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**The Saggar-Making Shop and Drying House
at the former Sharpe's Pottery, Alexandra Road,
Swadlincote, Derbyshire (SK 29833 19507).
An Historic Building Survey**

Richard Hayman



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ULAS Report No 2015-145

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Richard Hayman

for: Sharpes PotteryLtd

Planning application: **20132315**

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| Checked by: |
|  |
| Signed: |
| Date: ...01.10.2015 |
| Name:Patrick Clay. |

University of Leicester

Archaeological Services

University Rd., Leicester, LE1 7RH

Tel: (0116) 252 2848 Fax: (0116) 252 2614

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The Saggar House and Drying Shed at the former Sharpe's Pottery, Alexandra Road, Swadlincote, DE11 9AZ (SK 29833 19507). An Historic Building Survey

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Summary

The Saggar House and Drying Shed at the former Sharpe's Pottery in Swadlincote, Derbyshire, has been the subject of a written, drawn and photographic record, undertaken as a condition for permission to demolish them. The Saggar House and Drying Shed were built in the period 1856-73, part of the expansion of Sharpe's Pottery into sanitary ware manufacture from 1855. In the 1950s a separate Mess Room was built adjoining the Drying Shed. Archive evidence is combined with an analysis of the building to place the building in its historical context and to explain changes to the building over time. Both ranges were altered in the 20th century and the building was adapted to light-industrial use after closure of the pottery in 1968. No internal diagnostic features were recorded.

1. Introduction

The Saggar House and associated Drying Shed at the former Sharpe's Pottery, Alexandra Road, Swadlincote, is part of a complex of buildings on the main site of Sharpe's Pottery, which is bounded on the north and west sides by West Street and Alexandra Road respectively (SK 29833 19507; Figs 1-2). The pottery complex is now a small industrial estate in multiple occupation, while the core of the 19th-century pottery is now Sharpe's Pottery Museum and stands at the junction of West Street and Alexandra Road.

The Saggar House and Drying Shed, with an attached Mess Room, stand on the west side of the works, beside Alexandra Road, attached to which on the north side is a later Moulding Shop (Fig. 2). The Saggar House, Drying Shed and Mess Room are surrounded by a former yard on the east and south sides, although in 2015 this has been obscured by the erection of modern fences.

The building is within the Swadlincote Conservation Area. It is not listed, but stands near two grade II listed buildings, although not visible from them directly: kilns with attached buildings on the corner of Alexandra Road and West Street (now forming Sharpe's Pottery Museum), and the former works office on West Street.

South Derbyshire District Council has granted planning permission for the Saggar House, Drying Shed and Mess Room to be taken down, but on the condition that a Level 3 historic-building analytical record (as set out in English Heritage 2006) is made prior to the commencement of any works on site. The specific objectives, as detailed in the approved Design Specification (ULAS 2015), are to provide a written, drawn and photographic record to ensure the long-term preservation of the information through deposition of the record and a summary written report with an appropriate depository. This report therefore fulfils the requirement for a written record, and covers documentary and cartographic research into the building's history, combined with an analysis of the building as it stands.

Documentary, cartographic and pictorial research has been used to outline the historical context of the building. This included consultation of the Derbyshire Historic Environment Record (HER26813, Sharpe's Pottery), previous consultations (Meeson 1999; SDDC 1999), and items in Swadlincote Library and at The Magic Attic local-history archive in Swadlincote. A collection of company records is deposited at Derbyshire Record Office (D512, Sharpe Brothers & Co Ltd), but the catalogue does not indicate any relevant material. Other documentary material remains in the possession of the site's owner. This was not consulted, but includes a plan of 1904 which is reproduced in Sharpe's Pottery Museum, where it has been used to construct a model of the works of that date.

There has been some previous work at the site. However, the need for further understanding of the sanitary-ware industries of South Derbyshire, and of the area's general industrial heritage, has already been noted (Campion 2006; Knight 2012). The wider context of Sharpe's Pottery has been considered in studies of the sanitary ware industries of South Derbyshire (Spavold 1981) and the town of Swadlincote (Stroud 1999). Sharpe's Pottery was the subject of an archaeological assessment (Meeson 1999) and a detailed conservation plan drawn up by South Derbyshire District Council (SDDC 1999), both of which were undertaken in advance of repair work and the opening of the Sharpe's Pottery Museum in 2003. An assessment of the Saggar House and Drying Shed was made in 2014 in advance of seeking planning permission for their demolition (Hayman 2014).

At the time of survey in August 2015 the building was disused and was enclosed by a fence on the east and north-east sides, and by dense shrubbery on the south side. Inside the fence was a significant quantity of debris, and a deposit of soil that raised the ground level above the interior of the building, and above the level of the adjoining yard. Mature shrubs grow inside the fence, which affected the ability to make a photographic record of the exterior, but did not inhibit sufficient access to conduct a measured survey. The interior of the building retained some fixtures from its final use as an office, but also contained significant other waste material that had been dumped there during its period of disuse. As with the exterior, this rendered it difficult to make a photographic record that did justice to the building, although it remained possible to make an adequate examination of the interior walls and floor.

