs are practically identical to the Grade II listed brick tenements built a year or so later to the rear of Devonshire Buildings on Barque Street, Brig Street, Schooner Street and Ship Street (Fig 2). Crucially, the titling of the original architects' plans confirms that Egerton Buildings were originally seen as a direct addition to that much larger complex of workers' tenements.[28] The success of the buildings in helping to attract workers from far afield may be assessed with the help of returns from the 1881 Census: residents at Egerton Buildings came from Scotland and Ireland in the main, but also from Wales, other parts of Lancashire and, in one case, Denmark.[29]

Fig 2: Tenement block to the rear of Devonshire buildings between Steamer Street and Sloop Street. (DP146628)

Despite a seemingly negative predisposition towards such buildings on the part of many commentators,[30] the tenements of Barrow appear to have been liked by those who lived in them. Former residents speak fondly of the strong sense of community the area

engendered over many years – something that is often attested to by tenement-dwellers generally.[31] As a sentiment, this rather chimes with the utopian optimism of advocates of the tenement writing in the years before Egerton Buildings were erected. A committee of artisans looking at housing problems in Edinburgh in 1860 argued, for instance, that architecture of the type that would follow in Barrow 'is based upon a far higher principle in social philosophy than we are accustomed to believe. The proverb that "an Englishman's home is his castle" contains a very selfish, if not impracticable idea'.[32]

DESCRIPTION

Barrow Island

Old Barrow Island is recorded in the the Domesday Book as a large sand-bar called Bar Ey, situated in the narrow channel between Walney Island and the mainland tract of Low Furness.[33] Over the centuries shifting sediments gradually increased the size of the island until in 1831 Lewis noted that its soil had become 'a fine turnip loam, of tolerable depth', which combined with a generally level topography to make the land suitable for crops of wheat, barley, oats, beans and potatoes.[34] The larger-scale shipping of locally-mined minerals arrived fifteen years later with the founding of the Furness Railway Company (see above), and in the early 1850s dredging commenced at the low-water ford between Old Barrow Island and the coast, accentuating the island's detachment from the mainland, resulting eventually in the channel on which the Devonshire and Buccleuch Docks were built.[35] The first of these enabled the Barrow Iron Shipbuilding Company, founded in 1870, to open yards on Barrow Island. Shipbuilding has been the life-blood of the area ever since.

Fig 3: Ordnance Survey map showing the tenement blocks on Barrow Island as they were in 1910-11 (reproduced from the 1913 Ordnance Survey maps).

Egerton Buildings stand very near the former shipyards and immediately opposite the several outer and inner blocks of Devonshire Buildings (1872-5), also designed by Paley & Austin and built by Smith & Caird for the Furness Railway Company as accommodation for workers at the Devonshire Dock, which was opened by that firm in 1867 (Fig 3). Much of the rest of the area is occupied by terraces of two-storeyed houses which are contemporary with or slightly later than the nearby tenement blocks of Egerton

and Devonshire Buildings but which, like them, were designed to accommodate the thousands of workers introduced to Barrow Island to man the heavy industries that sprang up there during the second half of the 19th century. Many of the local street names – Aberdeen Street, Annan Street, Athol Street, Ayr Street, Dunbar Street,

Fig 4: Egerton Buildings from the north. (DP146629)

Dundalk Street, Dundee Street, Dunoon Street, Dunvegan Street, etc – allude to the largely Scottish[36] and Irish composition of the workforce, while the name James Watt Street may possibly reflect the more professional standing of the foremen and clerks likely to be attracted to the better-quality terraces on that road. Institutional buildings, including two churches (St John the Evangelist and the Catholic St Patrick's), a school and a Co-operative Society shop, line the nearby Island Road, and the area was also served by several hotels, pubs and working men's clubs.

Egerton Buildings

The two blocks that make up Egerton Buildings (Fig 4) stand very near the shipyards on a large square island plot to the south-west of Ramsden Dock Road, bounded to the north-west by a continuation of Michaelson Road, with Siemens Street bounding it to the south-east and leading directly to the former gates of Vickers, immediately south of the tenements. An unnamed street, parallel with Ramsden Dock Road, bounds the site to the south-west. The two blocks are almost identical but differ slightly in date of construction: the north-western block is the earlier of the two and was designed in 1879 and built in 1880 while the south-east block was in place by 1886.[37] Egerton Buildings consist of two three-and-a-half and four-storeyed U-shaped tenement blocks, symmetrically opposed across a central court from which they are entered, and presenting continuous elevations without entrances to Michaelson Road and Siemens Street (Fig 5). The central court is approximately two hundred square feet in area and, as well as being the point of access for the flats, appears to have been an open communal area for residents. It is reached from Ramsden Dock Road and the unnamed street to the south-west which were linked by what was originally a single roadway, roughly thirty feet wide, which ran between the two blocks and across the court, connecting the two

public roads. Latterly the line of the road was diverted around a children's playground created on a small island of tarmac at the centre. The areas on either side of the roadway served as open communal spaces and in this way differed from Smith & Caird's earlier Scotch Buildings at Hindpool (see Historical Background), where a similar area was used to site communal wash-houses.

