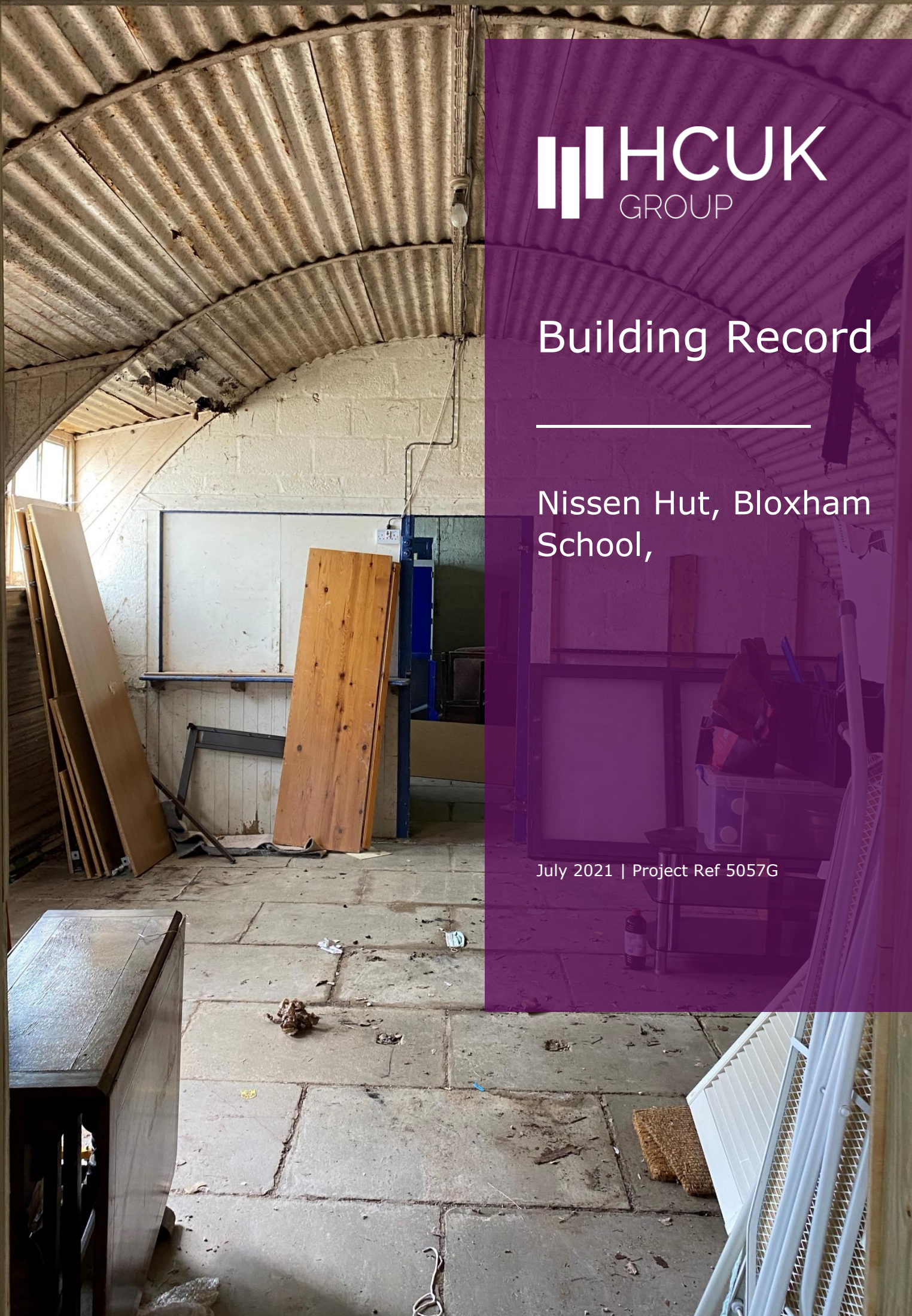




Building Record

Nissen Hut, Bloxham
School,

July 2021 | Project Ref 5057G



HCUK Group is a multi-disciplinary environmental practice offering expert advice in archaeology, heritage, landscape, arboriculture, and planning. It began life in 2010 as Heritage Collective LLP, before becoming Heritage Collective UK Limited in 2014. In the coming years diversification saw the addition of Archaeology Collective, Landscape Collective and Planning Collective, before all strands came together to be branded under a single umbrella: HCUK Group, based on the acronym for the original company. A home working company since the beginning, we are pleased to employ a talented workforce of consultants and support staff, who are on hand to advise our clients.



