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78 Ablewell Street, Walsall, West Midlands
Historic Building Recording 2006

By

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For

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78 Ablewell Street, Walsall, West Midlands

Historic Building Recording 2006

Summary

A programme of historic building recording was carried out at 78 Ablewell Street, Walsall, West Midlands (NGR SP017983) on behalf of Norton and Proffitt Development Ltd. in advance of demolition. The recording work was carried out to a degree equivalent to the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England's Level 3 (RCHME 1996). The building dates from the late 18th/early 19th century and was in use as a public house until the early part of the 20th-century. Only the shell of the original building survives, the structure being greatly altered during the mid-20th-century, resulting in the loss of the original fixtures and fittings, and the complete re-design of the ground floor layout. Within the past decade the original roof was also completely replaced.

1.0 Introduction

In January 2006, Birmingham Archaeology undertook building recording and fabric analysis of 78 Ablewell Street, Walsall, prior to the demolition and redevelopment of the site. The work was carried out in accordance with a brief issued by Wolverhampton City Council (Shaw 2003), a specification prepared by the Halcrow Group Ltd. (2005) and the advice of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 2001).

2.0 Site Location

The building is situated on the corner formed by the west side of Ablewell Street and the south side of The Ditch, Walsall, West Midlands (NGR SP 017983) (Fig. 1).

3.0 Objectives

The aim of the historic building recording was to obtain an analytical record of the building prior to the redevelopment of the site.

4.0 Methods

The building record was conducted to a degree equivalent to the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England's Level 3 (RCHME 1996). It comprised the following elements: -

- A written description on a room by room basis compiled on *pro forma* record sheets.
- A photographic survey using 35mm monochrome and colour slide film of all internal and external elevations. In addition a selective coverage of digital photography was carried out for the purpose of illustrating the report.
- A measured survey consisting of floor plans and the principal east elevation of the building.

5.0 Documentary Research

Due to the degree of alteration to the fabric of the building, documentary research was conducted in an attempt to establish the buildings earlier form and function. The first edition of the Ordinance Survey map from 1886 shows the building having a similar plan form (Fig. 2) to the present configuration. Furthermore, the building is marked as a public house on both the first and second editions of the O.S. map (Fig. 2 & 3). By the time of publication of the third edition (1914) the building was no longer designated as a public house (Fig. 4). In *Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire* (1912, 485), 78 Ablewell Street is given as the address of the Royal Exchange Public House, owned by a Thomas Pedley. Using this name, rather than the street number, the building can be traced back further through the trade directories and is listed in the *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire* (1834) and the *Staffordshire General and Commercial Directory* (1818). The Royal Exchange public house was also the meeting place of the Walsall Town and Walsall Swifts football teams (who later amalgamated into Walsall Football Club in 1888) who used the building in the 1880s as a changing room (*Walsall Football Club Historical Website*).

The earlier form of the building can be seen in a photograph dating from the 1930s showing the north and east elevations of the building (Fig. 5). This shows the earlier layout of the ground floor, with a single central doorway, two large windows at either side, and a doorway on the northeast corner of the building. The north elevation shows a window at ground floor level of the northwest wing, which appears shorter than at the time of this survey. The first floor windows of the building are twelve-light sashes, whilst those of the second floor are six-light sash windows. A further photograph (Fig. 6) from September 1997 shows the current building being re-roofed.

6.0 Building Description

The main block of the building runs N/S and faces on to Ablewell Street to the east, with its north elevation towards The Ditch. At the rear (west) of the building there are two wings running E/W. The northwest wing runs along The Ditch, whilst the southwest wing forms part of the boundary wall with the property to the south. In between these two wings is a small section of infill, comprising part of G1 on the ground floor and forming a small room (F1) on the first floor (See Fig. 7 for layout of blocks). The floor plans of the building are presented as Figs. 8, 9 & 10.

Exterior

East Elevation

The exterior of the building has been plastered and painted white at some point during the mid to late 20th century, as earlier photos show the building to have walls of plain brick (Lewis & Woods 1987, p20). This exterior render has obscured a great deal of the evidence concerning the building's original function and later adaptation. The main elevation of the building faces onto Ablewell Street to the east (Plate 1, Fig. 11). At ground level the elevation has been greatly altered by the conversion of the premises into a shop. It has a central set of double doors, with large glazed panels to either side. Directly above this is a long shop sign running the length of the building, with the outline of a shorter earlier sign visible on the plaster above. Above ground

floor level, the building has two window bays, placed towards either end of the building. First floor level is emphasised by tall windows with moulded masonry sills and a masonry lintel having gauged blocks with chamfered rustication and a raised end moulded keystone (Plate 2). The windows, which date from the late 20th-century, have nine lower fixed lights with a top hung vent above, composed of three lights. These resemble, and have replaced earlier twelve light sash windows. At second floor level, there are two short casement windows, two lights high by four lights wide, placed directly above the first floor windows. These have the same moulded masonry sills as the windows on the first floor (Plate 3) but lack the ornate window head. Again they are late 20th-century replicas of earlier sash windows. At the top north corner of the elevation is a rectangular metal tie plate. At roof level there is a course of what appears to be masonry (Plate 4), which is partially obscured by wooden bargeboarding. Above this the roof has red/brown tiles and matching ridge tiles. At the south end of the building there is a short red/brick stack with a half brick step two courses in height one course from the top.

South Elevation

The south elevation of the building is again rendered with plaster and painted white. The current building on the site to the south is a modern supermarket and the construction of this has raised the surrounding ground level by over a metre. This can be clearly illustrated by the top of a blocked up doorway at the west end of the elevation of the main block (Plate 5), of which only the top half metre or so is visible. Above this the walls are featureless until roof level (Plate 6). The southwest wing is two stories in height, and has a red/brown tiled roof and ridge tiles. At its east end there is a short rise in the wall above roof level, presumably a feature relating to an earlier building to the south. The gable wall of the main block has a slight continuation of the masonry course from the east elevation at its east end (Plate 7) but otherwise is featureless until the ridge, where the red brick stack rises out of the plasterwork. The pitch of the roof is slightly convex, due to the replacement of the timber roof structure at some point in the 20th century.

The south elevation of the northwest wing has short flight of three steps running downwards at ground level. Above this is a metal staircase running up to a metal balcony at the east end of the elevation (Plate 8). At first floor level there is a narrow frosted fixed pane window of late 20th-century date with blue brick sill towards the west end of the building. At roof level the block has a stepped row of stretchers topped by a stepped row of headers (Plate 9). The roof above has red/brown tiles and ridge tiles.

West Elevation

The west elevation of the building is largely taken up by two wings and a block of infill between them (Plate 10). The northwest wing is featureless on this side. At ground floor level the southwest wing shows the scars of an earlier building to the west, and a double skin of brickwork at ground floor level to support this. The north west corner of the block has the brickwork partially exposed and has a bevelled brick corner. To the north of centre at ground floor level there is a doorway originally joining this block to the building to the west. The small section of infill between the northwest and southwest wings is blank at ground floor level but has steps down to

the wall at its north end (Plate 8), which line up with the blocked up doorway on the interior. This presumably went out of use at the same point as the insertion of the metal staircase to the first floor, which blocks it. At first floor level the staircase leads to a metal walkway, central to this is the current access to the upper floors. Above this the roof of the infill is made of bitumen felt. The west elevation of the main block is only visible from the second storey upwards. At second storey level there is a central window with a large lower fixed light and a top hung vent above. At eaves level there is a rectangular metal tie plate at the north end of the building, corresponding to that on the east elevation, above this is a stepped course of stretchers topped by a course of alternately projecting headers, with a course of stretchers above (Plate 11). Above this the roof is as the east elevation.

North Elevation

The north elevation of the building faces onto The Ditch, a road running upwards to the west, ground level at this side of the building rises by approximately 0.8 metres from east to west (Plate 12). At ground level there is a large single-pane window at the east end of the main block of mid to late 20th century date. The photo from 1936 shows this corner of the building canted at ground level, with a doorway (Fig. 5), but this is now imperceptible. At first floor level there are two windows on the northwest wing, both of mid to late 20th century date. The window to the east is a casement with a top hung vent above, with a large fixed pane to the west. The west window is frosted with a large lower fixed pane and a top hung vent above. At eaves level the northwest projection has a stepped row of stretchers topped by a stepped row of headers. Above this the roof has red/brown roof tiles and ridge tiles.

At ground level the north elevation of the southwest wing has a row of three 20th century fixed-pane windows towards the west end. To the east of this is there is a doorway, with the door and frame removed. At first floor level there are two 20th century casement windows, one towards either end of the wing.