Fig 5: The Siemens Street elevation of the south-east block. (DP146630)

Exterior

Egerton Buildings are three-and-a-half and four storeys high and are built of red brick in English garden-wall bond. The roofs are slate covered and mansarded on the main blocks but hipped on one side on each of the out-riggers which project from the court-side elevations. Each block has one long front elevation, that of the northwest block facing Michaelson Road and that of the south-east block facing Siemens Street, and two short side elevations which face Ramsden Dock Road (Fig 6) and the unnamed street to the south-west (Fig 7). The front and side elevations terminate as slightly projecting four-storeyed end pavilions which, on the front elevations, are each three bays long and flank

Fig 6: The Ramsden Dock Road elevation of the north-west block. (DP146631)

an irregular ten-bay central section of three full storeys with a dormer-windowed attic storey above. The short side elevations return as L-shaped wings of four full storeys with two-bay central sections and two-bay flanking pavilions. The street elevations of each block incorporate a bull-nosed brick plinth rising to the level of the ground-floor window sills.

Fig 7: Egerton Buildings from the south. (DP146632)

On the front and side elevations the window openings on the full storeys are headed by segmental brick arches, formed of three courses of headers, and have concrete sills, chamfered on the ground floor. The dormers on the central sections of the front elevations have hipped Roofs and are of timber. Throughout, the present simple timber casement windows replace original four-pane, vertically-sliding sashes. Although subdued, the front elevation of each block is not without embellishment. A single course of cyma-reversa moulded brick links the top half of the second-floor windows and bands of simple ornamentation extend across the central section below the second-floor windows, and across the end pavilions below the third-floor windows. These bands are composed in three parts, consisting of cyma-reversa moulded courses and plat-bands over and beneath a sequence of raised brick panels. There are cornices above the second-floor windows of the central section, and above the third-floor windows on the pavilions. They consist of single plat-bands, with rows of cyma-reversa concrete brackets supporting the eaves.

The four side elevations, two for each block, are all very similar. Each is of four full storeys with projecting two-bay end pavilions flanking a two-bay central section. On the north-west block the six-bay side elevations have a projecting chimney stack at the left end and regularly-spaced single windows, except for paired windows lighting the two-bedroomed flats, at the right-hand end. On the Ramsden Dock Road elevations the second and third window openings are blocked. The side elevations of the south-east block follow the same pattern but reversed, and no window openings are blocked. The windows occupying the second floor of the central sections also have brick hood-moulds which

continue the single course of cyma-reversa moulded bricks that link the top half of the second-floor windows across the whole elevation. The plinths are similar to those on the front elevations except that they are interrupted by the projecting chimney-stacks. Bands of embellishment matching those found on the front elevations extend along the side elevations just below the third-floor windows. The cornices also continue the pattern found on the front elevations, extending along the side elevations above the third-floor windows but interrupted by the chimney-stacks which at ground-floor level are corbellled out over six brick courses.

The fenestration of the front and side elevations appears irregular, reflecting the arrangement of accommodation within (see below and appendix 1.6). The front elevations have alternating paired and single windows to the central sections, the paired windows lighting the bedrooms of the two-bedroomed flats and the single windows lighting the bedroom of the one-bedroomed flats. The outer two single windows of the flanking pavilions light the two bedrooms of two-bedroomed corner flats. The side elevations have paired windows at their rear ends which light the bedrooms of more two-bedroomed corner flats but otherwise have the single windows of single-bedroomed flats.

The four short elevations overlooking the Egerton Court roadway mirror each other in all but one detail: the more southerly elevation on the north-west block has single windows on its second and third floors to the right of the chimney-stack, features which are omitted on the other three elevations. Each is three bays long with a projecting chimney-stack on the inner side and two single window bays (Fig 8). The single windows

Fig 8: The north-west block from the east. (DP146633).

closest to the central court are narrower and slightly shorter, being scullery windows, than those in the middle bays which are living room windows (see appendix 1.6). On the ground, first and second floors the window openings are headed by segmental brick arches formed by three courses of headers. The window openings on the third

floor have flat heads and concrete lintels. The sills on the ground floor are chamfered. The plinths, moulded courses and panel bands, which on Ramsden Dock Road and the unnamed street to the south-west extend across the whole of the elevations (Fig 9), continue only as far as the edges of the projecting chimney-stacks but the cornices span the whole of the elevations except where interrupted by the chimney-stacks. The stacks themselves are corbelled out in the same manner as those on the side elevations.

Fig 9: Window details and embellishments on the south-east block, the central window on the lower floor is a late insertion. (DP146634)

Fig 10: Part of the court-side elevation of the north-west block. (DP146635)

Egerton Buildings are entered only from within the central court and there are no original entrances from the public streets. The long rear elevations overlooking the central court – to the rear of Michaelson Road on the north west block and Siemens Street on the south east block – are dominated by seven open stair-wells alternating symmetrically with six hipped projecting full-height out-riggers resembling those of conventional terraced houses (Fig 10). The stair-wells are four storeys high with flanking

single living-room windows at a level with each of the storeys (Fig 11). The stair openings are headed by large segmental arches constructed of three courses of brick headers.

Fig 11: Stair well in the north-west block. (DP146636)

The stairs are concrete and ascend in five flights, with railed landings level with the first and second-floor windows. The tops of the railings are anchored into the side walls by concrete blocks. The first three floors of window openings either side of the stair-well are headed by segmental brick arches constructed of three courses of headers. The heads of the window openings on the third floor are plain, and are situated just a couple of brick courses beneath the eaves. The concrete sills on each floor lack chamfers and there is no plinth.