OASIS ID - archaeol34-426185

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Building Record has been prepared by HCUK Group on behalf of Bloxham School. It presents the results of a high level descriptive and photographic record of a Nissen Hut on the Bloxham School site, which is proposed for removal under application no. 21/01779/F.

1.2 The Nissen Hut in question is located on an area of gravel used for Bloxham School for parking and accessed from Courtington Lane, Bloxham, Oxfordshire, OX15 4PQ.

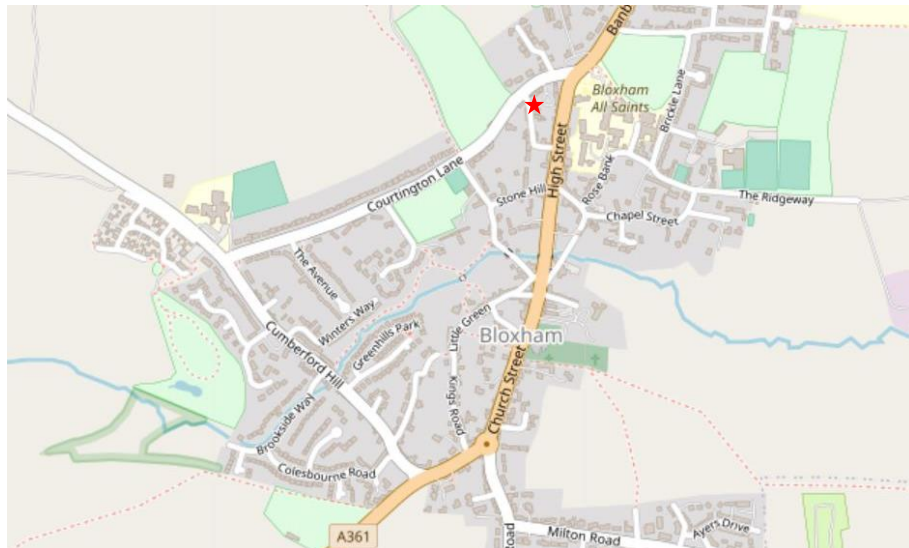


Figure 1: Site location within Bloxham (OpenStreetMap data)



Figure 2: Aerial view showing site context in more detail.(Google)

The Context

1.3 Consultation on application 21/01779/F included a response from Cherwell District Council (CDC, the decision making authority) conservation officer as follows:

"There are no objections to the demolition of the Nissen Hut which is in very poor condition and any repair programme would substantially remove or alter historic fabric.

It is, however, recommended that a basic record is taken of the building and is incorporated on the Historic Environment Record for the county. This should include a brief history and development, written description and photograph record and should be a condition of any consent for demolition." (Jenny Ballinger, conservation officer, 17.06.21)

1.4 A recording condition was recommended but following liaison with CDC officers it was agreed that an extension of time would be allowed in order that the required building record could be compiled and submitted as part of the application documents, thus avoiding the need for a pre-commencement condition.

1.5 This report provides the results of the record and the relevant background history. The record is also in accordance with paragraph 205 of the National Planning Policy Framework (June 2021 revision) which states:

"205. Local planning authorities should require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible 69 . However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted."

1.6 The site address is Courtington Lane, Bloxham, Oxfordshire, OX15 4PQ located at national grid reference SP 42998 36177.

1.7 The report will be deposited with the local authority and with the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) via the OASIS system (**OASIS ID - archaeol34-426185**).