Interior

G1

G1 is a large open room occupying the entire ground space of the main block as well as that of the northwest wing and a portion of the southwest wing. It is composed of several rooms knocked through into one large room. The east elevation has had large single-pane windows of 20th-century date inserted along its length, punctuated by a central double doorway of 20th-century date. The north elevation of the main block has also had a large single pane window fitted. The walls of the upper floors are supported by a series of boxed beams on the ceiling (Fig. 8). However, as the walls and ceiling are thickly plastered, and the floor covered by ruberoid material, no other evidence for the original layout remains. The west wall of the room has a projecting central section with a blocked doorway to the south of centre. The wall to the south of this has a doorway reached by two steps leading through to G2. The south wall of the room has a blocked doorway at its west end beneath the slope of a staircase. The walls have several brick piers supporting boxed beams on the ceiling.

G2

Located to the west of G1 within the southwest wing. The room appears to have originally been a small hallway and stairway (now removed) up to the first floor. The floor is quarry tiled to the south, where the staircase was previously located, with ruberoid material to the north. The north wall is entirely taken up by a doorway to the exterior. The east wall has a doorway through to G1 at its north end. To the south of this is the outline of an earlier staircase, rising from the south side of the doorway upward to the south. At the south end of the wall, from mid-height upwards is a blocked stairway, comprising five stairs, running to the bottom of the ceiling above. The south wall of the room has exposed brickwork to mid-height, where the staircase was removed. The west wall has matching scars to the east wall. At the north end of the west wall there is a doorway through to G3. The ceiling of the room is plastered and painted at the north end. To the south, where the stairway previous rose through the floor, modern joists and floorboards have been inserted, and left exposed.

G3

Located at the west end of the southwest wing, to the west of G2. Floored by ruberoid tiles over concrete. The north wall has three evenly spaced 20th-century fixed pane windows. The east wall has a doorway at the north end through to G2. The south wall appears to be an original boundary wall to the property, the base curves outwards, exposed bricks are 9"x2½" red brick. The west wall has a slight step in the middle, with a doorway to the north leading to the now demolished block to the west. The ceiling is comprised of painted wooden boards.

Upper Floors

The first and second floors of the building were converted to use as flats at some point in the mid-20th century. This involved the addition of an external metal staircase at the rear of the building giving access to the upper floors at first floor level. The interiors of the two upper floors were also adapted during this conversion, with the interior walls being covered in thick cement plaster with fake stonework protruding through and the ceilings decorated with fake scantling joists. Most of the doorways were also converted to open plan openings during this period.

F1

Current access to the upper floors of the building is from an external metal staircase located at the centre of the west elevation of the building. This provides access to F1, a small room consisting of the upper floor of the infill section between the northwest and southwest wings. Floor consists of wooden boards covered by carpet. Walls are brick plastered with cement. The north wall has a doorway to the west of centre which has been blocked up, and made to resemble a blocked window, with a slight step halfway up its height to give the impression of a sill. Fake stonework has been added above in the form of a segmental arch. The east wall has a large segmental arched opening, which has been filled by concrete blocks to form a single doorway. This doorway provides the access to Flat 2 (comprising F3, F4, F5, SF1 and SF2), and was most likely filled in when the upper floors were converted to flats. To the south of this doorway, the original corner of the segmental arched opening protrudes slightly, and

where the brick has become exposed, has a bullnosed brick corner (Plate 13). The south wall of the room has a doorway at the east end, with a segmental-arched head composed of fake stonework. The west wall of the room has a central doorway leading to the exterior of mid 20th-century date. The ceiling of the room is of white plaster decorated by the addition of fake black scantling joists. From the central N/S axis of the room the ceiling slopes downwards towards the west.

F2

Occupies the south end of the main block and the entire southwest wing (Plate 14). Was previously split into several rooms for use as a flat, but the stud walls separating the room have recently been removed. The room itself is divisible into two distinctive blocks. The first comprises the section of the room contained within the main block along with the eastern half of the southwest wing. The other consists of the remainder of the southwest wing, to the west. This division is marked, beneath the floorboards, by the top of a brick wall, which corresponds to the east wall of G2 (Plate 15). To the east of this wall the floor is constructed of joists running E/W protruding through to the west side of the wall. The boards above are of hardwood, fixed down with square headed nails. To the west of the wall the joists run N/S, and have modern softwood boards fixed with modern nails. Above this division, on the ceiling is what appears to be a boxed beam, but is more likely remnants of the upper portion of the wall.

Within the main block, the north wall of the room protrudes slightly further north than the portion to the west. It has a blocked central doorway, which like the one on the north wall of G1, has been made to look like a blocked window, with a fake stone segmental-arched lintel. The remainder of the north wall has a doorway at the east end leading through to F1, and has a fake stone segmental-arched lintel. To the west of this are two large casement windows of late 20th-century date. The east wall of the room has a central 12-light window (Plate 16), the bottom nine of which are fixed, with a three light top-hung vent above. The lintel above the window appears to have a slight reveal (Plate 17) most likely relating to the earlier sash window. The south wall has a chimneybreast at the east end, central to the portion of the room contained within the main block. The west wall of the room has been tiled to mid height, and was originally a bathroom separated from the rest of the room by a stud partition. The ceiling of the room is again decorated by white plaster with fake black scantling joists. There are two boxed beams, which appear to mark the original divisions of the blocks. One lies directly above the east wall of G2 beneath, whilst the other marks the line of the west wall of the main block. There is a hatch to the west of the latter providing access to the attic space of the southwest wing. This allows the original west wall of the main block to be seen. It is composed of untreated red brick, laid in Flemish stretcher bond, with three courses of stretchers separating each course of stretcher/header. The roof structure of the southwest wing is also visible, and comprises a single purlin roof supporting common rafters.

F3

Located central to main block, F3 provides access to the second floor via a staircase. The floor consists of wooden boards covered by carpet. The north wall has a doorway at its east end leading to F4, with a fake stone segmental arched head. To the west of this, leading upward from east to west, is a late 19th-century staircase with turned

balusters and foot newel and closed string, and an open space below at the west end (Plates 18, 19, 20). The south wall of the room has a central doorway, the reverse side of that on the north wall of F2, again blocked up and made to look like a blocked window, with fake stone segmental arched lintel. The west wall of the room shows clearly the blocked segmental arched opening through to F1, with the corbels still evident. The ceiling of the room is covered by white plaster and fake black scantling joists, and is perforated in the northwest corner by the staircase.

F4

Occupies the north end of the main block. Hardwood joists running E/W, covered by hardwood boards, and carpeted. The east wall has a central window identical to that in F2, but without the reveal at the top (Plate 21). The south wall has a doorway at its east end with fake stone segmental arched lintel. The west wall has a large double opening through to F5. This forms the west wall of the main block, and at its base, running as a sill for the opening are three large timbers which run N and S through the base of the wall on either side (Plate 22). These lie directly above the boxed beam of G1 and were most likely inserted when the floor below was converted to one large open room. The ceiling of the room has a large central N/S boxed beam (Plate 23), the exact nature of which is unclear as it is heavily plastered. To either side of this, running E/W are fake black scantling joists.

F5

F5 was originally one large room has been subdivided by the addition of stud partition walls into a kitchen (Plate 24), bathroom (Plate 25) and corridor when the building was converted to flats. The floors are hardwood joists with herringbone struts and hardwood boards (Plate 26). The boards along the east end are roughly cut and stop slightly short of the wall to the east, which presumably is due to the insertion of the timber beam. The north wall of the room has a 20th-century frosted fixed pane window with top hung vent to the west, contained within the bathroom, and a 20th-century casement window with top hung vent to the east, contained within the kitchen. The east wall has a large double opening through to F4. The south wall has a small frosted window to the west, contained within the bathroom. At its east end, within the corridor section is a blocked doorway, imitating a blocked window with a fake stone segmental-arched lintel, the reverse of that on the north wall of F1. The roof structure above the rooms is visible through a hatch at the east end of the kitchen. It comprises a single purlin roof supporting common rafters. The west wall of the main block is also visible through this hatch, and an earlier roof scar can be seen beneath the line of the present roof (Plate 27). This suggests that either there was an earlier building in the place of the northwest wing or that the wing has been widened at some point, as the pitch of the previous roof scar suggests that the building would end at the wall separating the kitchen from the corridor.

SF1

Occupies the south two thirds of the main block at second floor level. The room originally comprised a small landing in the centre of the building, with a larger room to the south; this division is still marked by two short piers on the E and W walls joined by a boxed beam. Floored with hardwood boards covered by carpet. Access to

the room is from a staircase in the northwest corner, leading to the first floor. The north wall has a doorway to east of centre leading through to SF2, and filled by a 20th-century doorway. The east wall has a short brick pier a third of the way from the north; central to the remainder of the wall is a wooden framed eight-light 20th-century casement window. The south wall has a central chimneybreast. The west wall of the room has an opposing brick pier a third of the way from the north. Central to the wall to the north is a 20th-century wooden framed window with a fixed lower light and top hung vent above. The ceiling above is split by the boxed beam, to the south the ceiling is plastered and painted, whilst to the north it is decorated with fake black scantling joists. To the north of the brick pier on the east wall is a hatch leading to the attic. Through this the roof structure is visible. This has been replaced in the late 20th-century and comprises a single purlin roof.