Fig 12: Raking-out hatch. (DP146637)

The end elevations of each out-rigger were originally two bays wide with large wide openings which on the upper floors encompassed nearly the whole height of the storey, allowing for the greatest possible flow of fresh air and sunlight. On the ground floor, probably for security reasons, these openings were smaller. Like the stair-wells they were originally fitted with railings anchored in concrete blocks. All of the openings on the north-west block have been reduced in size and glazed to allow for the installation of bathrooms while on the south-east block they have now been bricked up. At ground level there were two hatches which probably gave access to dust or ash chutes which might have served the flats on the

floors above or just the ground-floor flats. These are blocked today, but were probably originally fitted with metal doors or shutters (Fig 12). Heavy concrete lintels and sills would have allowed for fairly rough usage by the ash collectors. The side elevations of the out-riggers originally had a further bay of single windows, these lighting the sculleries, and another of railed openings to drying areas (see below). Today these openings have been reduced in size and glazed, but originally they were shouldered, with those on the first three floors headed by large concrete lintels. The heads of the openings on the third floor ran almost into the eaves. All of the openings except those on the ground floor had simple concrete sills.

The rear elevations to the wings fronting Ramsden Dock Road and the unnamed street to the south-west are all four bays long with very large pavilions projecting at right angles to one side. The four-bay elevations originally consisted of two railed openings flanked on each side by a single scullery window but the railed openings have been reduced in size and glazed. There are two dust or ash-hatches located centrally at ground level on each elevation. The pavilions each consist of a stair-well with a bay of single windows to one side and an out-shot with railed openings on the other. These variations in overall arrangement allow for the corners of the development to be negotiated comfortably, without significant obstructions to sunlight and air, and for larger, two-bedroom flats to be laid out inside.

Interior

The following description of the interior is based on an inspection of two single-bedroom flats (6A in the north-western block and 11B in the south-eastern block) within the development. No two-bedroom flats were accessible during the survey, and so these must be understood solely in terms of the layouts ascribed to them in the original architects' plans (see appendix 1.6).

The accommodation provided in Egerton Buildings was in the form of one and two-bedroomed flats on four floors, each reached from shared dog-leg stairs in open wells, with eight flats per well arranged as tiers of four on either side. The flats all have through plans with the bedroom or bedrooms on the street side, the kitchen/living

Fig 13: Interior of flat 6A, north-west block, looking from the living room through to the out-rigger. (DP146638)

room behind and the scullery, leading through to a drying area, in the out-rigger (Fig 13). The two-bedroomed flats have side-by-side bedrooms on the street side but are otherwise arranged as the one-bedroomed flats and, apart from the extra bedroom, the accommodation is the same. In addition to one or two bedrooms, each flat had an entrance hall from which the kitchen/living room, bedroom(s) and pantry were reached directly. The sculleries were reached from the kitchen/living rooms and in turn led to open, railing-enclosed drying areas, in each of which was situated a water closet, coal store and an ash chute, thereby placing fresh air between the living accommodation and the main sources of dust and smells. The landing from the stair-well gives access through the front door to the entrance hall. On the same wall as the front door there is a shelved cupboard, originally a pantry with a small vent on the landing side. On the wall opposite the front door and the pantry are doorways leading to the bedroom and the kitchen/living room. The bedrooms all overlook one or other of the four streets bounding the two tenement blocks. Every first bedroom has a small fireplace; the second bedrooms, in those flats that have them, were originally unheated. The kitchens/living rooms face the inner courtyard and have much larger fireplaces which would have originally accommodated cooking ranges beside which were small fitted cupboards. In most of the flats the sculleries were situated in the out-riggers, reached through a door from the kitchen/living room. The sculleries were originally provided with sinks and coppers, or 'boilers' as they are termed on the architects' plans, allowing for the washing of cooking utensils and clothes. These rooms have now been converted into kitchens. The open drying area, in effect a flying back yard, was reached through a doorway at the end of the scullery. It had railed openings overlooking the inner courtyard, together with a water closet, a coal store and an ash or dust store. The ground-floor flats also have under-stair storage cupboards on the landings outside their front doors.

The fixtures and fittings in the two inspected flats are mostly replacements and the form of the originals is not known nor is the level of original survival in other flats. It is also not known if the flats were all originally fitted out similarly, however, given the institutional ownership of the blocks it this is likely and furthermore, as the larger (two-bedroomed) flats enjoyed identical service arrangements to, and were not distinguished by a higher level of externally decoration from, the smaller (single-bedroomed) flats, there was probably also no significant distinction between the two sizes of flat in terms of fixtures and fittings.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Victorian tenements are extremely rare in England, especially outside London. Barrow is a special case, however, and the very fact that such unusual buildings exist in the town speaks vividly of the rapidity of industrial development and the resultant population growth. On the back of the various industries created practically out of nothing by Ramsden and others, the population of Barrow exploded in the thirty years up to 1881, growing nearly a hundred-fold in this time. More so than with any other contemporarily booming town in England, novel answers were needed to the troublesome social and economic questions of how to house a rapidly growing workforce in a cheap, efficient and socially responsible way. In Barrow, unusually, officials dealing with this problem looked for solutions to the kind of provision familiar to the immigrants themselves. Most incomers had arrived from Scotland, and so were well accustomed to a building type that in England had fallen largely out of favour. That a firm of Dundee contractors was employed to build the new tenements rather supports the impression that a consciously Scottish solution was being applied to the problem.

