Stable Block and Annexe, Burwalls House Bridge Road, Abbot's Leigh, North Somerset

Standing Building Recording

(NGR ST 56303 72829)



By Potter, K. & Dias, S.

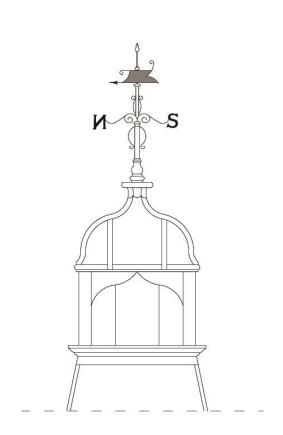
Avon Archaeology Limited Bristol, December 2013



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ABSTRACT

The following report details the results of a historic survey of a set of buildings known as "The Stable Block and Annex", located at Burwalls House, Bridge Road, Abbot's Leigh, North Somerset, centred on NGR ST 56303 72829. The project was commissioned to inform the planning process ahead of an application to develop the Burwalls site. The county archaeologist for North Somerset requested, as part of the pre-planning process, that the former stable block and its attached structures be recorded in accordance with English Heritage Level II specifications (English Heritage, 2006) prior to demolition and refurbishment.

Burwalls has always lain within the ancient parish of Long Ashton, in Somerset, albeit very close to its eastern boundary. The site encompasses a very large, detached late 19th century house, associated landscaped grounds, and other buildings, including the former stable block and a small lodge house. The main house is listed at Grade II level, with the stable and lodge also listed by virtue of being within the curtilage of the main building. The Stable Block was constructed after the main house, in the late 19th or early 20th century, and can be shown from historical records to be of more than one phase, an early alteration being the addition of a garage with inspection pit, that was added in or shortly after 1905.

Further alterations to the Stable Block were made throughout the 20th century, including the construction of the Student Accommodation Block (annex building) on its north side, which also entailed the conversion of the original Stable Block, also for student accommodation. Changes, such as re-rendering and painting were also undertaken. The buildings were abandoned in recent years and are set for partial demolition and restructuring in 2014, on the completion of the present recording exercise.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Avon Archaeology Limited wishes to acknowledge the assistance given by the following in the production of this report: Rebecca Collins, of GVA (Commercial Property Consultants) and Vince Russett, the Archaeological Planning Officer of North Somerset Council.

NOTES

Avon Archaeology Limited have taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence. However, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

PROJECT HEALTH AND SAFETY STATEMENT

In all matters pertaining to this fieldwork project, Health and Safety has taken priority over all archaeological concerns. All archaeological fieldwork has been undertaken in accordance with the guidelines set out by the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (SCAUM 2002, Health and Safety in Field Archaeology) and also the relevant requirements set out in Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 1994 (Health and Safety Commission 1994) and in accordance with the Avon Archaeology Limited Health and Safety Policy (AAL 2013), which was drafted in collaboration with Safety Horizon South West.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following report details the results of a historic building survey of a set of buildings known as "The Stable Block and Annex", located at Burwalls House, Bridge Road, Abbot's Leigh, North Somerset, centred on NGR ST 56303 72829 (**Figures 1** and **2**). The project was commissioned by GVA (Commercial Property Consultants) in accordance with the stipulations of the County Archaeologist for North Somerset, who requested that the buildings were recorded in accordance with English Heritage Level II specifications (English Heritage, 2006) before partial demolition and refurbishment.

The building recording was undertaken in one single stage, with the identification of all major interior and exterior features. Along with an extensive photographic survey, detailed descriptions of the building's features were also undertaken, as well as a simplified phasing layout of the construction.

A Historic Environment Record entry, detailing the project, will be placed in the North Somerset Historic Environment Record. A paper archive of the project will be retained at the offices of Avon Archaeology Limited and will be made available for public access upon request.

2. **METHODOLOGY**

The standing structures affected by the development were recorded prior to any demolition or construction works, by means of written notes, scale drawings, and colour digital photographs. The record was made in accordance with English Heritage Level II specifications (English Heritage, 2006). A metric survey was undertaken using hand measurements and a digital total station, the data from which was related to existing survey drawings. The fieldwork was conducted in accordance with methodologies outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation (Potter, 2013) produced in response to a brief issued by Vince Russett, of North Somerset Council.

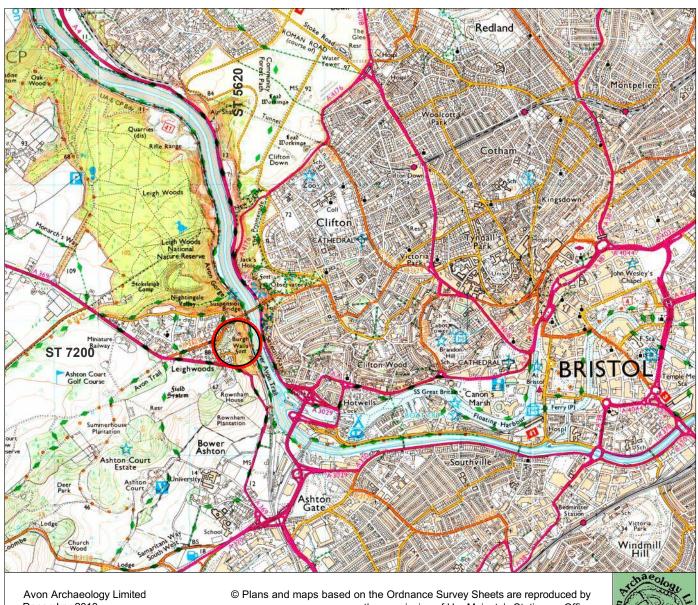


Figure 1





Location of the Study Area Grid lines at 1 km intervals (extract from OS 1:25 000)