SF2

Located north of SF1 on the second floor, occupies the width of the main block. Floored with hardwood boards covered by carpet. The north wall is obscured by built in wardrobes. The east wall has a central window of the same form as that on the east wall of SF1. The south wall has a late 20th century doorway to the east of centre leading through to SF1.

7.0 Conclusions

From documentary sources and stylistic evidence the main block of the building can be dated to the late 18th/early 19th century. The wings to the west of the building are marked on the first edition of the O.S. map (1886), but as the relationship between them has been obscured by exterior and interior render it is hard to say whether or not they are contemporary with the main block. A lack of original fixtures and fittings throughout the building has made the exact phasing of the building difficult. The northwest wing has a roof scar contained within the attic space, which suggests that the wing has been either re-built or widened, but again it is hard to assign a specific date to this alteration. At ground floor level the interior plan of the building has been greatly altered at some point during the mid-20th century. The arrangement of the boxed beams on the ceiling, which have been inserted to support the external and dividing walls of the floors above, can be used to indicate the original layout of interior walls. The original roofs of the main block and both wings have been fully replaced in the late 20th-century. The external walls have also been heavily altered at ground floor level, with the insertion of large mid to late 20th-century windows on the east and north walls. The upper floors of the east elevation are perhaps the only area of the building to have remained largely untouched, though these have had their original window frames replaced. The documentary evidence for the use of the building as a public house is not supported by the physical structure, largely due to the alteration of the ground floor. Equally, however, there is no evidence to suggest that this was not its original function. In terms of significance then, the building retains some of its original character on the exterior, particularly on the upper floors. Its previous use as the Royal Exchange public house, and as the meeting place of the Walsall Town and Walsall Swifts football teams, is of some local historical interest, but the high degree of alteration to the building has meant that very little of the original fabric can be said to survive.

8.0 Acknowledgements

This project was managed for Birmingham Archaeology by Malcolm Hislop. The fieldwork was supervised by Michael Lobb, assisted by Sally Radford and Kate Bain. The report was written by Michael Lobb and edited by Malcolm Hislop. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

9.0 References

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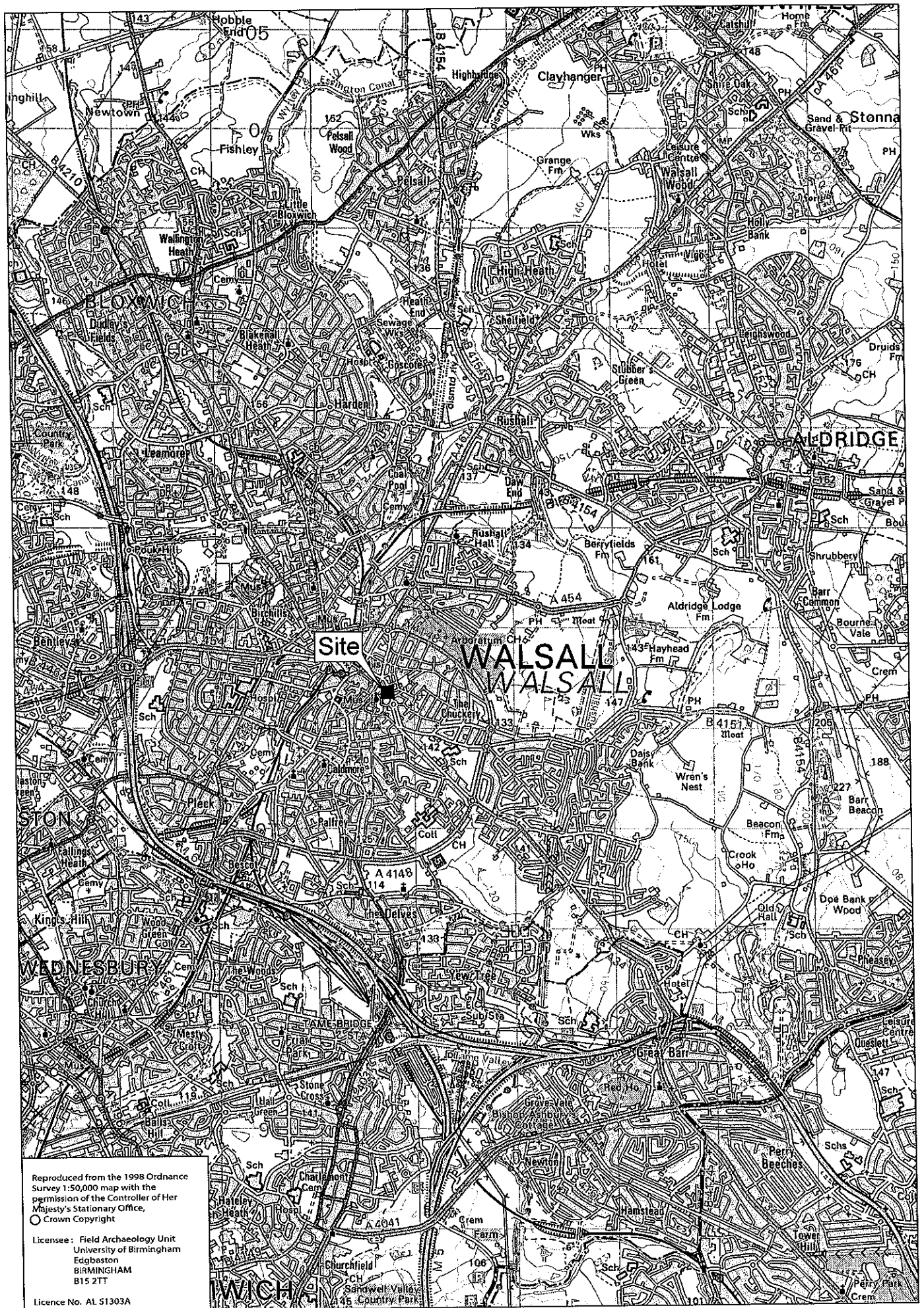


Fig.1

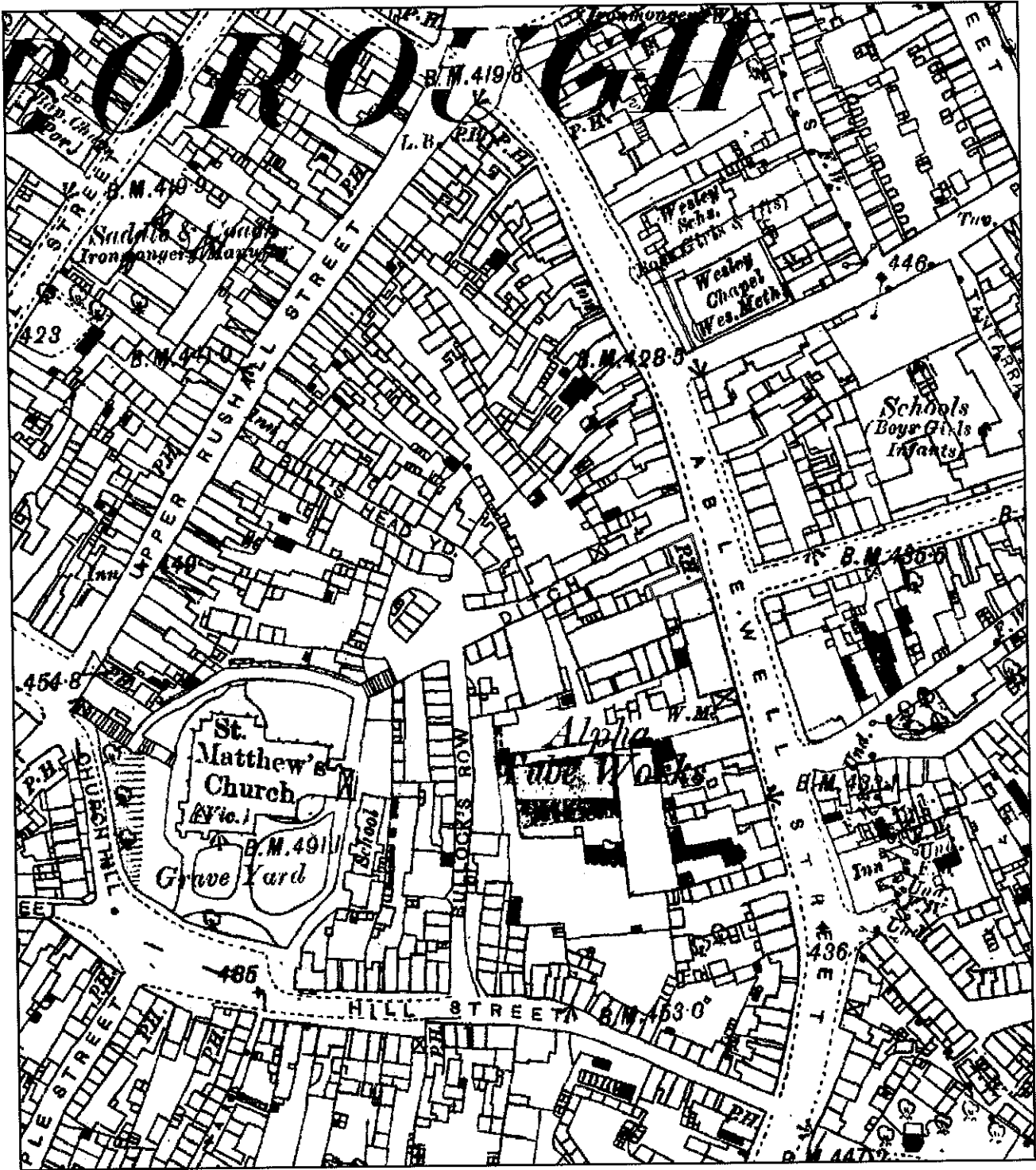


Fig.2 (1886)