Accommodating large numbers of workers was especially difficult on Barrow Island, where the natural limits of space meant that greater densities were desirable – certainly greater than those normally provided by terraced housing. It comes as no surprise to find that most of Barrow's tenements were built on Barrow Island, nor should the place of Egerton Buildings within this wider context – essentially a planned industrial new-town district, built by a single corporate entity – be discounted. The loss of any single building from this settled environment would significantly compromise the architectural integrity of the whole, but the prominent position of Egerton Buildings on the corner of two major thoroughfares, Michaelson Road and Ramsden Dock Road, makes it especially important, as does its relationship with the neighbouring tenements of Devonshire Buildings, and the fact that it was initially regarded as an extension of that larger, now Grade II*-listed, architectural set-piece.

Egerton Buildings is also of consequence in its own right. Designed by Paley & Austin – a practice 'of regional rather than local importance'[38] – it has suffered few external alterations over the years, with original decoration and door and window positions left largely intact. Internally, despite the probable loss of many original fixtures and fittings, the plan-form is essentially unaltered. The appearance of the building has suffered from the effects of low levels of occupancy over a prolonged period, but even a cursory inspection of the identical blocks of the Devonshire Buildings complex on Barque Street, Brig Street, Schooner Street and Ship Street will confirm that a refurbished and fully-occupied Egerton Buildings could make a handsome and useful contribution to the housing provision of Barrow.

NOTES

1 F Barnes, *Barrow and Furness: An Illustrated History* (Barrow, 1951), 99. The company originally operated thirteen miles of railway between Barrow and Piel, with two four-wheeled engines and a few wagons. The line was extended northwards to Broughton in 1848 and eastwards to Ulverston in 1854, crossing Morecambe Bay to connect with the Lancaster & Carlisle Railway at Carnforth in 1857. A branch to Coniston was opened in 1859 and the company amalgamated with the Whitehaven & Furness Junction Railway in 1866. A branch line was opened to Lakeside, at the foot of Windermere, in 1869 and another northwards from Arnside in 1876.

2 Barnes 1951, 100, 102.

3 Barnes 1951, 106, 110. Schneider, Hannay & Co. was formed in 1857 by Henry William Schneider (1817-87), an iron ore prospector from Middlesex who first arrived in the area in 1839, and Robert Hannay (d.1874), a businessman with connections to the Scottish iron industry. The company opened three blast furnaces at Hindpool in 1859. Schneider and Hannay both served on the first council of Barrow, nominated by the Duke of Devonshire in 1866.

4 Barnes 1951, 122. The first steamship constructed by the Barrow Iron Shipbuilding Co. was launched in 1873. The company was bought out by Vickers in 1897, its works becoming a naval construction yard at this time. In 1927, following a merger with Tyneside engineering firm Armstrong Whitworth, the yard at Barrow came under the aegis of Vickers Armstrong (Shipbuilding) Limited. The shipbuilding interests of the area are maintained today by the same firm, which – following several name changes due to mergers, nationalisation in 1960 and 1977 and privatisation in 1986 – is now known as BAE Systems.

5 Barnes 1951, 102.

6 J D Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution: an Economic History of Furness (1711-1900) and the Town of Barrow (1757-1897)* (Barrow, 1958), 355.

7 Barnes 1951, 110.

8 Barnes 1951, 108.

9 Barnes 1951, 112.

10 Barnes 1951, 114.

11 *Manx Quarterly*, No.7 (1909), 664.

12 Barnes 1951, 102-3.

13 Barnes 1951, 110. According to Marshall these were 'solidly built of stone, but cramped in the extreme; and they were in every way typical of the housing of the period' – see Marshall 1958, 243.

14 Barnes 1951, 110.

15 Barnes 1951, 112.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 James Stevens Curl's *The Life and Work of Henry Roberts* (Chichester, 1983) contains many descriptions of 19th-century discussions regarding tenements and workers' housing in general.

19 *Barrow Herald*, 22 July 1871, 2.

20 Barnes 1951, 126. At their height, the jute works in Barrow employed two thousand women, but 'competition by the Indian jute trade depressed British trade and Barrow could not compete with Dundee for the remnants'. A fire destroyed half the factory in 1892 and it was never rebuilt. According to Sidney Pollard, James Ramsden claimed before a Select Committee on the Barrow-in-Furness Corporation Bill (1873) that the town was 'competing successfully with Belfast and Dundee in the jute and flax trade': see Sidney Pollard, 'Barrow-in-Furness and the Seventh Duke of Devonshire', *Economic History Review* (1955), 216.

21 *Barrow News*, 9 June 1972, 7. David Caird (1843-99) settled in Barrow after the completion of work on some earlier tenements at Hindpool circa 1876. Aidan Jones at Barrow Record Office and Bryn Trescatheric of the Dock Museum confirm that this was the same David Caird who in 1876 was one of the individuals in charge of David Noble & Co., shipbuilders of Barrow. That firm had changed its name to Caird & Purdie by 1881, and by the following year David Caird Ltd, a firm of iron-founders and engineers, had been formed. This was eventually wound up in the 1970s. For a detailed description of the jute works see Marshall 1958, 349-50.

22 Marshall 1958, 348. At a time when the jute works were still being erected, the *Barrow Herald* (22 July 1871) noted that 'Mr Caird occasionally superintends the work'.

23 *Barrow News*, 9 June 1972, 7.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 James Price, *Sharpe, Paley and Austin: A Lancaster Architectural Practice, 1836-1942* (Lancaster, 1998), 4-5, 11. Between 1868 and 1886 the firm was partnered by Edward Graham Paley (1823-95) and Hubert James Austin (1841-1915) and known as Paley & Austin. Though essentially a Lancaster-based operation, the firm received many commissions from Barrow-in-Furness from the late 1850s onwards and from 1875 until about 1890 kept an office in the town at 16 Church Street.

