

No. 1 WILKES ST – No. 13 FOURNIER ST,  
SPITALFIELDS, LB TOWER HAMLETS

*Report on Building and Other Areas Affected by  
Proposed Alterations/Refurbishment*

*by*

A. R. Wittrick

Historical Analysis & Research Team  
*Reports and Papers (First Series, 7)*  
1996



ENGLISH HERITAGE



ENGLISH HERITAGE

1, WILKES ST/13, FOURNIER ST  
Spitalfields  
L B Tower Hamlets

APPRAISAL OF  
HISTORIC FABRIC

*Report on building and other areas  
affected by proposed alterations/refurbishment.*

by

A R Wittrick

HART  
Conservation Group  
Deputy Director's Division

June 1996  
(1st amendment July 1996)

© copyright English Heritage

# CONTENTS

	Page No.
<b>1. Background to this Report</b>	2.
1.1 Introduction	2.
1.2 Limitations	2.
1.3 The Building	2.
1.4 LBC Application	2.
1.5 Past Research History	3.
1.6 Purpose of Research	3.
1.7 Information Sought	3.
1.8 Archive	3.
<b>2. The Report</b>	4.
2.1 Introduction	4.
2.2 Scope	4,
<b>3. Recommendations</b>	4.
<b>4. The Brick Vault</b>	5.
4.1 Introduction	5.
4.2 Structural Interpretation	5.
4.3 Use	5.
4.4 Importance	6.
<b>5. The Floor Filling (Pugging)</b>	6.

## 1. BACKGROUND TO REPORT

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 The Historical Research and Analysis Team of English Heritage, Deputy Director's Division, was requested by London & SE Region, NE Team to give an opinion on surviving historic fabric of this early C.18th building and consider whether anything of historic importance survived here. Current LBC proposals involve the alteration and loss of some of the buildings extant fabric.

1.1.2 Areas affected by the proposals, which included the floors and roof structure and a large brick vault under Wilkes Street, were examined in some detail on site and are described in the following text.

### 1.2 LIMITATIONS

1.2.1 Inspection was limited to those areas of the building that were accessible. This involved mainly a visual inspection of internal and external surfaces as no areas were opened up to expose internal constructional details.

### 1.3 THE BUILDING

1.3.1 The building presently consists of No.1 Wilkes Street and No.13 Fournier Street and was constructed in c.1725, possibly originally under separate ownership, as a corner house at the junction of Wilkes Street and Fournier Street. Its main facade of four bays fronts onto Wilkes Street. The roof is a composite of single pitch to the Fournier Street terrace and an M shaped roof to the surviving terrace of Wilkes Street. It was reconstructed, probably during the early C.19th, when the extant brick front to both elevations was constructed, replacing the former facade.

1.3.2 The building is typical of the area and date. Little survives of the original internal features and no indication of their form is evident.

1.3.3 The structure has been included on the statutory list of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest and been given grade II status.

### 1.4 LBC APPLICATION

1.4.1 The current proposals involve alterations and strengthening works to the existing fabric.

### 1.5 PAST RESEARCH HISTORY

1.5.1 A detailed account of this building can be found in the Survey of London volume covering the Spitalfields area (Vol XXVII Christ Church & All Saints). Other documentary evidence relating to the development of this site can be found at the NBR at Blandford Street W1. No historical information was provided with the initial request.

## 1.6 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

- 1.6.1 The purpose of this investigation was to make an assessment of the surviving fabric affected by the proposed refurbishment at this site, establish its historic importance and assist with the evaluation of the proposed development. The research was required to form a basis on which acceptability of the proposed alterations and improvements could be assessed.

## 1.7 INFORMATION SOUGHT

- 1.7.1 Brief written account of specific areas of the building concerned with the proposals for the structure identifying original surviving elements and areas of historic importance to assist the casework officer considering the current LBC application.

## 1.8 ARCHIVE

- 1.8.1 Copies of this written report, together with a separate photographic record and available cartographic information, form the archive documentation.

## 2. THE REPORT

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1 The results of historic constructional analysis of specific areas of this building are presented within this written report.

### 2.2 SCOPE

- 2.2.1 The following brief account presents the information collected during on-site analysis during June 1996.