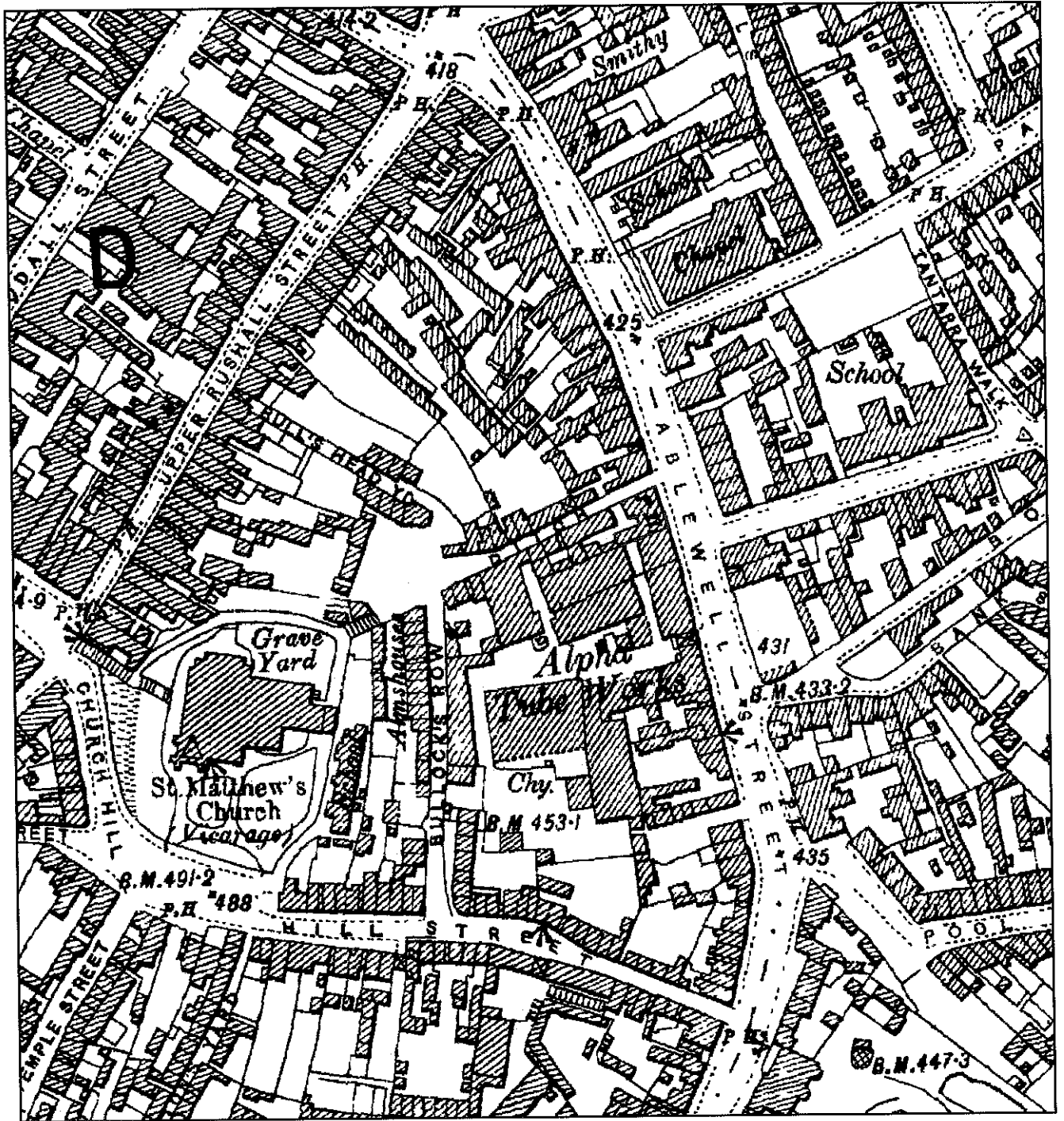


Fig.3 (1903)

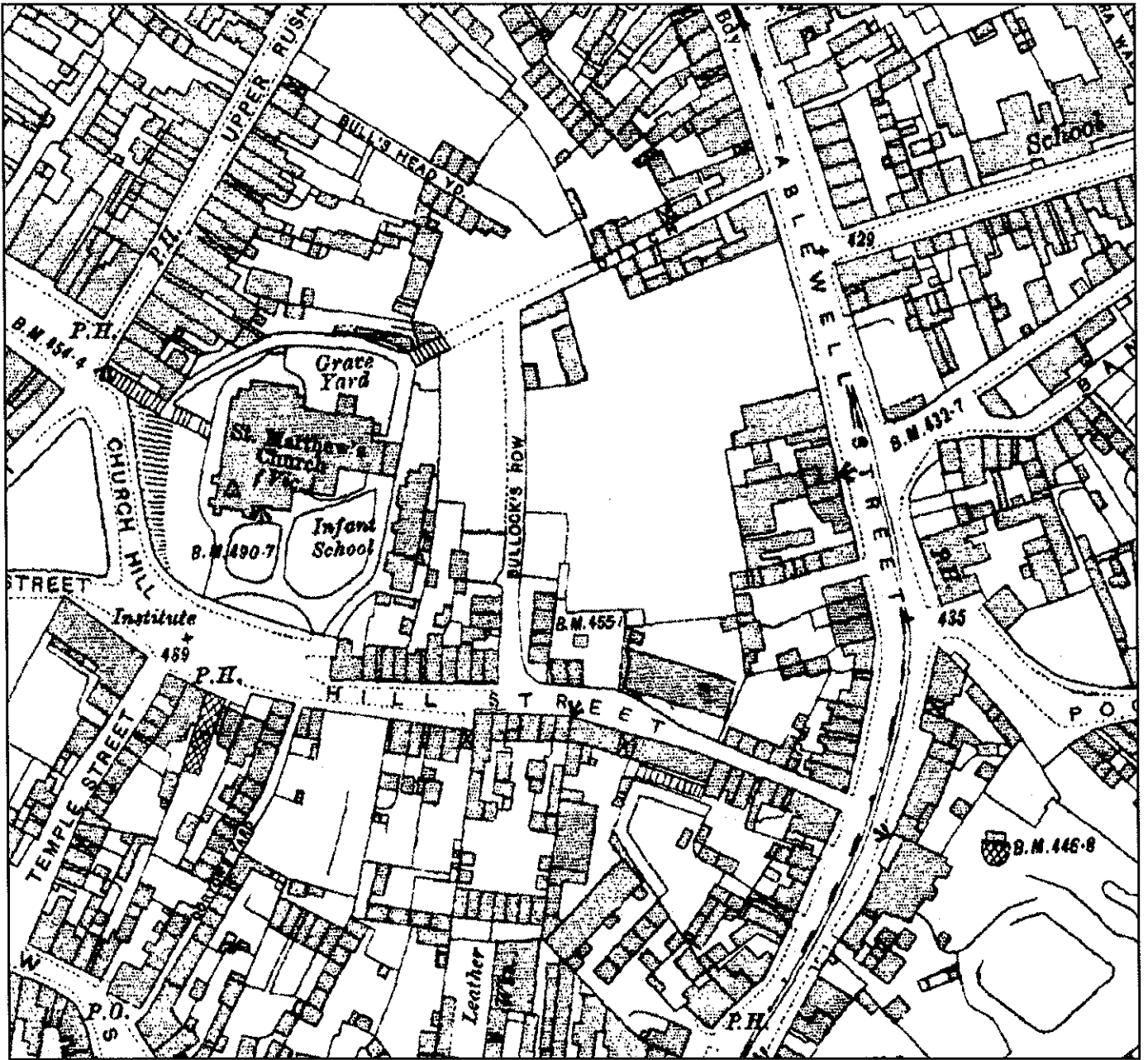


Fig.4 (1914)