December 2013

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Figure 2



Site Location Plan and Boundary of the Study Area outlined in red



The main criteria for English Heritage Level II building recording are set out in *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practice*, English Heritage, Swindon, April 2006, as follows:

"[...] This is a descriptive record, made in circumstances similar to those in Level I but when more information is needed. It may be made of a building which is judged not to require any fuller record, or it may serve to gather data for a wider project. Both the exterior and the interior will be viewed, described and photographed. The record will present conclusions regarding the building's development and use, but will not discuss in detail the evidence on which these conclusions are 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. A Level II record will typically consist of: drawings, sometimes 1, sometimes one or more of 2-7; photography, 1, 2, 4; written record, 1-3, 6. [...]". (English Heritage, 2006, p. 14).

The technical records were based on stratigraphic principles, and included analyses of the different features present at the Stable Block and annexed buildings. All the information regarding archaeological features was recorded on field documents (context record sheets) produced and compiled by Avon Archaeology Limited, in addition to a detailed photographic survey.

Access to the outer walls was good – except for the northern elevations, which were obscured by undergrowth. The data recovered was used to produce the scaled phase plans at the back of the report.



3. THE SITE SETTING: HISTORICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The Burwalls estate encompasses a large, late 19th century house with associated landscaped grounds, containing ancillary buildings, covering 1.8 hectares. The main house is Grade II listed, as are the Stable Block and Annex Building, by virtue of their being considered to lie within the curtilage of the main building. The site is bounded on its south and southwestern sides by Burwalls Road, to the northwest by Bridge Road, and along its entire eastern side by the very steep, rocky and heavily wooded slopes which form the western side of the Avon Gorge.

From a geological perspective, the study site is located on one of the highest parts of the Avon Gorge, sitting atop Clifton Down Limestone, a sub-division of the main Carboniferous Limestone series, which outcrops extensively in a wide band, running much further to the southwest and northeast. The Clifton Down Limestone was formed from deposits laid down in the middle part of the Lower Carboniferous, and its nature as a very hard, crystalline rock, although prone to splintering and heavily bedded, makes it extremely resistant to erosion. Burwalls House itself lies at a height of about 82 to 83 m aOD. The buildings which are the focus of this survey lie towards the southern extent of the Burwalls estate, where the level drops to around 65 m aOD.

Burwalls was the subject of an archaeological desk-based assessment (Corcos 2013) undertaken by Avon Archaeology Limited, as part of the pre-planning process for the same development for which this report was commissioned. The following historical background is, largely, distilled from that document.

Historically, the site lay in the parish of Long Ashton, in the Hundred of Hartcliff and Bedminster. There is no surviving pre-Conquest record of Long Ashton, but that it was a fully-bounded and very well established estate by the late Anglo-Saxon period, at the very latest, there can be little doubt. So much is clear from the pages of Domesday Book (1086), where the estate, then held by the Bishop of Coutances, is called *Estune, 'the farmstead/estate/settlement where ash trees grow'*. The size of the estate, as it was recorded in the early post-Conquest period, finds direct reflection in its large size at the time of the tithe survey in the mid-19th century, when the parish extended to no fewer than 4.237 acres.



On the northern side of Nightingale Valley, a small estate called *Leigh* is known to have been in existence before the Norman Conquest, because it is mentioned in Domesday Book. From the mid-12th century, this estate was in the hands of St Augustine's Abbey (Bristol). From this ownership it eventually became known as Abbot's Leigh. Burwalls itself did not come into the hands of the Smyth family until 1605, where it then remained for just over 340 years. In 1621, the site was described as "[...] one close of pasture or woodey grounde called Burwalls containing eight acres more or less situated at the east end of Aishton Doune [...]" (Way, 1913, 78-79).

It looks as though the Burwalls site remained pretty much intact until well into the 19th century, but a defining moment came in the late 1820's with the construction of a new road on the Somerset side of the Avon Gorge, to serve the proposed new Suspension Bridge – this is now Bridge Road. The potential for residential development created by the new bridge resulted in the progressive selling of the surrounding land plots. Three of those plots were sold to Joseph Leech, a wealthy Bristol newspaper proprietor, between 1871 and 1875. Leech constructed Burwalls House on its present site, and the process of its construction, and most especially the landscaping of its grounds, can be presumed to have wrought serious damage on part of a substantial Iron Age enclosure (NSHER 43498) located within its boundary. Leech died in 1893, and in 1894, the house and its grounds passed into the hands of the Wills tobacco dynasty. It was they who first built the Stable Block (at some unknown date at the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century - **Phase 1**), which they modified in 1905, to include a garage and car inspection pit (**Phase 2**).

A sale catalogue for the house and its grounds, published in 1946, gives a detailed verbal description of the Stable Block as it was at that time, before any of the more modern additions were made. These additions comprised the Annex Building to the north, and general reorganisations of the layout throughout the second part of the 20th century (during the 1970s and 1980s), after the property was bought by the University of Bristol in 1947 (**Phase 3**). The rectangular building to the east of the Stable Block was added at this point (**Phase 4**), to house the heating and water devices for the main adjacent structures.