## 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The current proposals involve structural alterations/improvements to this building to stabilise the structure prior to refurbishment. This will involve alterations/strengthening to extant floors and roof structure. These works are likely to expose historic elements of the structure which would benefit from further on-site analysis during the building programme. It is also proposed to clear the brick vault under Wilkes Street of rubbish/back fill.
- 3.2 Important historic fabric likely to be lost during the course of repair, should be recorded.
- 3.3 Further historical background archival research needs to be undertaken, as a separate programme, to provide background information with which to compare present interpretations based on site analysis.
- 3.4 Once the brick vault has been cleared, further on site analysis of this structure should be undertaken to determine its nature and former use.
- 3.5 Monitoring -
- 3.5.1 The proposed works should be monitored during the course of the project to ensure the maintenance of proper professional standards and to ensure important historic evidence revealed during the course of the works is identified.
- 3.5.2 The appointed monitor should be informed directly of the discovery of any significant and previously unidentified fabric remains.

## 4 THE BRICK VAULT

### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Constructed some 1.5m below the surface of Wilkes Street and extending approximately half the width of the roadway, to a depth of 1.8m and running the length of the property, is a large brick-lined vault, accessed only from the lower storey of No.1 Wilkes Street.

4.1.2 During the initial inspection/analysis the vault was partly filled with building debris and rubbish. This was cleared (July '96) to reveal the lower sections of the vault. However, removal of rubbish/back-fill was halted when certain brick features were uncovered at floor level. A raised brick floor has been partly exposed together with a brick-lined well/sump which appear to be original features.

## 4.2 Structural Interpretation

4.2.1 The vault, has been substantially built with a good quality stock brick, typical of the period. It has been constructed from the junction with Fournier Street and there is no visible evidence to suggest that it originally extended further than this point. The northern end has been closed along the party wall line with No.3 Wilkes Street. Both end walls are bonded to the brick vaulting and therefore must form part of the original build. A later brick platform has been constructed at the northern end of the vault which appears to conceal a later drain connection to the road sewer.

4.2.2 The access passage drops steeply to the vault via brick steps. The entrance to the passage has been altered to accommodate a door-frame, now lost. The hacked brickwork has been covered with a lime-based render.

4.2.3 The occupant of No.3 Wilkes Street indicated that a similar vault may exist within this property. Nos.10 & 17-25 Wilkes Street are known to have cellar-basements although these are however, largely incorporated within the building fabric of these houses.

## 4.3 Use

4.3.1 As early as 1727 coal was stored in cellars and vaults. However, no evidence has as yet been found to suggest this area was used for this purpose. No access is provided to this vault other than through the extant brick-lined passage from the basement area and materials used within the house would have had to be brought in through the ground floor. This would also apply to those waste materials needing to be disposed which would have proved an unsatisfactory arrangement.

4.3.2 No evidence has been found to suggest any external access which may have provided for collections/deliveries.

4.3.3 A vault of this size could quite possibly have been used for the storage of barrels for wine or ale. A 1950s photograph of this site clearly shows a shopfront to Fournier Street. Constructionally, it is clear that the C.18th re-fronting of this building included a shopfront on the Fournier Street facade. This building has clearly been used for trade for a considerable period.

## 4.4 Importance

4.4.1 This large structure is of some interest as it appears to be somewhat unique in this locality. Although houses in Spitalfields are known to have brick vaults, none have as yet been found to these dimensions.

- 4.4.2 The excavation for this vault and its construction would have proved very costly and it is therefore surprising to find such a structure attached to one of the smaller houses in this street.
- 4.4.3 Vault building became an important part of the whole process of laying out streets as the brick arches formed a firm roadway foundation. However, the depth of this vault below the surface of Wilkes Street (1.5m) and the quality of its brickwork, may suggest that this was not its original intention.
5. THE FLOOR FILLING (Pugging)
- 5.1 Samples of a compacted floor-filling, uncovered during remedial works between structural floor joists, from the first floor structure to the front of the house, were taken away for examination by the EH Laboratory. A sample of a floor filling to the rear ground floor room was also examined on site.
- 5.2 The first floor 'filling' is a plant material - almost certainly a moss - which appears to have been mixed with other plant materials and sand to form a slurry which was then deposited between the floor joists and over the ceiling laths to a depth of approximately 50mm (2").
- 5.2.1 Floor filling or 'pugging' of this nature was usually positioned as a form of insulation against sound. Little disturbance appears to have occurred to the floor framing where this material survives and it is quite possible that it may have survived from the mid C.18th.
- 5.2.2 It is not a unique find but uncommon in the locality. It is a subject on which little research has been undertaken as yet and few parallels can be found and in this respect it is therefore an important find.
- 5.2.3 In those areas where the material remains in-situ, a good deal of the fibre bonding has broken down and it now appears, and could be mistaken for, dust/debris. Careful examination of the floor structure therefore needs to be undertaken before removal or repair takes place.
- 5.3 The floor filling to the rear ground floor room is compacted cork which was placed in sections of approximately 100mm (4") in thickness.
- 5.3.1 Little of this material remains and it is unclear what purpose it served in this situation other than some form of insulation. The process of manufacture is relatively modern and it is likely that it was placed here quite recently, possibly during the most recent repairs to the floor structure.