Fig.5 (1936)



Fig.6 (1997)

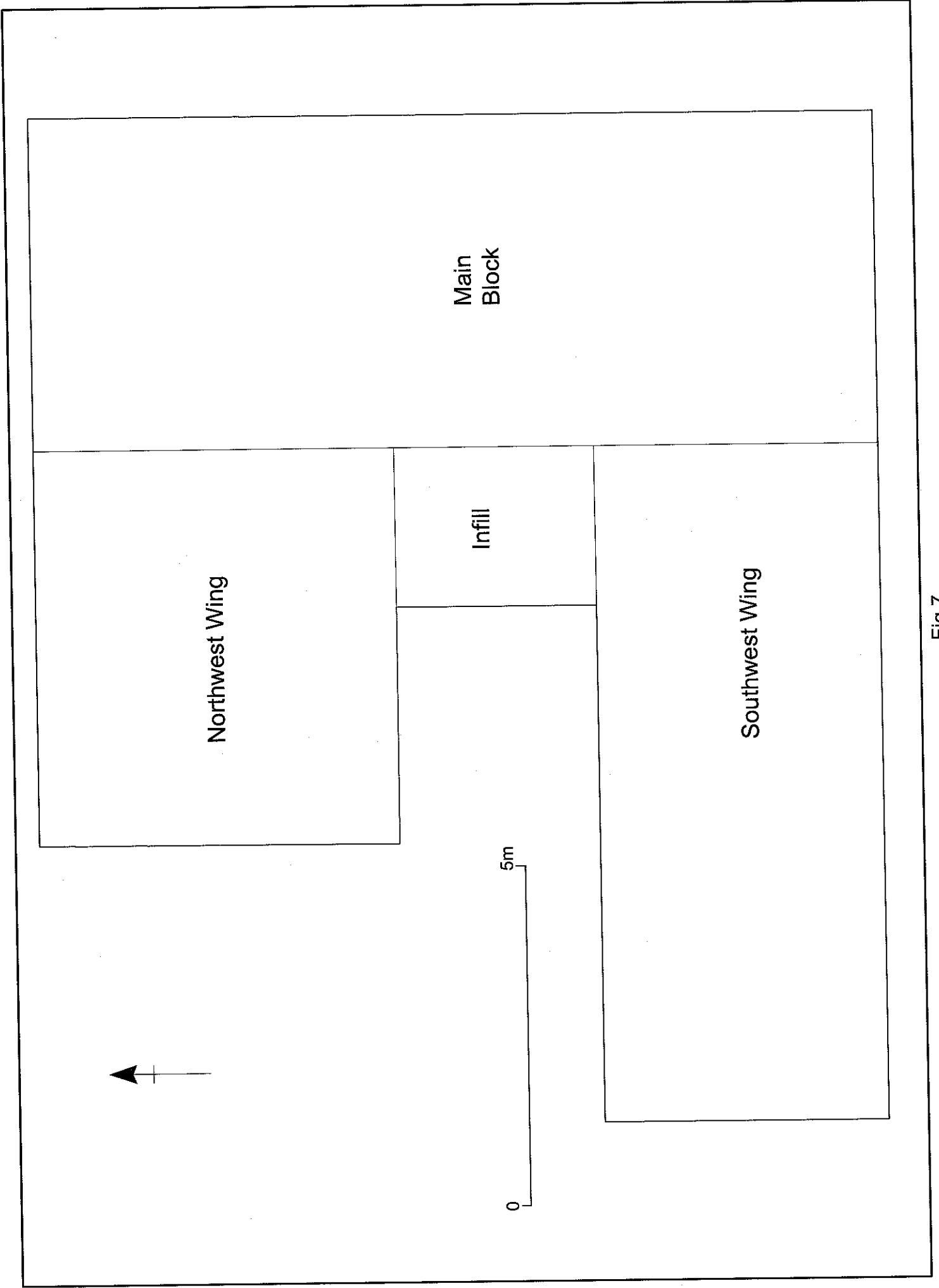


Fig.7

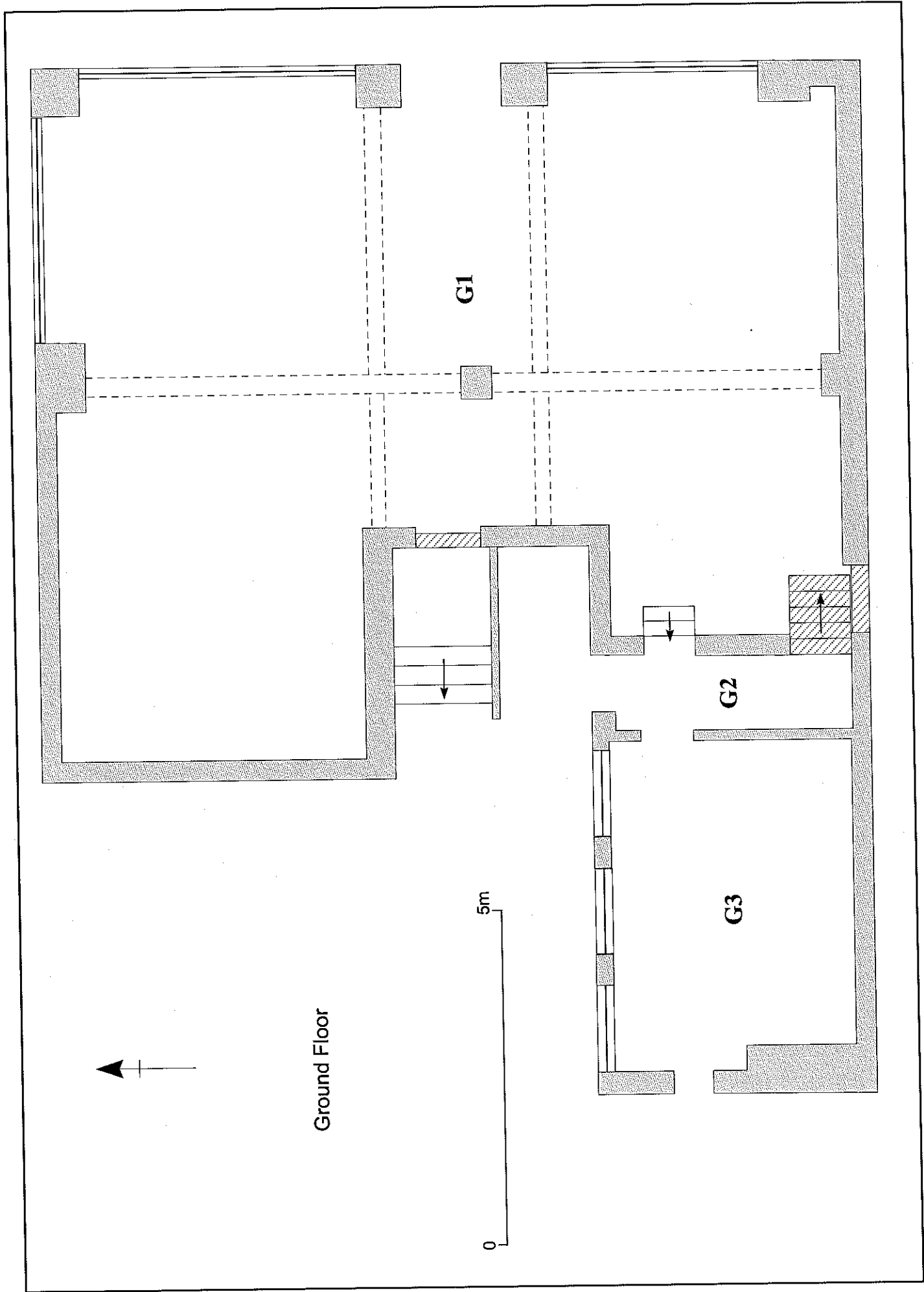


Fig.8

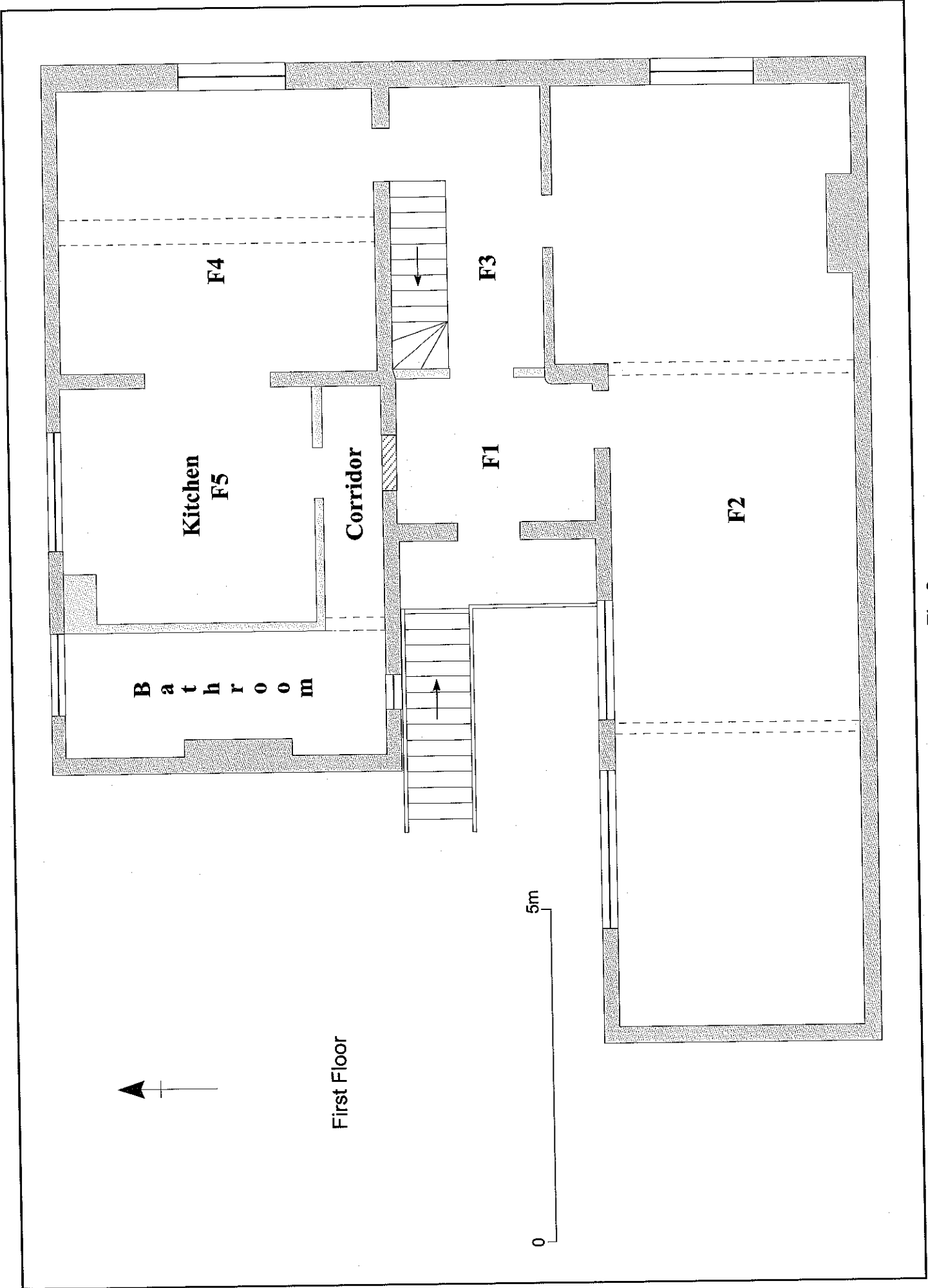


Fig.9

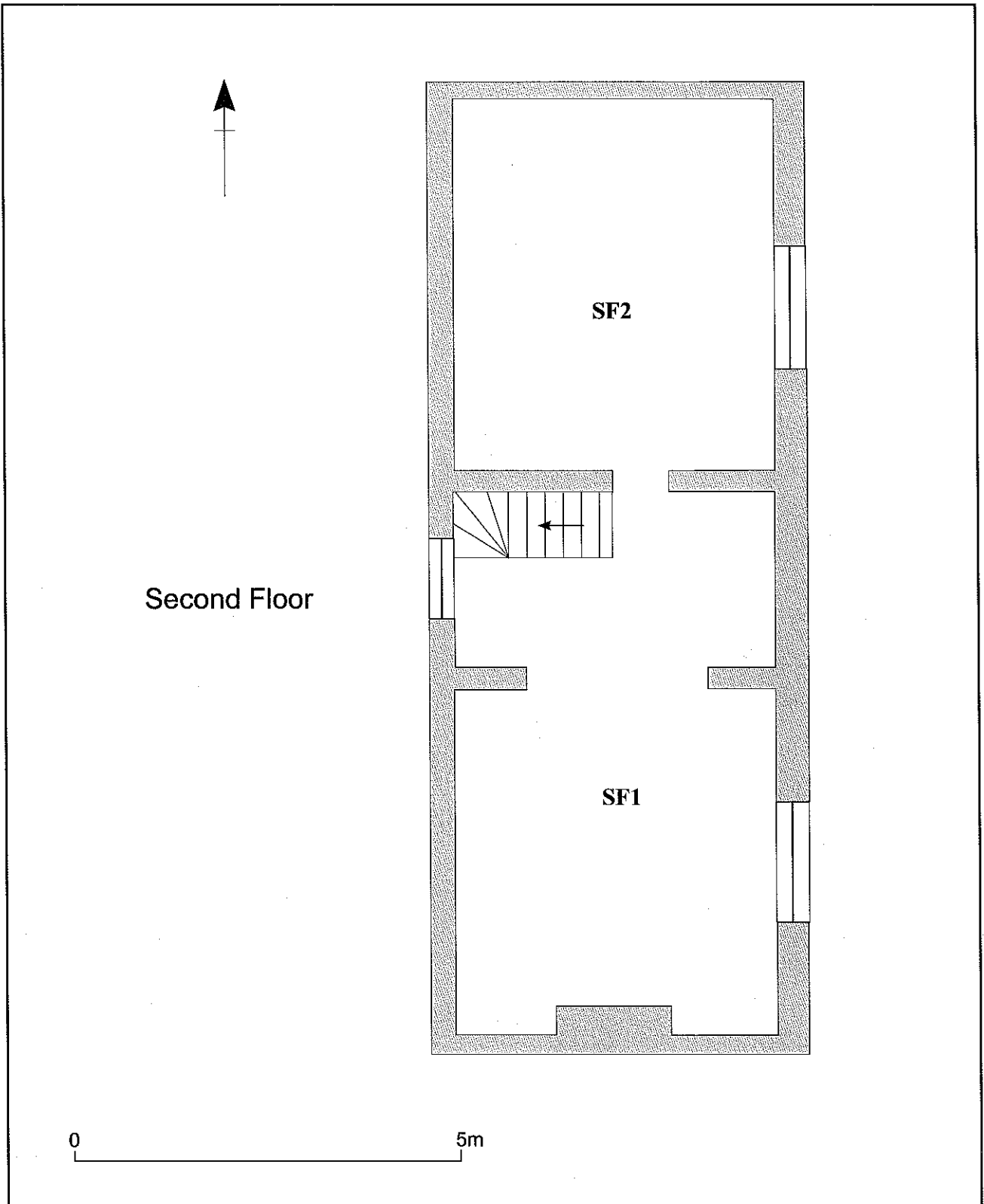


Fig.10

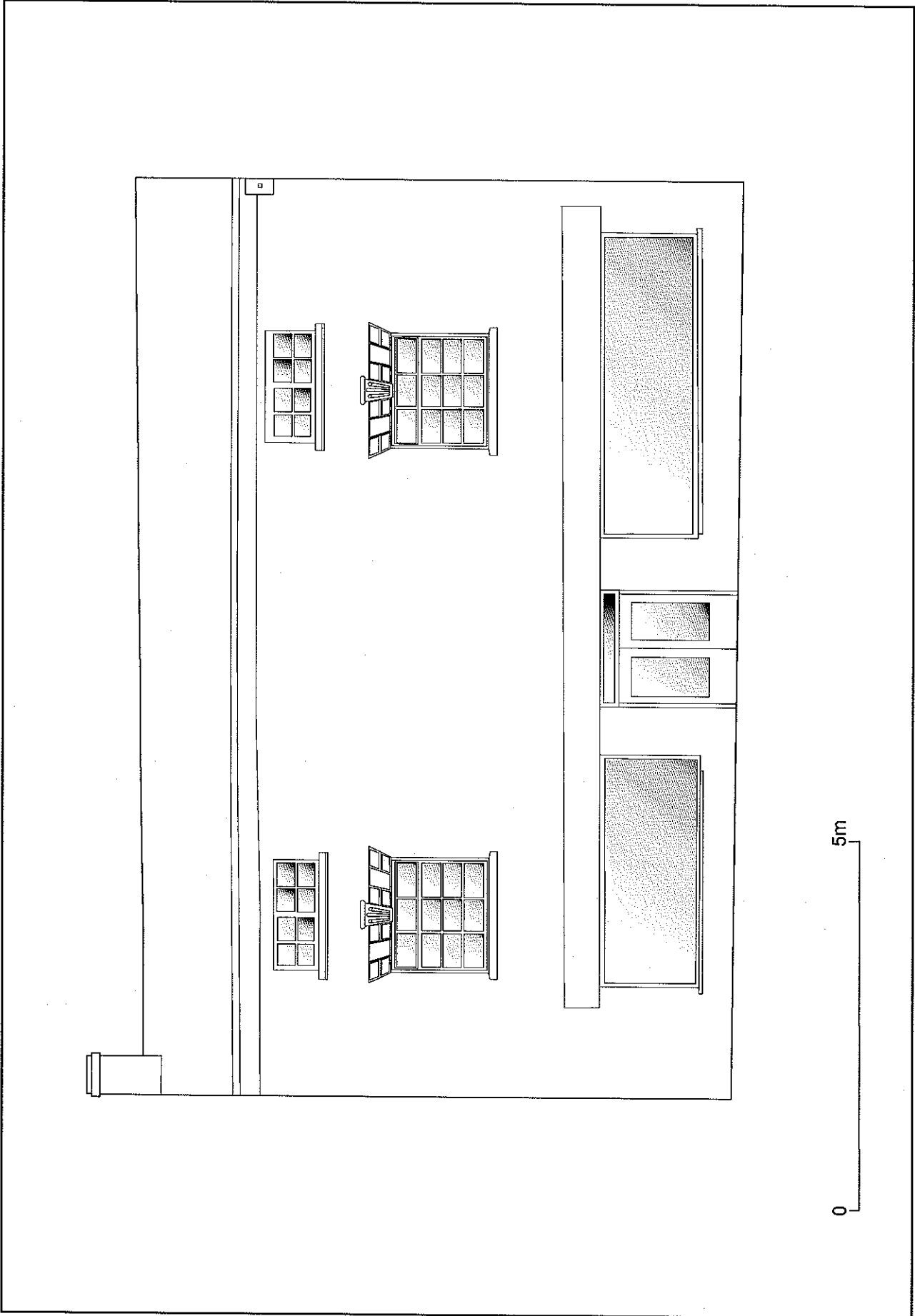