Methodology and Constraints

1.8 The historic building record has been carried out in line with the guidance set down in 'Understanding Historic Buildings, a Guide to Good Recording Practice' Historic England, 2016. The record equates to a Level 2 record. This level of record is described within that document as follows:

"This is a descriptive record, made in similar circumstances to Level 1 but when more information is needed. It may be made of a building which is judged not to require a more detailed record, or it may serve to gather data for a wider project. Both the exterior and interior of the building will be seen, described and photographed. The examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based. A plan and sometimes other drawings may be made but the drawn record will normally not be comprehensive and may be tailored to the scope of a wider project." (Historic England 2016, Section 5.3, p.26)

1.9 Photography was taken on a Nikon D500 Single lens Reflex Camera with high resolution filesize save. The output files were JPEG. The photographs have not been manipulated at all and the camera's zoom lens was not utilised. A standard meter and 0.5m scale were included in photographs of features where relevant.

1.10 The recording was carried out in good clear and dry conditions on 15 July 2021 by Jody O'Reilly of HCUK Group. Jody O'Reilly has an undergraduate degree in Archaeology and a Masters Degree in Buildings Archaeology. All areas of the building except for the rear elevation were fully accessible and the presence of some stored materials within the building did not prevent observation of the building's characteristics, fabric and layout or the compilation of photographs sufficient to preserve the building's status and condition prior to its removal.

2. Historic Background

2.1 Nissen huts were developed during the First World War by Major Peter Norman Nissen of the 29th Company, Royal Engineers. Following a prototype phase the building design was patented in 1916 and at least 100,000 were produced in World War 1.¹ For this work he was promoted to Colonel, awarded the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) and paid royalties on the sale of huts after the war.

2.2 Nissen Huts came in three sizes: 16ft, 24ft and 30ft (width). The 16ft span usually had 6 bays, making an overall length of 36ft 6 ½ inches, though due to the design and construction they could be made up of any number of bays. They were cheap and easy to put up. A 16ft hut could be put up in 6 hours by 4 men. The record is 1 hour and 27 minutes. Many huts were used as temporary housing after the Second World War.²

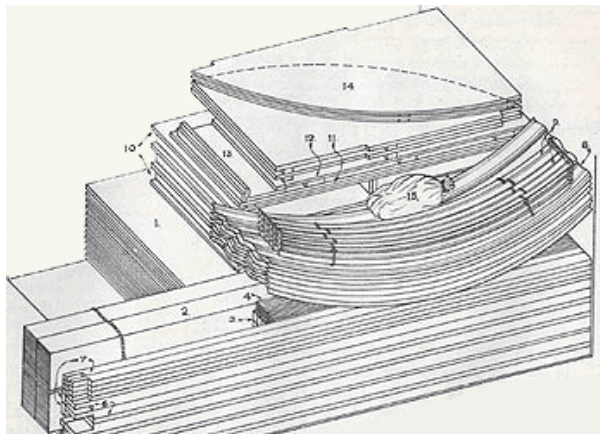


Figure 3: How a Nissen hut packs down for transport. (www.Nissens.co.uk/)

2.3 The Nissen hut deflected bomb blasts and shrapnel because of its semi-circular shape and sturdy corrugated steel shell and for this reason was used for housing troops during WWI. The efficiency of the design also extended to its transport which could be packed down to fit on a standard 3 ton truck removing the need for multiple transports for a single structure. Initial designs were timber lined, but this

¹ Wikipedia citing: McCosh, F. 1997 *Nissen of the Huts: A biography of Lt Col. Peter Nissen, DSO*. Bourne End: B D Publishing

² <https://coam.org.uk/museum-buckinghamshire/historic-buildings/sewell-Nissen-hut><https://coam.org.uk/museum-buckinghamshire/historic-buildings/sewell-Nissen-hut/>.

was quickly changed to a second inner corrugated shell after stoves installed for heating the spaces would ignite the timber lining.