4. STANDING BUILDING RECORDING

The following text describes the building's main structural phases in chronological order. Measurements and dimensions can be taken from the scaled plans at the back of the report and are not included within the body of the text, unless directly necessary.

The buildings are described by phase as a group, rather than separately, thus emphasising their evolution as a coherent set.

The buildings at Burwalls, including those which form the subject of this survey, are described, in some detail, in a Heritage Assessment produced for Bristol University by Asset Heritage Consulting (AHC 2012). The descriptive text that follows expands upon that work but, in essence, the core descriptions are the same.

PHASE 1 – Late 19th/early 20th century

Joseph Leech constructed Burwalls House, the main house located at the highest part of the property, on its present site around the late 1870s and 1880s. Leech died in 1893, after which the house and its grounds passed to the Wills tobacco dynasty and it was the Wills family who constructed the Stable Block.

The Stable Block (**Building 3**), seems to have been built in the last decade of the 19th century or the first few years of the 20th (**Phase 1**). It originally served as a stable with attached domestic accommodation, possibly housing service staff for the Burwalls estate (AHC 2012).

The Stable Block is characterised by the use of simple but good quality construction materials, utilising, particularly for a building of its utilitarian function, high quality building techniques. It is built from solid Victorian brickwork laid in *Flemish* bond, forming a *U* shaped plan. It has pitched roofs covered by flat clay tiles. Both the south and north elevations (**Figures 6, 7** and **8**) present a pair of tile-hung gables. In the main, the fittings of the doors and windows are later 20th century replacements (where not actually later



additions). However, it is the authors' opinion that both the bay windows, present in the gable ends of the building, and the dormer windows in the roof, have their original frames, or if not that they reflect closely the style of the originals (**Plates 1** and **2**).



Plates 1 & 2 – Partial view of the north and west facing elevations of the 19th century Stable Block.



Survey of the interior of the Stable Block provided little opportunity to dissect and phase the features present as, in the main, the walls and structures were clad with modern render, wallpaper and timber obstructions etc. Blocked fireplaces were noted within the rooms at the western end of the Stable Block at both ground floor and first floor level (Plates 3, 18 and 19, Figures 3 and 4). They correspond to three chimneys that are visible from the exterior of the building (Plates 1 and 2). The fact that all the fireplaces are situated at the western end of the Stable Block is an indication that this was where the domestic accommodation of the original building was located. The wooden fire surrounds are decorated with moulding depicting small flowers tied with bows.

The timber stairs (**Plate 4**) although very plain, are decorated with stick balusters, crowned by a square section handrail and square newels with ball finials, and may well be of late 19th or early 20th century origin.



The roof structure was exposed in a hole in the ceiling, at the eastern end of the Stable Block, and displayed characteristics that one would expect in a 19th century building, but it was evident that much of it had been replaced in more recent years.



Plates 3 & 4 – Partial view of a 19th century fireplace in one of the ground floor rooms. Detail of staircase with wooden handrail at the west of the Stable Block.



PHASE 2 – Early 19th Century, circa 1905

Phase 2 corresponds to the 1905 extension of the Stable Block (**Building 3**), to the south, when a flat roofed garage building was added. The garage is now visible only in the eastern elevation of the Stable Block. (**Figure 6**). Surviving building plans (**Plate 5**) show that it was designed as a car garage, and included a car inspection pit, which was highly uncommon in the first decade of the 20th century.

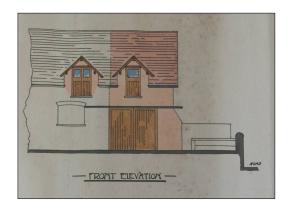
A sale catalogue for the house and its grounds, published in 1946, gives a detailed verbal description of the Stable Block as it was at that time, before any of the more modern additions were made. In view of this, it seems worth quoting in full here:

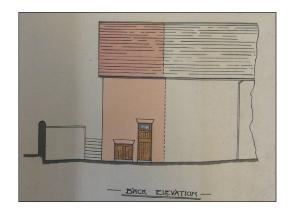
"[...] Close by is the well-built brick original coach-house, garage and stable block, comprising:- Open Yard in front and glazed covered washing yard, heated garage for 3 cars

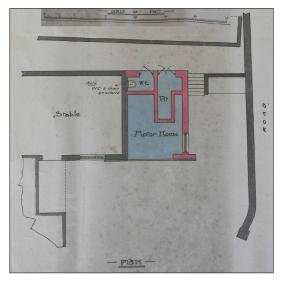


with pit, second heated garage for one car with pit, expensively fitted stabling of 3 stalls and 2 Loose Boxes, Harness Room with boiler, Chauffeur's Cottage, containing sitting room, parlour with modern tiled grate, scullery and sink, larder, outside W.C. Upstairs are three bedrooms, bathroom with gas boiler and W.C. Electricity, Gas and Water laid on.

Over these Garages (but approached from the rear) is a bothy or stableman's rooms, being self-contained flat or cottage, containing living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom with gas boiler and W.C. Adjoining and communicating are large store-rooms or Lofts, which could readily be added to the living accommodation if required [...]" (BRO 39879, unpaginated).