Fig.11

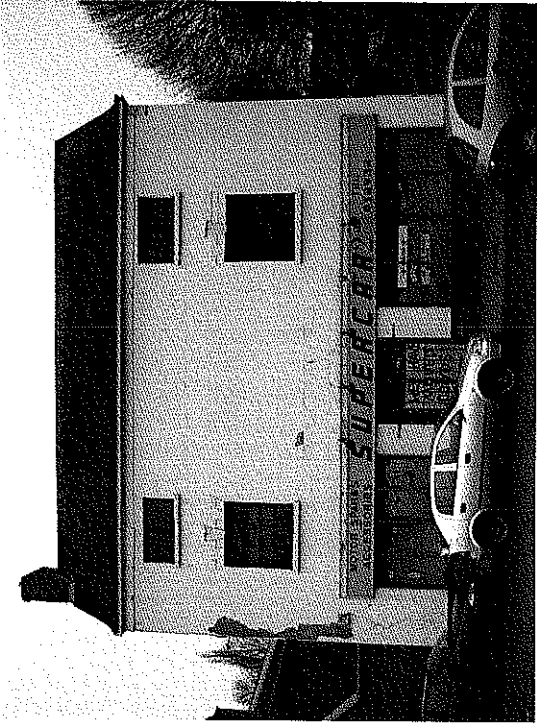


Plate 1

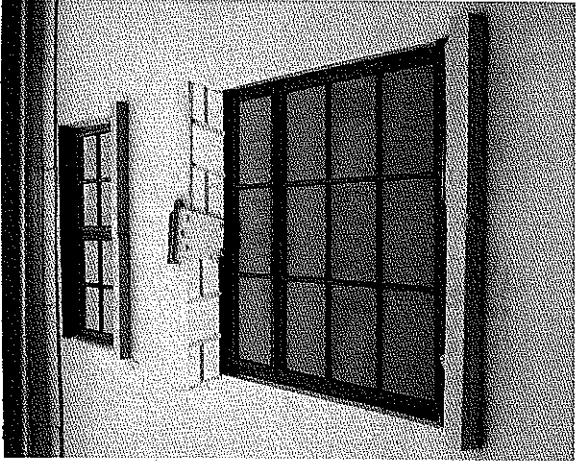


Plate 2

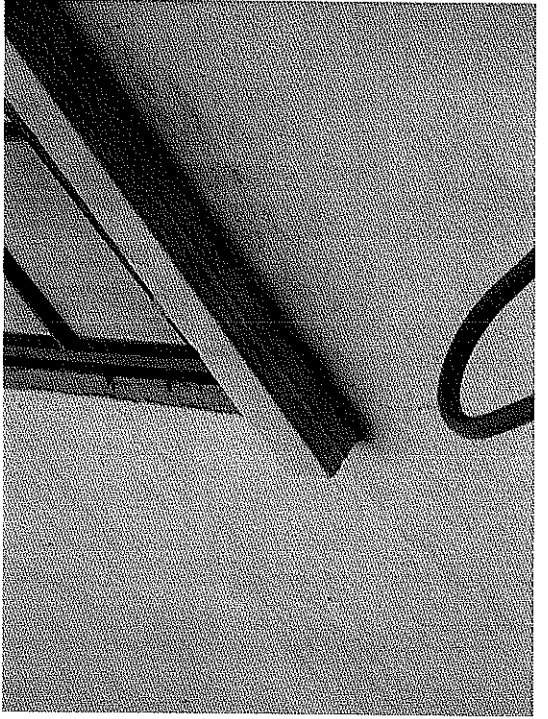


Plate 3

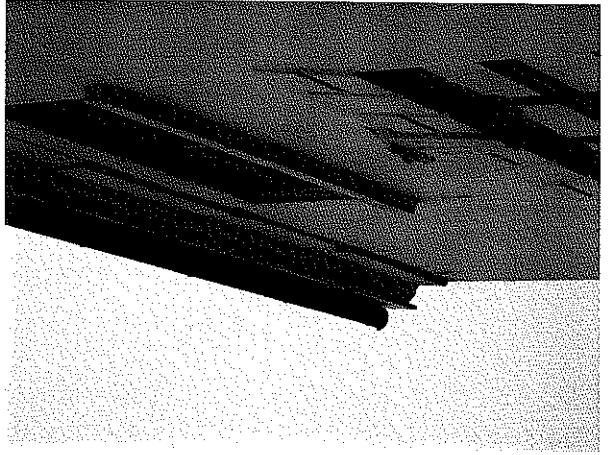


Plate 4



Plate 5

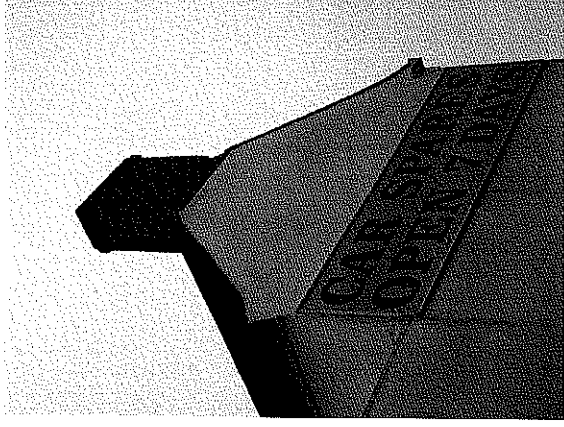


Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12

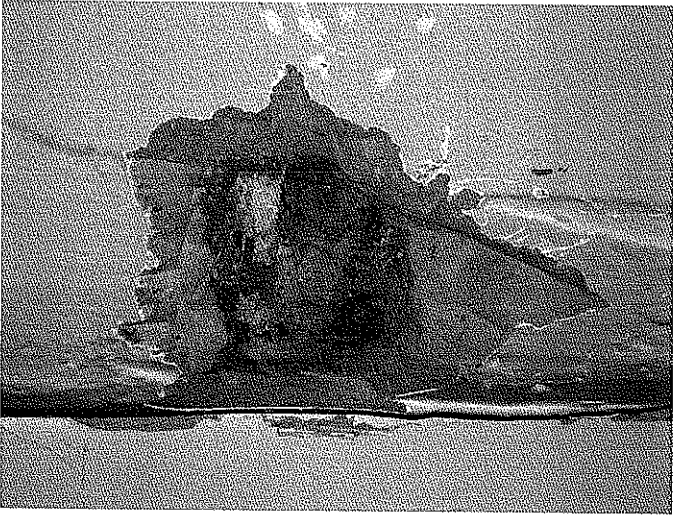


Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15



Plate 16

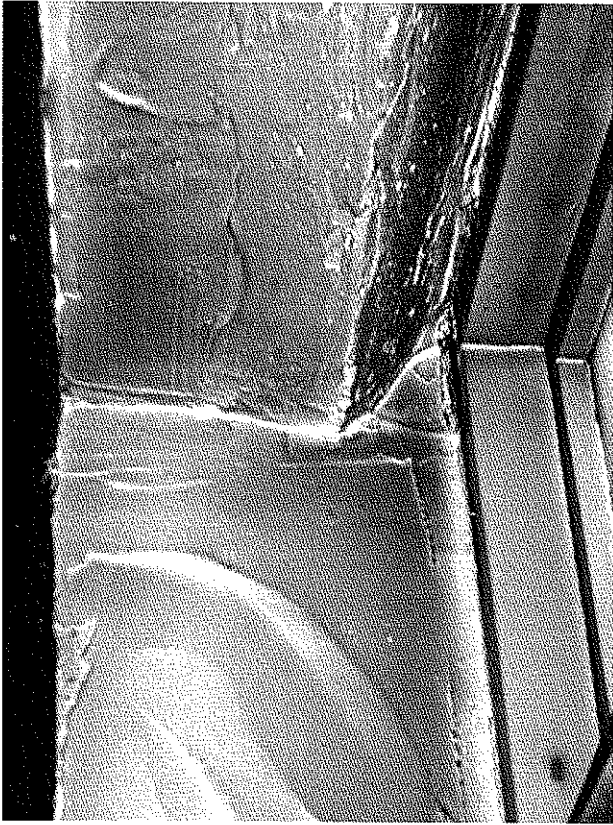


Plate 17

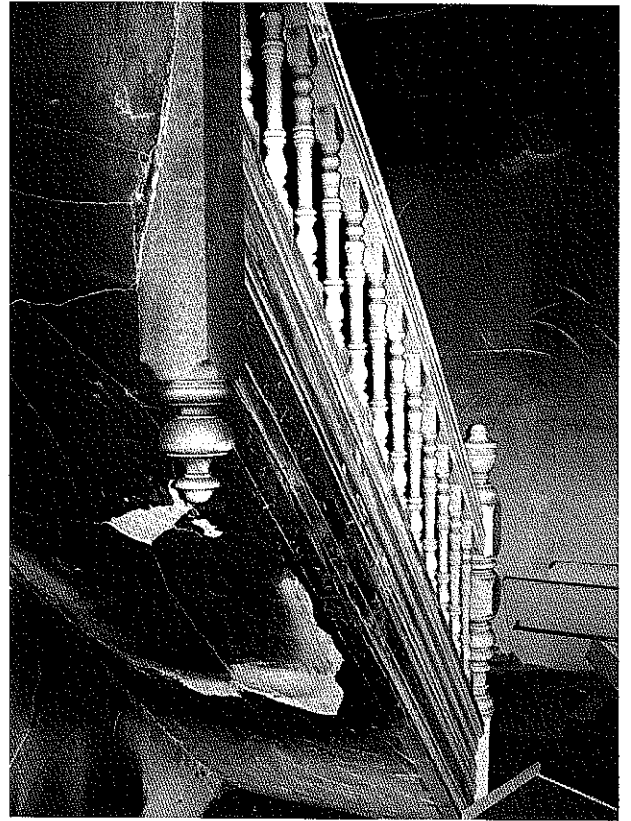


Plate 18