27 Peter Reed (ed.), *Glasgow: the Forming of a City* (Edinburgh, 1993), 91.

28 Cumbria Record Office, Barrow: Barrow Building Register 1, 1870-84, plan no. 1353. This shows the Michaelson Road half of the Egerton Buildings development,

signed and dated August 1879 by Paley & Austin and stamped by the Furness Railway Company on 25 February 1880. Each drawing is entitled either 'Devonshire Buildings: proposed additions' or 'Devonshire Buildings Extension'.

29 Christopher Frederick, a 32 year-old mariner living at No.7A, was born in Copenhagen.

30 Marshall, for instance, can barely contain his disgust when he declares that the Scotch Buildings at Hindpool 'are still [in 1956] an eyesore' – see Marshall 1958, 348.

31 Darren Gardner, *Echoes from Barrow Island*, (Barrow, 2006), 18. Les Costley, born in 1931, speaking of the flat where he grew up in Ship Street, said that it was 'right at the top, and climbing those steps seemed never ending – thousands, or so it seemed. Our flat was occupied by nine of us, comprising my six brothers and sisters as well as mam and dad. Bath night was every Sunday. I can picture it now, the old tin bath in front of the coal fire, filled up with water heated up from the fire, two of us in at the same time having our weekly soak. From all my days living on the island I only recall a friendly, close-knit community where you knew and trusted your neighbours, and never locked your door. There was no need. In fact we only had one key to our door which was on a piece of string in the letter box. I think this was a common feature with many island families. One of my earliest memories of living on Ship Street is the washing lines that used to go across the street from building to building, high above the road, with clothes on them. They just waved like flags in the wind – it was like Chinatown'.

32 Miles Glendinning, Ranald MacInnes, Aonghus MacKechnie, *A History of Scottish Architecture* (Edinburgh, 1996), 273.

33 Barnes 1951, 24.

34 Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (London, 1831), vol. 4, 349-50.

35 Barnes 1951, 100, 102.

36 Marshall 1958, 421. By 1911 Barrow would have more Scottish-born inhabitants than any other county borough in England.

37 Roberts' *Directory of Barrow-in-Furness and Furness District* (1886), 188-9.

38 Price 1998, 1.

APPENDIX 1: ORIGINAL DRAWINGS OF 1879

Plans, elevations and sections on 6 sheets in a file labelled 'Devonshire Buildings Extension'. The sheets are all signed by Paley and Austin and dated August 1879. They were approved on the 20th of August 1879. Cumbria County Record Office, Barrow-in-Furness: Barrow-in-Furness Building Register volume 1, 25.11 1870 – 30.1 1884, plan no. 1353.

These plans have been reproduced with kind permission of Barrow Borough Council and Cumbria Record Office.