2.4 In 1939 the design was revisited by the then Nissen Buildings Limited with a slightly wider base and the introduction of windows. This form is the most widely seen today. At the outbreak of the Second world War the company waived its patent rights enabling war time mass production from 1939 on.³

2.5 Nissen huts are included on the statutory Register of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest but usually as part of a complex of other military buildings that reflect to a high degree of survival and integrity their use within a military context. They were mass produced structures throughout the war eras and used for a huge range of purposes. Examples included on the statutory list are:

- Nissen Hut known as building 171 at Duxford Air base, South Cambridgeshire (List UID: 1461305). Grade II. Duxford is identified as “*the finest and best-preserved example of a fighter base representative of the period up to 1945 in Britain*” (Historic England List Description) and the Nissen Hut is designated as a complete and almost unaltered example in its original context and as part of an important group.
- Watch Office And Operations Room At Alconbury Airfield (List UID: 1461305). Grade II. This Nissen hut was added to an earlier building to provide a crew briefing room.
- As part of a group of structures and buildings with the Scheduled Monument at World War II Heavy Anti-aircraft gun site (P12) at Monument Farm, Hampshire (List UID: 1020960).

Nissen Hut at Bloxham School

2.6 The Nissen hut on its current location first appears on mapping in 1972. Prior to that the site was an area of open ground that 19th century maps suggest was orchard or garden.

2.7 The site is thought to have been historically associated with a cottage known as Merton Cottage or with a farmstead associated with the building known as Hillside.

³ <https://Nissens.co.uk/>

Merton Cottage and Hillside form the south and northern ends (respectively of a row of buildings fronting a small green area at the northern end of the High Street. Merton Cottage was purchased by Bloxham School in 1917 to provide extra dormitory accommodation.⁴ Hillside was sold to the School in 1947. The building was in use as a bursar's office by the 1970s alongside continuing accommodation and in 1973 it housed the first two female students admitted to the school.

2.8

Today Hillside forms staff accommodation and Merton cottage and its extensions are a day house for pupils. The area to the rear has long been in use as additional car parking for the school with a low building on the northern edge of the area used by the CCF (Combined Cadet Force).



Figure 4: 1881 six inch to one mile map edition showing site location as orchard.



Figure 5: six inch to one mile map edition surveyed from 1938 but published in 1951. The site has gained its current shape but the Nissen hut is not present. They are not shown opposite Palmer House either.

⁴ Smith, 1978 'A History of Bloxham 1870-1978', p.97



Figure 6: 1935 aerial view showing Bloxham School, the future location of the Nissen hut and open fields beyond Palmer House (Historic England collections ref: EPW044181)

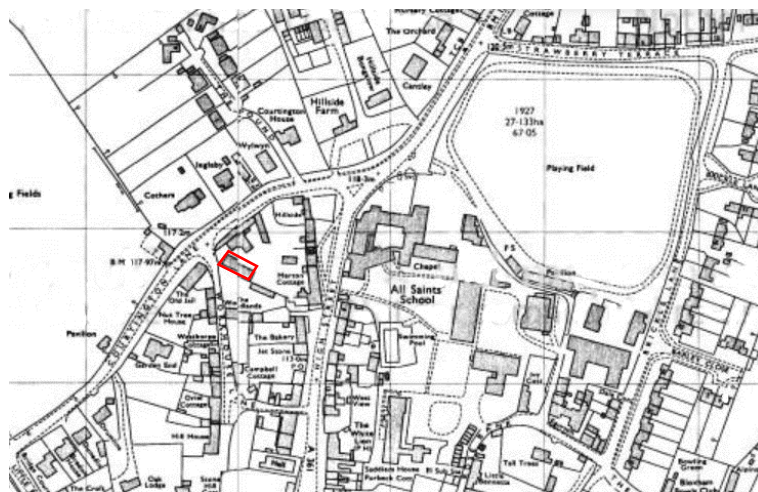


Figure 7: 1972 1: 2,500 map extract. Nissen hut in place along with CCF building to the north

2.9

Little specific history of the Nissen Hut’s location prior to being located on this site is known but a reference in Smith’s history of the school states that during the war Palmer House, originally the school’s infirmary located on the far north eastern corner of the main campus, was used by the military. Smith states:

“In 1941, for instance, boys cycled to Tadmerton to see British and American tanks and the artillery troop at Palmer House and in the Nissen huts opposite wheeled out its guns and wireless equipment for inspection on the field” (Smith, B, 1978 ‘A History of Bloxham School’ page 131 Published by the Old Bloxhamist Society)

- 2.10** This suggests that there were multiple Nissen huts located east of the school in 1941 and that in the post war period, at an as yet unknown date but by 1972 this Nissen hut was relocated to its current location. They do not appear in a series of aerial photographs taken in 1935, this is prior to the revised design of the Nissen hut in 1939 and they are not shown opposite Palmer House, then still open countryside. They are also not shown on the 1951 published map edition (Figure 5) however as military buildings they may have been deliberately left off the map to avoid enemy identification of home defences.
- 2.11** Nissen huts of this type were often constructed in six bays. The current hut is 12 bays long and it is possible that it is actually formed from two original huts located close to Palmer house joined together to form a larger single structure on the present site.

3. Description and photographic record

Dimensions and materials

- 3.1** The Nissen hut comprises 12 bays of the standard 6 foot length giving an overall length of 22m or 72 feet. The arc is 4.98m wide, the standard 16 foot width. The internal height is nearly 3m or just under 10 foot. The building is aligned west north west to east south east with the entrance on the northern front. For the purposes of description and identification the building will be described with an east to west alignment and entrance at the north.
- 3.2** The construction is absolutely standard to the Nissen hut type. A 'T' section of steel with regular eyelets is bolted in to timber sills. Horizontal purlins run along the building fixed to the frame with hook bolts – a distinctive and unique feature of Nissen Hut construction. The inner corrugated skin sits into the 'T' section. The outer skin is fixed to the timber purlins.
- 3.3** The hut features a series of integral windows which comprise timber frames with flat roofs set into single bays, the sides are timber boarded. The windows are casements, top hinged upper lights, with Georgian wired glass in both square and hexagonal wire format.
- 3.4** Two entrances are located on the north elevation. A single door gives entry into the southern part of the building which is divided by concrete block walls into an entrance lobby and then three smaller rooms. This southern portion occupies five of the structural bays. A double door is located in the centre and a wider door is also located in the northern gable.
- 3.5** The northern end of the building was originally (in this location) a single open space of 7 bays (42 feet) long. Later a timber partition has been inserted with a central door dividing into a slightly larger four bay northern room and narrower three bay central room with a double entrance door.
- 3.6** The southern rooms defined by concrete block walls have similar joinery in a standard mid-20th century style, doors with horizontal panels, plain architraves and

skirting boards. There is a single door and serving hatch between the northern of these smaller rooms and the main open space.

3.7

The floor of the hut appears to be relatively recent concrete slab tiles that stand up slightly proud of the sill beams.