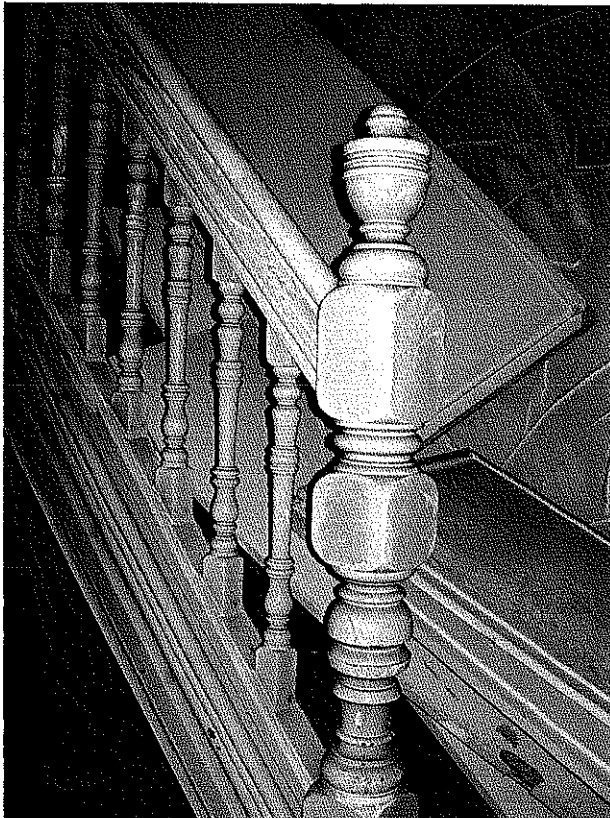


Plate 19



Plate 20



Plate 21



Plate 22

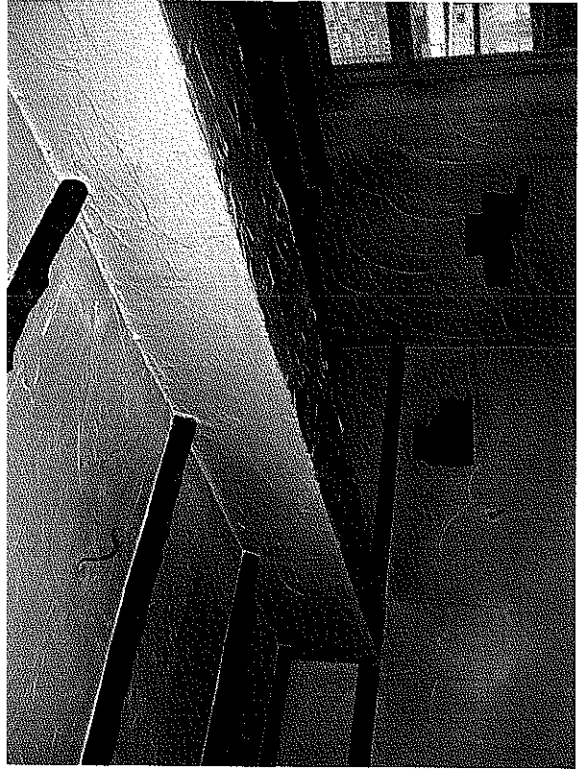


Plate 23

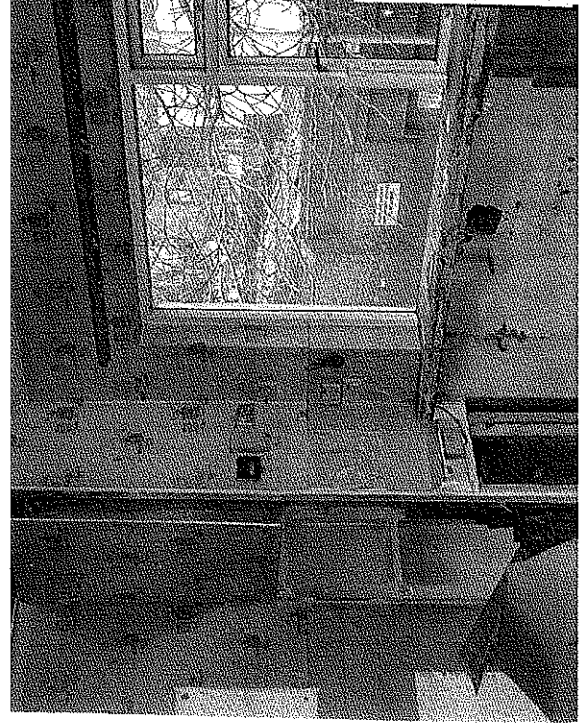


Plate 24

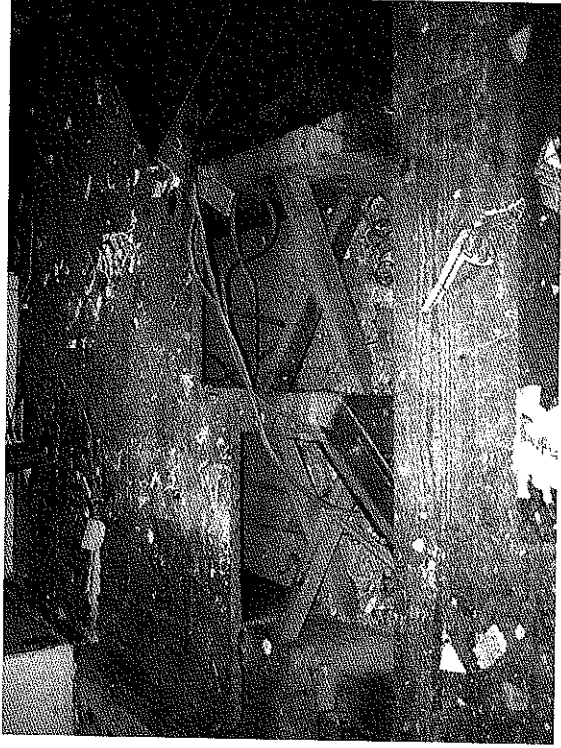


Plate 26



Plate 27



Plate 25