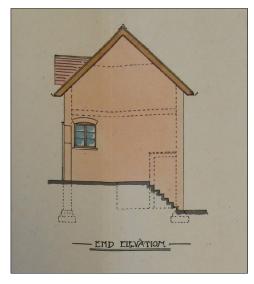


Plate 5 – Extracts from the *Plans of Buildings submitted for approval, 1905. Long Ashton.* D/R/lo 22/1/1. Somerset Record Office.

The presence of two car servicing pits might not otherwise be suspected, and from the scale on the drawing it is clear that the one shown in the building control plan of 1905, already referred to, is that described here as the 'second heated garage for one car with



pit'. The presence of early features related to the motor car offer an extremely interesting example of a building directly reflecting a defining social and economic development within its very fabric, catching, as it does, the turning point when horse-drawn transport began to be replaced by automotive transport.

Doubtless the stables would have continued in use for their originally intended purpose for many years afterwards, as riding remained an extremely popular leisure and sporting pursuit for those who could afford it; but the addition of the garage after 1905 clearly demonstrates that, as might be expected, the enormously wealthy Wills family would have been amongst the earliest adopters of, and therefore trend-setters for, the new technology in the local area.

The car garage was most recently given to use as a Common Room but has retained some of its original features. In particular the east façade (**Figure 9**, **Plate 6**) contains what remains of two ground level openings, which provided access to the inspection pit and toilet (see **Plate 5**).





Plates 6 & 7 – Detail of the east façade of the stable block, featuring the 1905 garage. Metal cupola with weathervane on top of the late 19th century Stable Block.



PHASE 3 – 2nd Half of the 20th Century, circa 1970-1980

After World War II, specifically in 1947, the Wills family sold the Burwalls property to the University of Bristol, by whom the property has been recently re-sold for partial redevelopment. In order to provide student accommodation, the university commissioned further phases of construction, which consisted of the Annex building to the north (**Building 2**) –, remodelled and reconstructed progressively throughout the second part of the 20th century (during the 1970s and 1980s) –, as well as the addition of a boiler room at the southeast corner of the Stable Block. (**Figures 8, 9** and **10**).

The Annex building is programmed for demolition. It had a T shaped plan, comprising two floors with an extra third floor at its northern end. It was a solid brickwork building, with simple straight architectural lines, similar to other common contemporary designs. Flooring and roofing, as well as the internal partitions composed entirely of wooden structures, are all characteristically modern, and of no historical or architectural significance. The internal space, on all floors, is divided into symmetrical bedrooms, of approximately $9.5 \, \text{m}^2$, with a set of toilets in the central section of the building.



Plates 8 & 9 – Detail of the east façade main entrance to the Stable Block. Detail of glass roof windows in the metal structure between the two buildings.



Access to the Annex block was through two doors located in its southern and western façades. The western entrance was accessed at the first floor level, by a metal staircase imbedded in the load bearing wall (**Plate 10, Figure 3**). The Annex and the original



Stable Block were connected by a metal framed glass concourse. Its construction entailed the demolition of a small section in the 19th century Stable façade (**Figures 3, 4** and **5**).





Plates 10 & 11 – Detail of the Annex building seen from the northwest. Detail of the Annex building seen from the northwest.

PHASE 4 – Late 20th Century, after 1970-1980

The rectangular building adjacent and to the east of the Stable Block was constructed during the enlargement of the complex in the 1970s and 1980s. The modern brick structure, referred to as **Building 1** (**Figures 3, 11** and **12**) was of *monolithic* rectangular construction, with a flat metal roof. Building 1 contained the heating and water devices for the university accommodation block, and was of little interest from a historical perspective. Its modern architectural style represented something of an anomalous addition to the building complex, which failed to reflect the historic character of the 19th century buildings.



5. **CONCLUSIONS**

The structural evidence grouped under the present survey distinguishes four main phases of development, which probably comprise an undetermined number of construction sub-phases. The earliest stage of construction may be identified in the late 19th or very early 20th century Stable Block which comprises a two storey building with a rectangular, U shaped layout. The fabric of this construction is entirely formed by a regular brick masonry structure, with a timber roof structure above, topped with plain ceramic tiles. The building's second phase can be identified with the 1905 modifications to the southeast section of the Stable Block, which comprised the addition of a garage and car inspection pit.

Phase 3 comprises the new constructions commissioned by Bristol University after the purchase of the property in the late 1940s. These additions, which include the Annex building – built in a T shape plan –, were developed mainly during the 1970s and 1980s, transforming the entire space, including the original Stable Block, into a lodge for student accommodation. Building 1 was added as a part of this development (Phase 4). This building contained the services: water, heating and electrical infrastructures linked to the Stable Block and Annex.

Apart from the main building – the late 19th century Stable Block –, none of the other buildings have any historical significance. In conclusion, the recording exercise at Burwalls established a clear overall narrative for the structural and chronological development of a set of buildings whose first phase of construction and development is consistent with the local vernacular tradition, and whose later phases consist of utilitarian alterations to the original building, and the later construction of modern university accommodation, with services.



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PLATES





Plates 12 & 13 – Detail of service Building 1 seen from the south. Detail of service Building 1 seen from the east.





Plates 14 & 15 - Detail of the building section added in 1905 to the Stable Block. Detail of the tile-hung gables seen on the south façade of the Stable Block.







Plates 16 & 17 – Ground floor flat roof over the south part of the Stable Block. Detail of the wooden roof structure for the Stable Block, seen from the interior at first floor level.





Plates 18 & 19 – Detail of the ground floor chimney in one of the south bedrooms. View from the inside of the tiled gable in one of the first floor bedrooms.