Andy Wittrick  
CON: DEPUTY DIRECTORS DIVISION (HART)  
Room 214 (SR)  
Ext 3773.





*Plate.1*  
View from Fournier Street, E1. 1974



*Plate. 2*  
View from Fournier Street, E1, looking west 1974





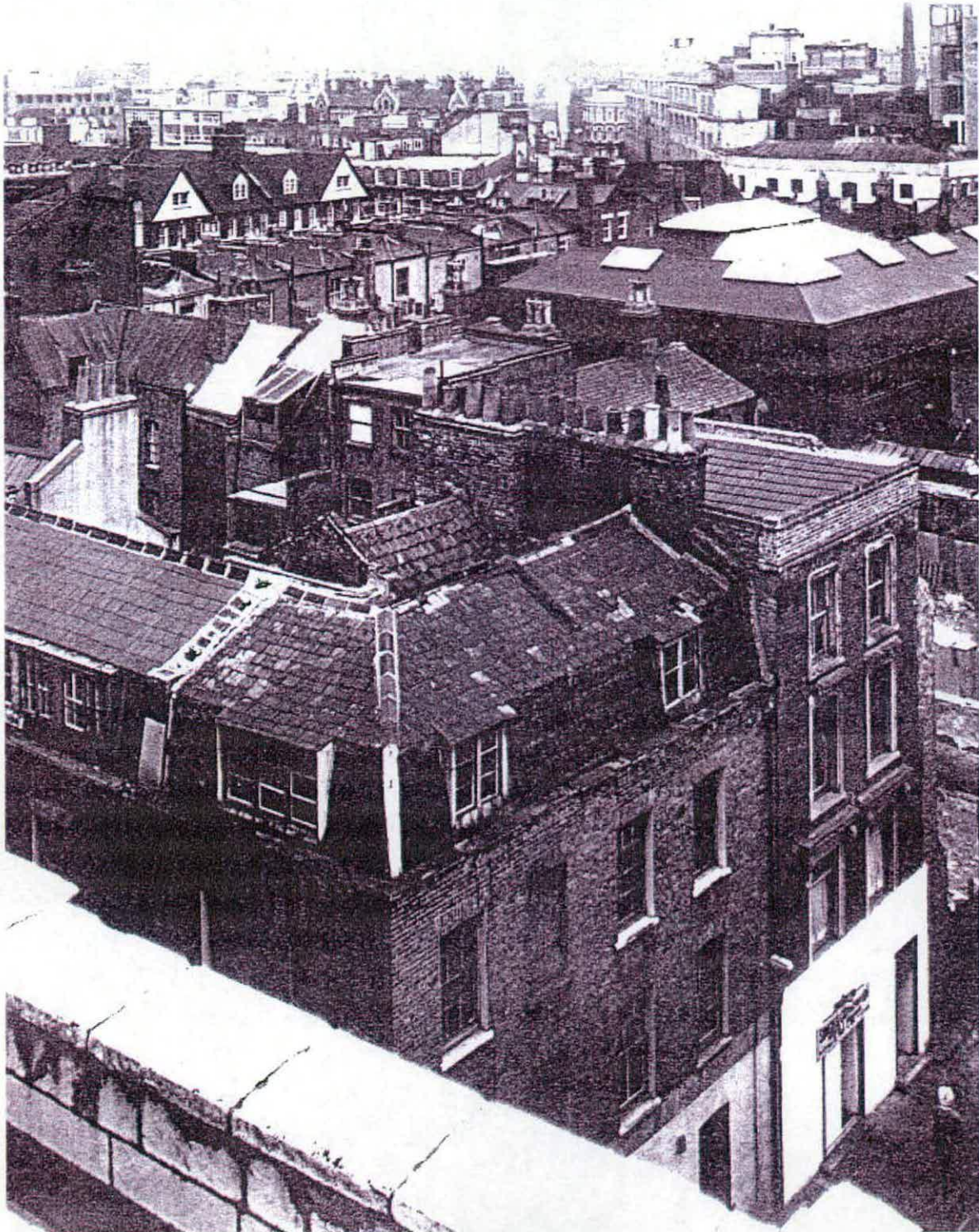
*Plate.3*  
View from Fournier Street, E1, 1974