1.1 End elevation; Section A – B; Section C – D; Ground Plan; upper floors plan

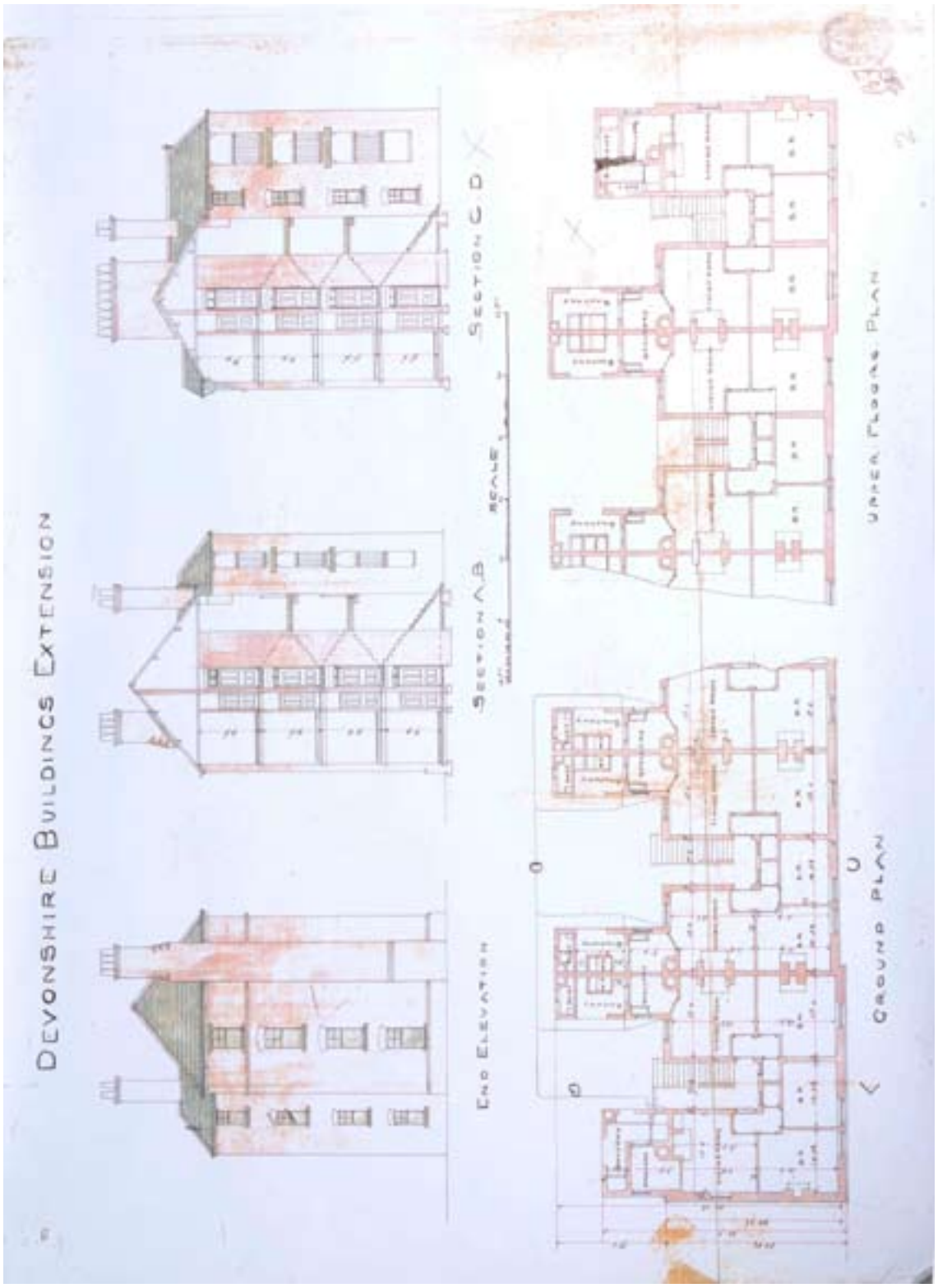
1.2 proposed system of drainage

1.3 End elevation; Back of end house; Back elevation

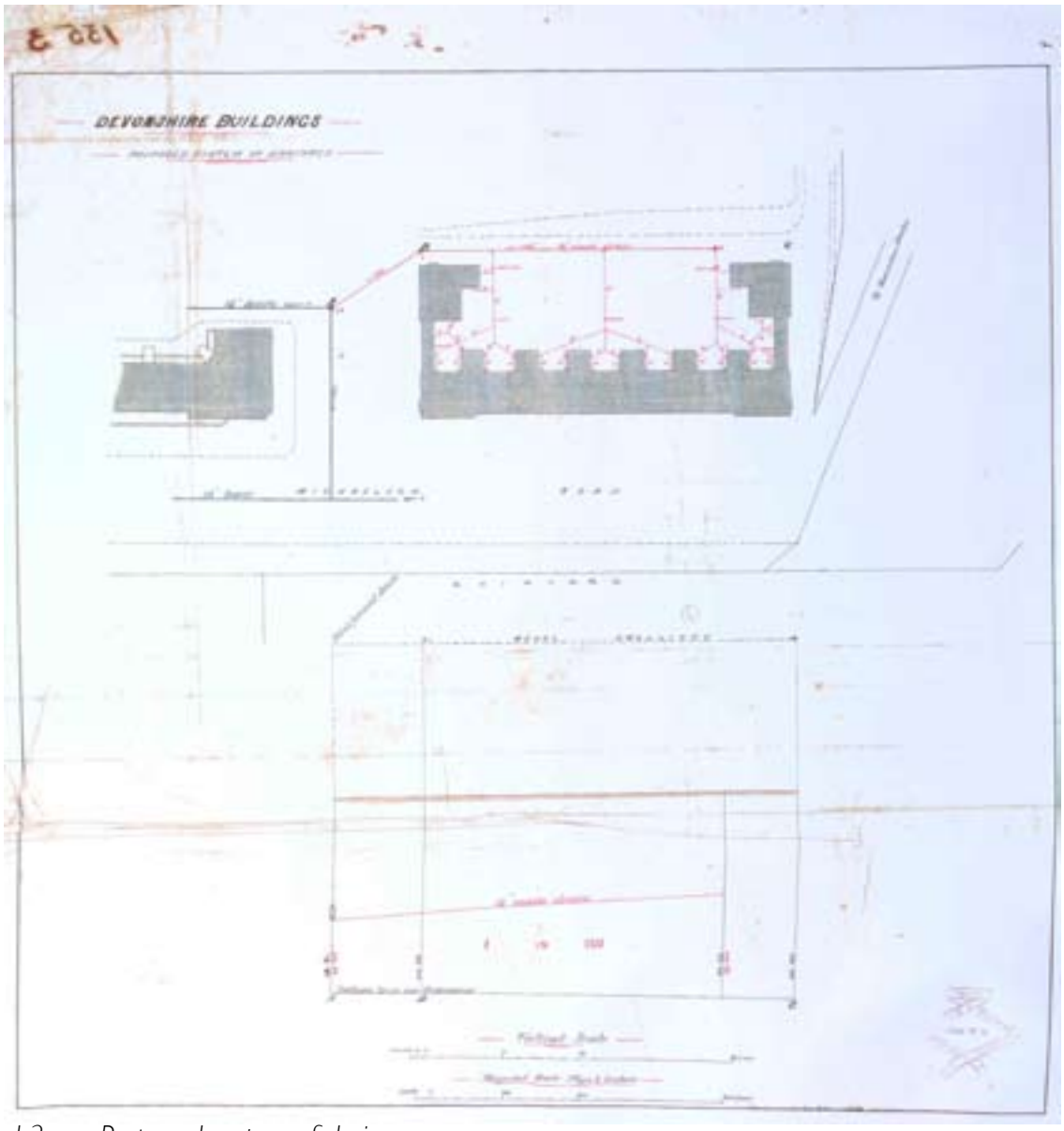