Plates 20 & 21 – Annex building seen from the east, next to one of the building's entrances. Detail of the internal metal staircase in the Annex building.

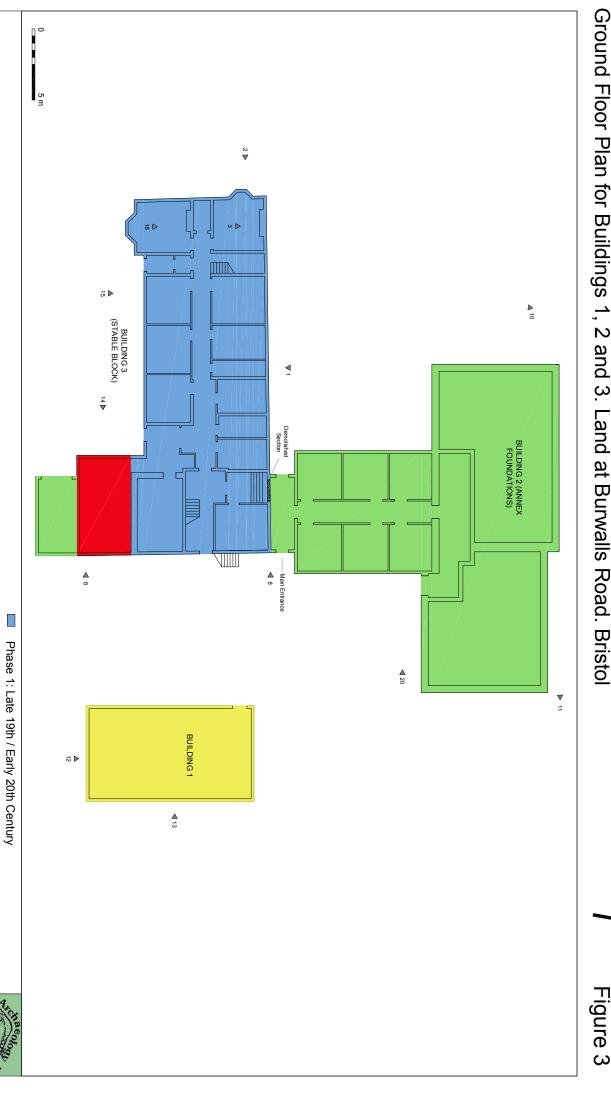




Plates 22 & 23 – Detail of the windows in one of the bedrooms on the second floor of the Annex building. Access corridor on the first floor of the Annex building.



Ground Floor Plan for Buildings 1, 2 and 3. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



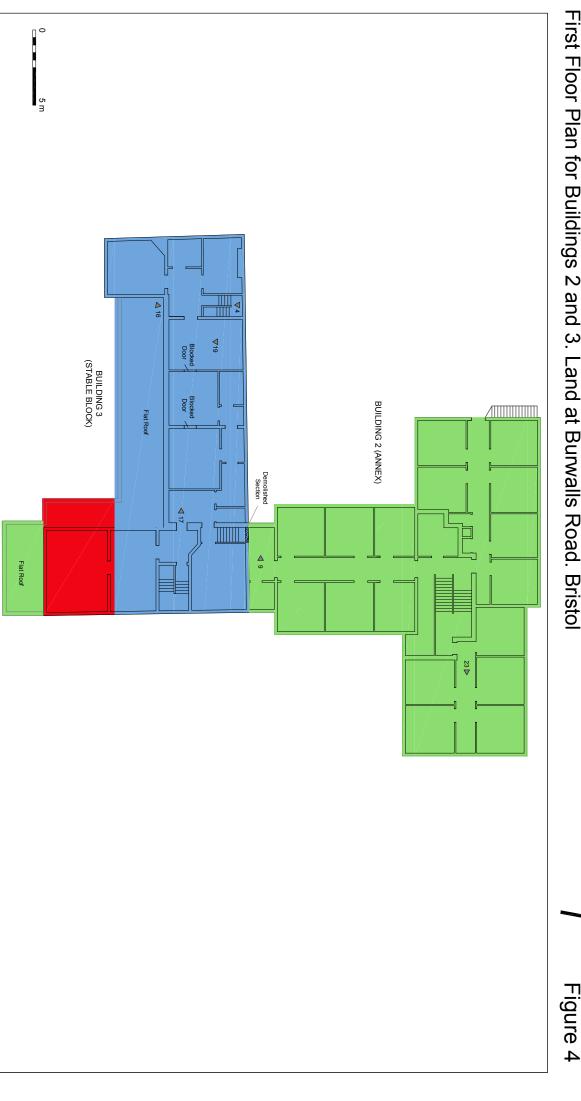
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Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980

Phase 2: Early 20th Century, Circa 1905

First Floor Plan for Buildings 2 and 3. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