*Plate. 3a*  
View looking south along Wilkes Street, E1, 1956

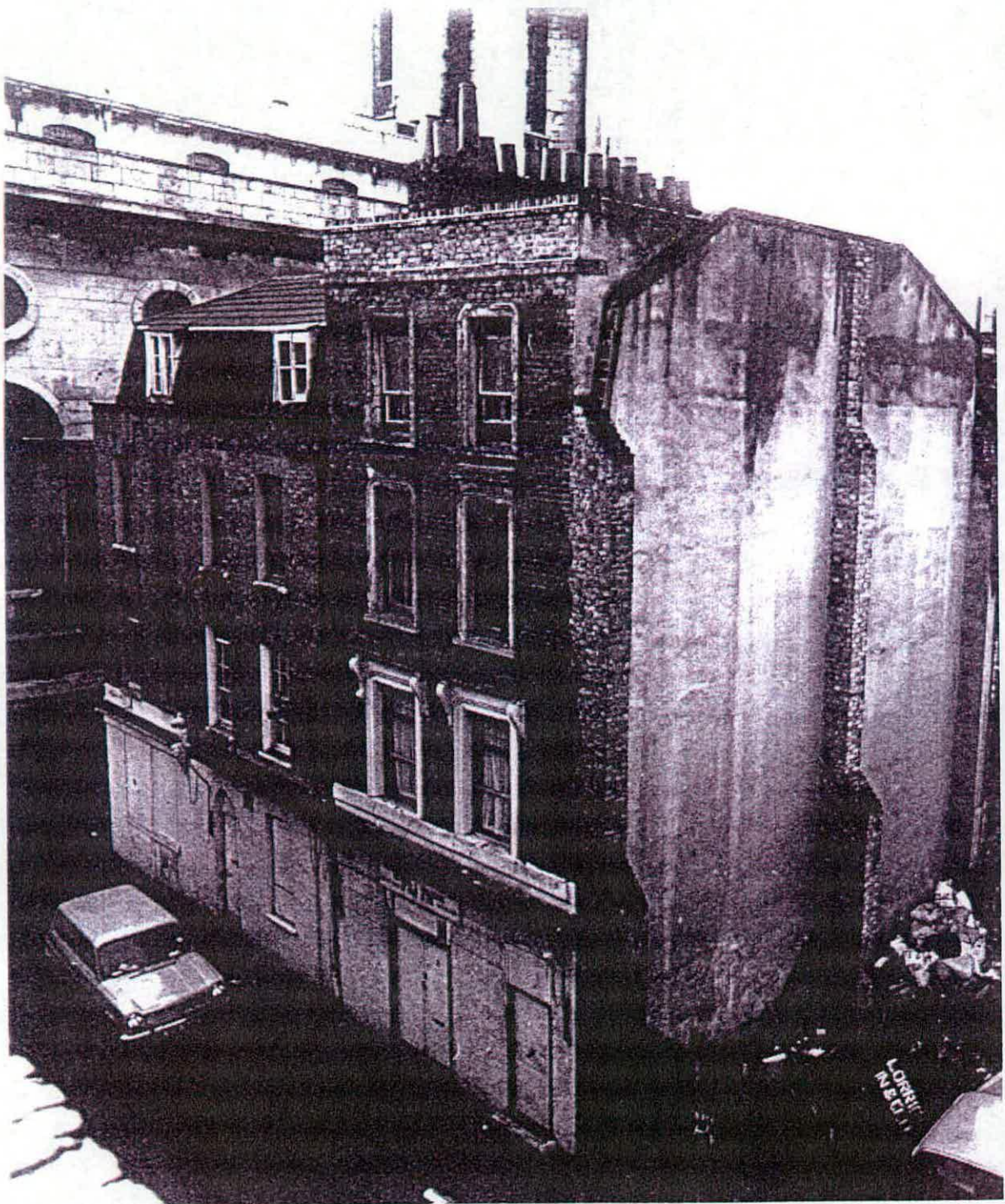




*Plate.4*

View from roof of Christ Church, looking north along Wilkes Street, E1, 1956





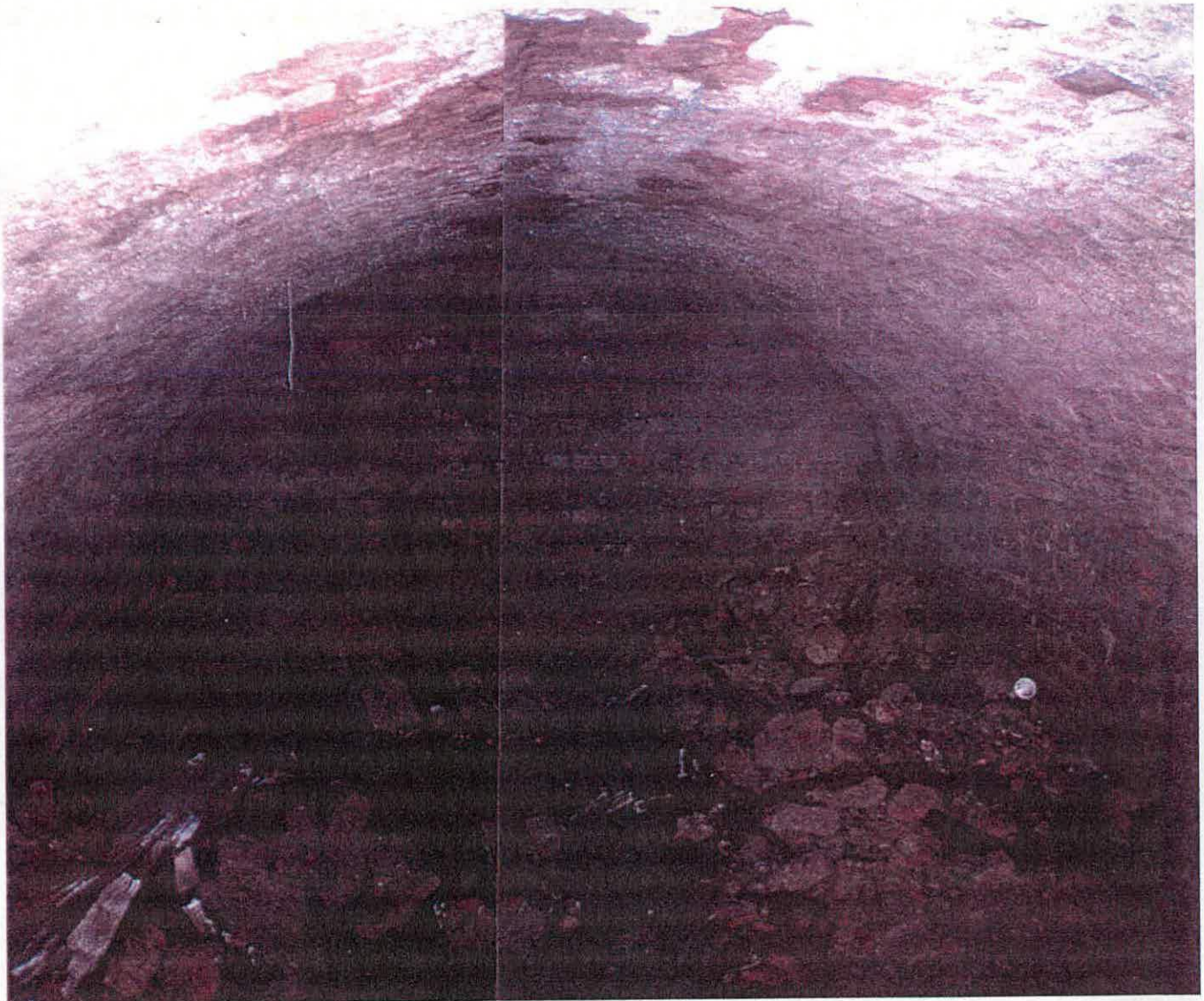
*Plate.5*  
View looking south along Wilkes Street, E1, 1970





*Plate.6*  
View from Fournier Street, E1, 1996





*Plate.7*  
Brick vault under Wilkes Street, prior to clearing 1996





*Plate.8*

Brick vault under Wilkes Street, prior to clearing, looking north 1996





*Plate.9*  
Entrance to brick vault under Wilkes Street, prior to clearing 1996





*Plate.10*  
Remains of joinery to upper floor 1996





*Plate. 11*  
Late 18C window frame 1996