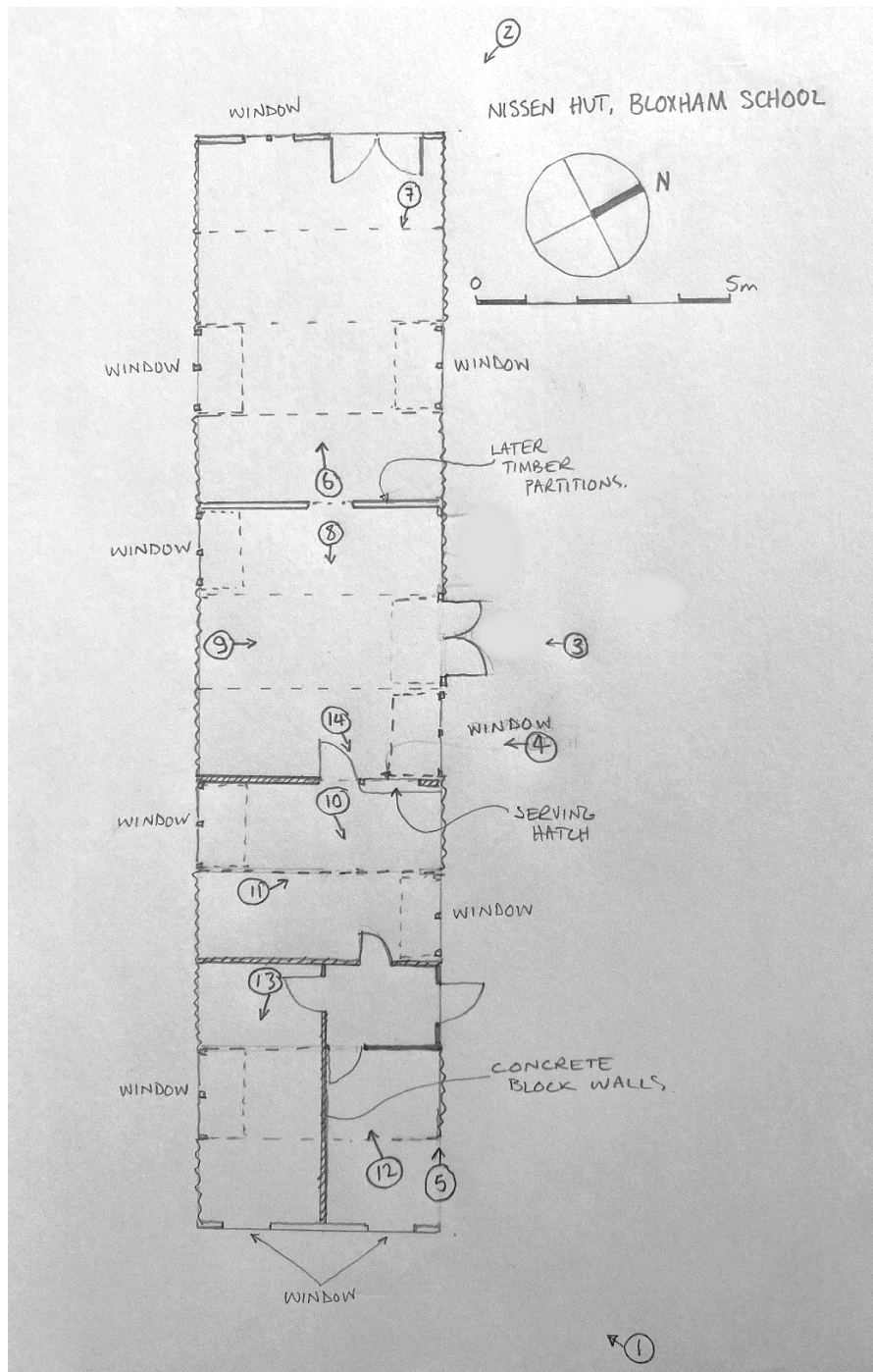


Figure 8: Schematic plan of the building with location of photographs

Photographic Record

3.8 The following images and captions illustrate the building and provide a record of its appearance at the time of the record on 15 July 2021. The direction in which the photograph was taken is indicated within each image caption, N = north, E -East and so on. Scales of 1m and 0.5m are used where appropriate.



1: The Nissen hut in its context with overgrown eastern elevation. W



2: Nissen hut from the west looking at the western elevation and showing the projecting dormers. E



3: The central entrance and adjacent window.



4: Detail of window, standard across the building.



5: Construction detail of sill plate, iron hoop and bolt.



6: Interior of the larger western room. W



7: The larger northern room looking towards the inserted timber partition. Opposed windows. E



8: Central room looking towards older concrete block wall with central door and serving hatch. E



9: Central room looking towards double door entrance. N



10: Central room, lockers block historic door in concrete block wall. NE



11: Reverse of serving hatch with contemporary shelving. NW



12: One of three smaller rooms at the eastern end of the building, viewed through a collapsed section of wall. Note mid-20th century four panel door.



13: South eastern of three small rooms at eastern end of the building. Note plank construction of the window sides and smaller four pane window in the end elevation. SE



14: Historic light switches with later added modern socket in the central part of the building.

4. Bibliography

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<https://britainfromabove.org.uk/>

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