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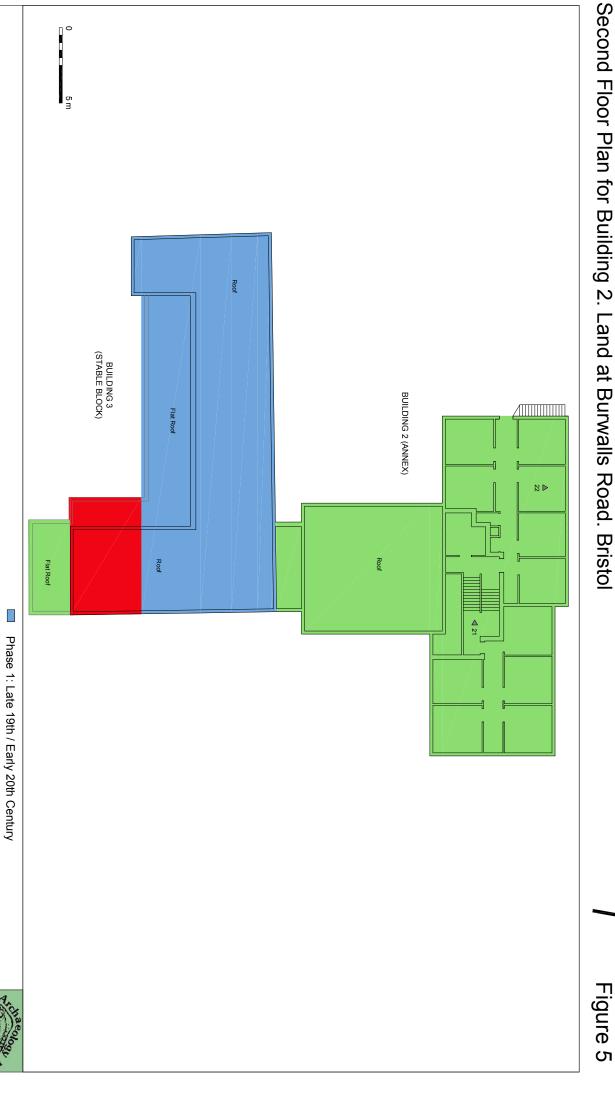
▲ Plates

Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980

Phase 2: Early 20th Century, Circa 1905 Phase 1: Late 19th / Early 20th Century

Second Floor Plan for Building 2. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



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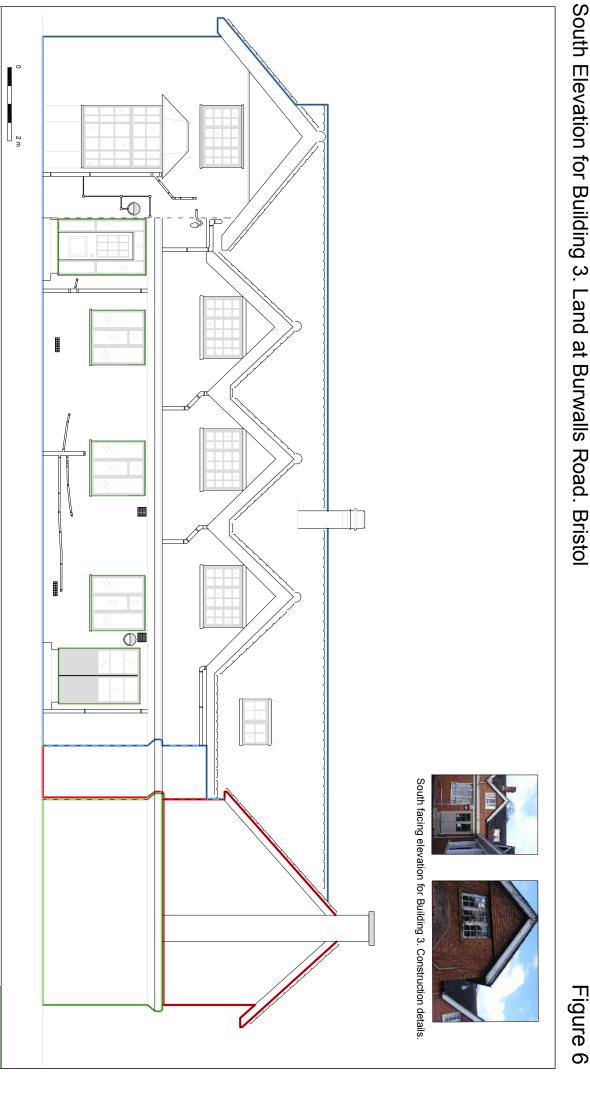
Plates

Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980

Phase 2: Early 20th Century, Circa 1905

South Elevation for Building 3. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



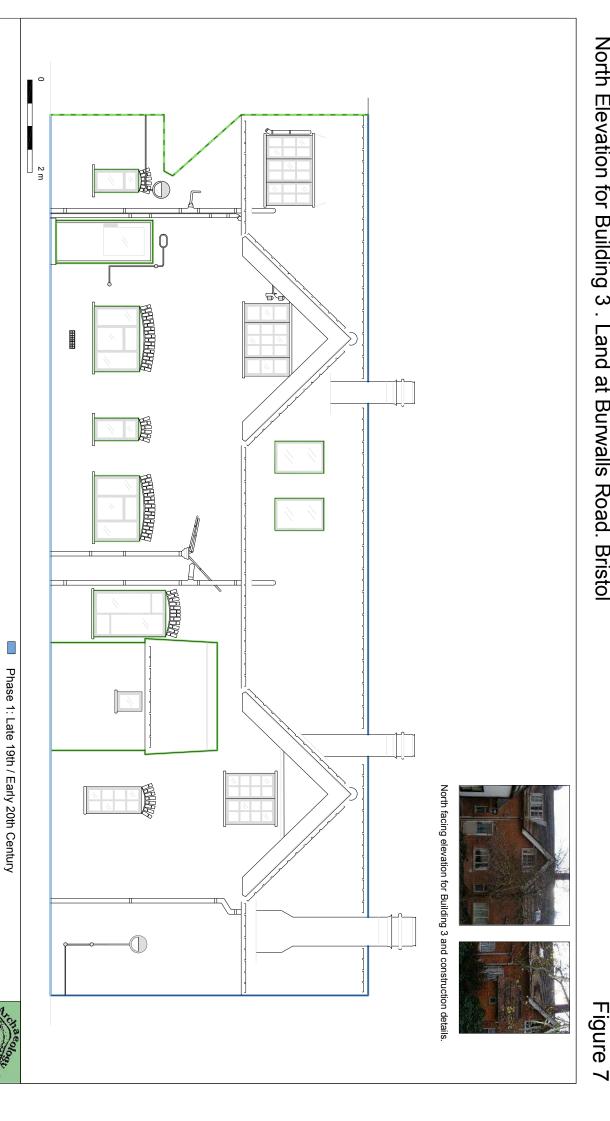
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Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980