1.4 Front elevation; Section

1.5 Block plan

1.6 Plan

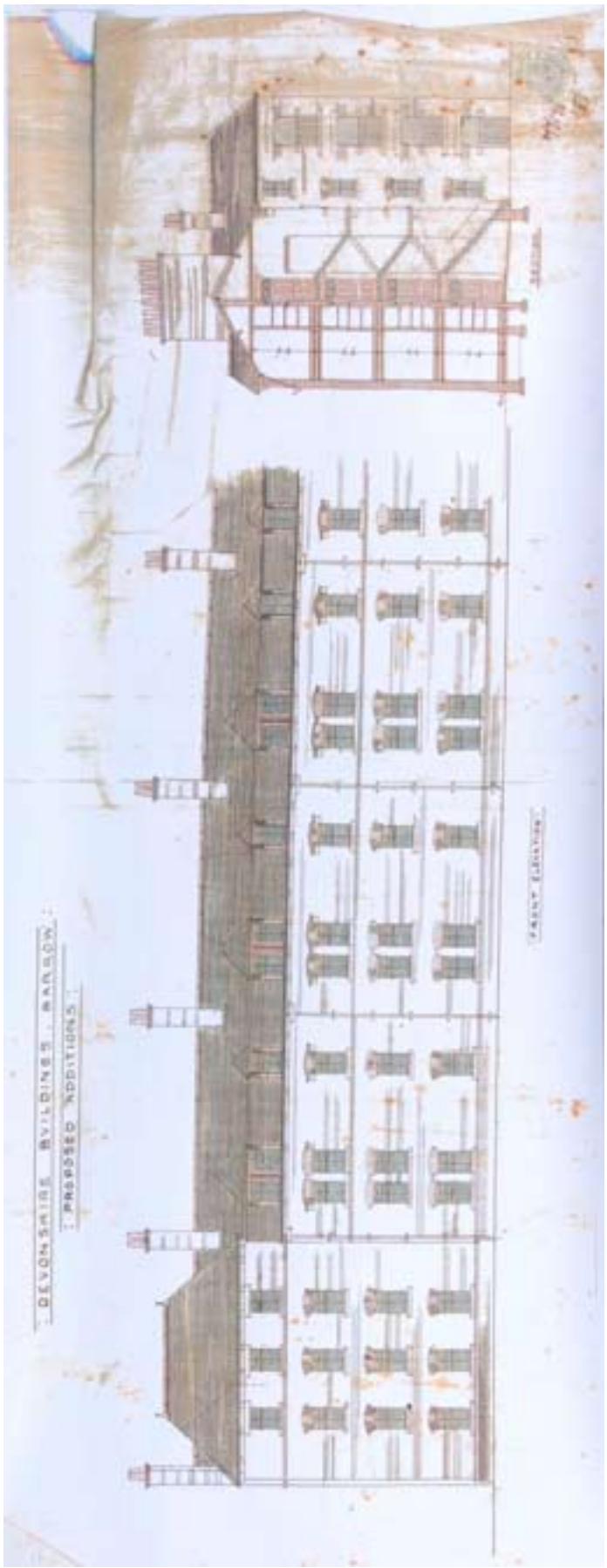


1.1 End elevation; Section A – B; Section C – D; Ground Plan; upper floors plan

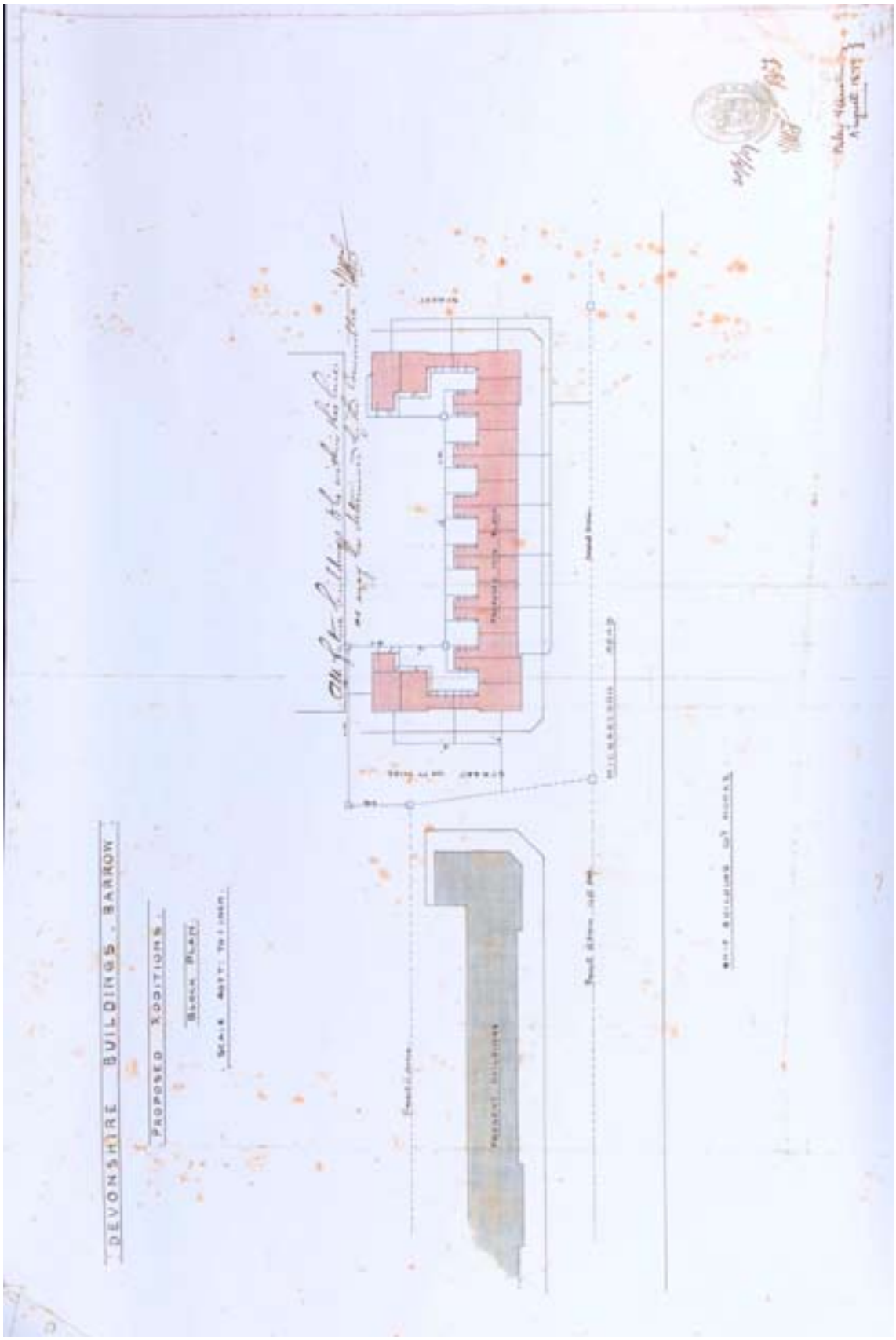