Phase 1: Late 19th / Early 20th Century
Phase 2: Early 20th Century, Circa 1905

North Elevation for Building 3. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



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Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

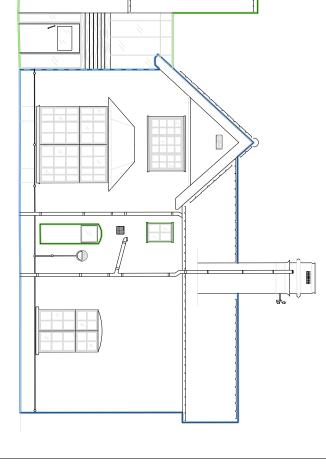
Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980

Phase 2: Early 20th Century, Circa 1905

Western Elevations for Buildings 2 and 3. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



West facing elevations for Building 2 and 3. Construction details.



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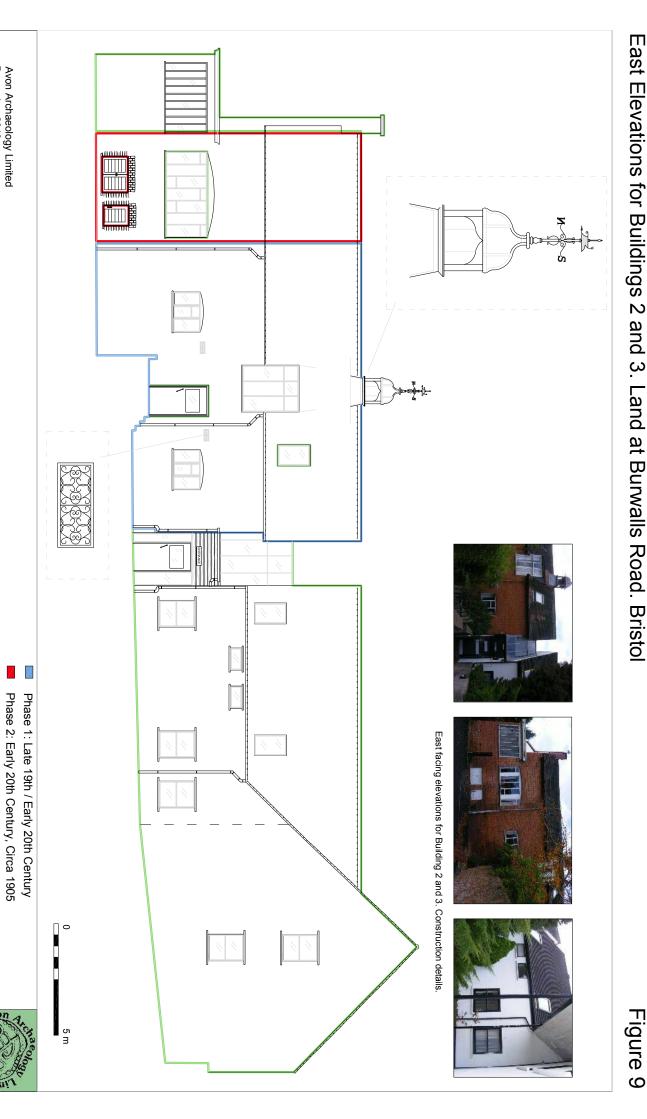


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- Phase 1: Late 19th / Early 20th Century
- Phase 2: Early 20th Century, Circa 1905
- Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980
- Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980



East Elevations for Buildings 2 and 3. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



Avon Archaeology Limited December 2013

Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980

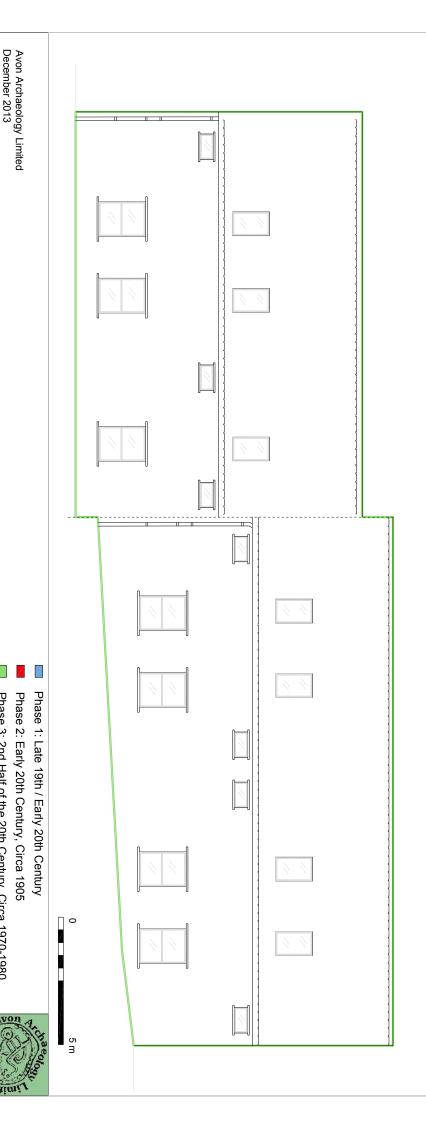
Figure 10

North Elevation for Building 2. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol





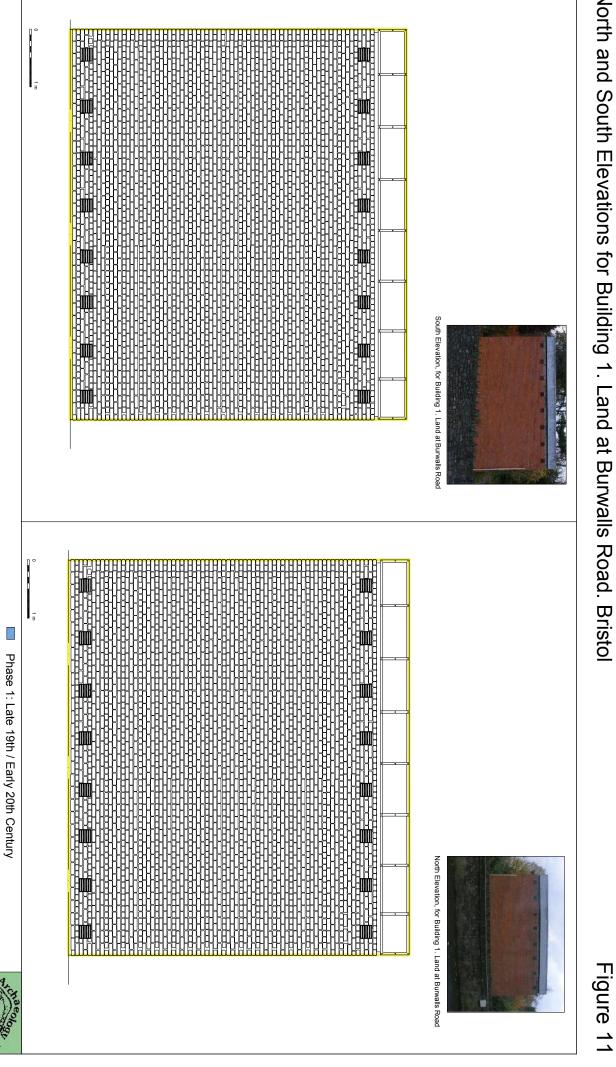
North facing elevation for Building 2 and construction details at its northeastern corner.



Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980

North and South Elevations for Building 1. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



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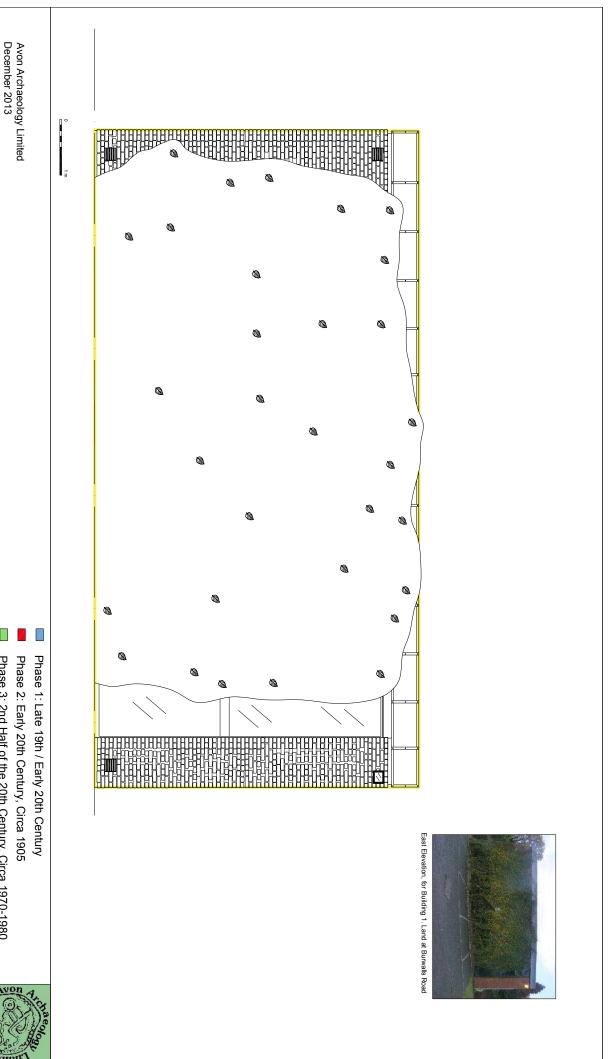
Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980

Phase 2: Early 20th Century, Circa 1905

Figure 12

East Elevation for Building 1. Land at Burwalls Road. Bristol



Phase 4: Late 20th Century, After 1970-1980

Phase 3: 2nd Half of the 20th Century, Circa 1970-1980