1.2 Proposed system of drainage

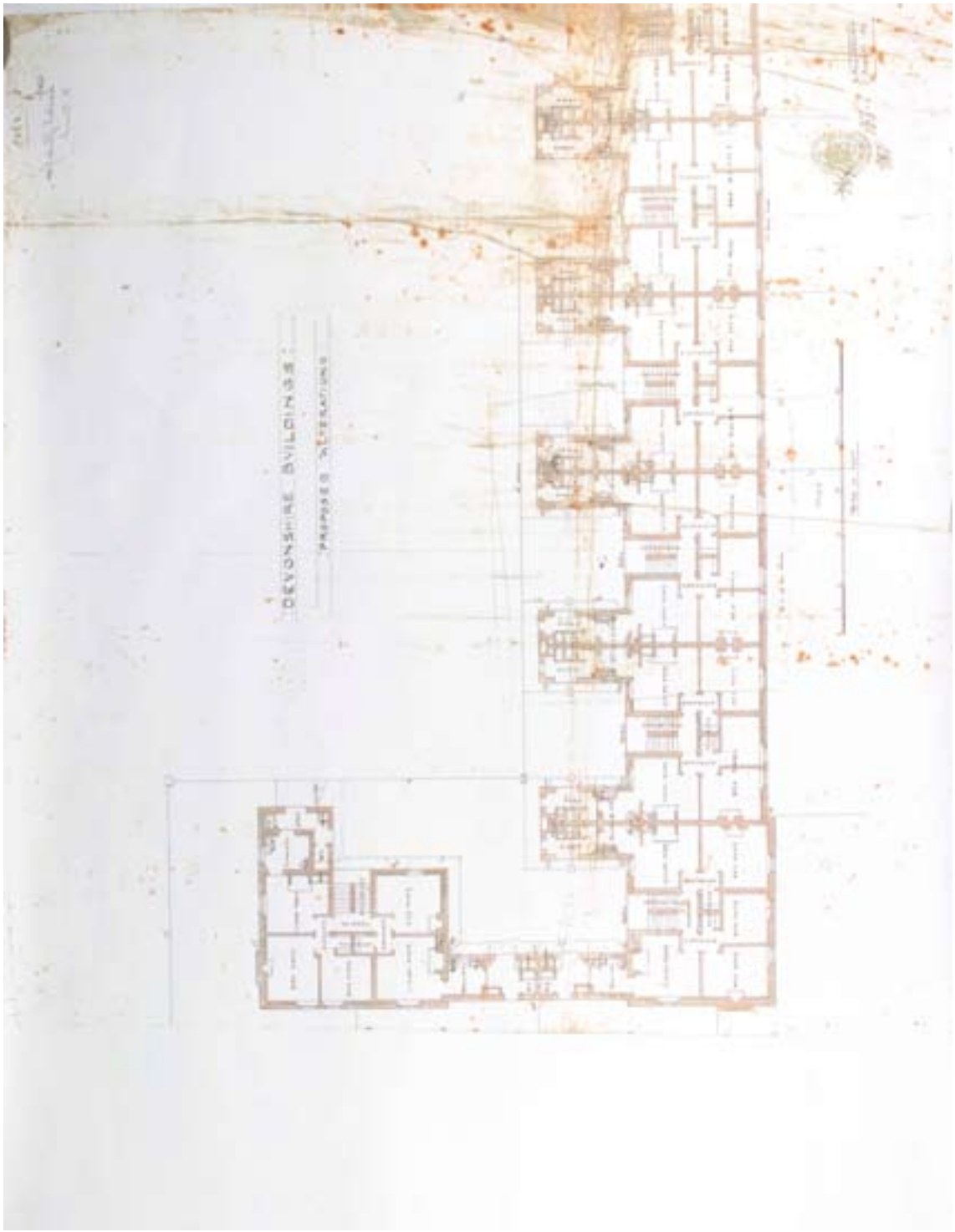
1.3 End elevation; Back of end house; Back elevation



1.4 Front elevation; Section



1.5 Block plan



1.6 Plan

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