2. Documentary and cartographic evidence

The general history of Sharpe's Pottery, founded in 1821 by William Sharpe, has been covered elsewhere and only the salient details need be repeated here (Doughty 2013, Meeson 1999). Originally the works manufactured domestic wares, but from the mid 19th century it diversified into sanitary ware, in addition to manufacturing domestic wares such as jugs, mugs and tea pots. A growing market for sanitary ware had emerged after powers were given to local Boards of Health by the Public Health Act of 1848, by which means sewage systems were introduced into Britain's cities and towns, and flush toilets began to appear in the home. This market was strengthened by the passing in 1866 of the Sanitary Act and a further Public Health Act of 1875. Sharpe's Pottery was well placed to exploit this market as in 1855 Edmund Sharpe patented the flushing rim toilet pan. It was the first local firm to make sanitary ware.

A plan of Swadlincote surveyed in 1856 shows, perhaps, some of the early expansion into sanitary ware (Fig. 3). The pottery was built on West Street, which had been constructed in the early 19th century as the Moira & Gresley Turnpike Road, and occupied two self-contained sites with kilns, one on the north side and one on the south side of the road. The site on the south side of the road is where the Saggar House was later built. On the map the site is bounded to the west by a 'footway', which later became Alexandra Road. The boundary of the works is indicated by a dot-dash line.

Further development of the works is apparent on a map published in 1873 for the newly formed local Board of Health (Fig. 4). The boundary from the 1856 map is also shown as a dot-dash line on the 1873 map. Outside of this line it shows the Saggar House and Drying Shed as an L-plan block beside a public footpath. The map shows two ranges, one oriented east-west, and the other north-south in-line with the works boundary. The boundary to the north of these buildings is marked as a solid line, representing a boundary wall enclosing a yard. On the south side of the block of buildings this line is not continued, suggesting that the boundary wall extended to the Saggar House only. A faint line, however, marks the remainder of the west and also the south and east boundary of the works.

The Saggar House and Drying Shed can therefore be seen as part of the mid-19th century expansion of manufacture at Sharpe's Pottery as it enlarged and diversified into making sanitary ware. It was detached from the main complex, which reflects the relatively ancillary status of saggars in the production process. The purpose and manufacture of saggars is outlined in section 3.

The 1883 Ordnance Survey shows no further development, but the revision of 1901 shows that a building had been added on the north side of the L-plan block, and integral with the boundary wall (Fig. 5). This was a Moulding Shop, probably part of the new investment made at the works after 1895 to allow an increase in sanitary ware production (SDDC 1999, 19).

The function of the buildings is detailed in a plan and model at Sharpe's Pottery Museum, based on a plan of the works made by the company manager in 1904. It indicates that the east-west range was the Saggar House and the north-south range was the Drying Shed. The only addition to this was made in the 1950s: a Mess Room was built against the Drying Shed, which is not shown on the 1949 revision of the Ordnance Survey but is shown on the 1959 revision (Fig. 6).

There are three known photographs of the works that show the Saggar House and the Drying Shed. A photograph taken in the 1930s from the former Majestic Cinema, which stood nearly opposite Sharpe's on Alexandra Road, shows part of the building at the very bottom of the picture (Fig. 7). Two square brick stacks are shown, one of which rose through the roof of the Drying Shed, while the other appears to have been built against the south gable end of the Drying Shed. The chimney pot is also just visible of a stack built against the gable end of the Saggar House. Another photograph, taken probably in the early 1960s, shows the stack rising from inside the Drying Shed, but the external stack against the gable end had been taken down by this

time (Fig. 8). The photograph is also of interest because it shows the boundary wall extending southwards beyond the end of the Drying Shed.

Sharpe's Pottery closed in 1968, after which the site became an industrial estate and a new entrance was made from Alexandra Road by taking down the boundary wall beyond the Drying Shed. At some period in the late 1960s or 1970s the Moulding Shop, and probably the Saggar House and Drying Shed, were let to Homefire Fuels, selling domestic solid fuels (Fig. 9). Although the Moulding Shop remains in light-industrial use the Saggar House and Drying Shed were disused by 2014 (Fig. 10).

3. Saggar making

Saggars are ceramic box-like containers employed to protect the pottery and sanitary ware from the kiln flames. They were also essential in coal-fired kilns to prevent damage by smoke, but were slowly phased out with the move to electric kilns that followed the 1956 Clean Air Act. Originally saggars were made in the same space as the pottery itself. The emergence in the 18th and 19th centuries of a purpose-built Saggar House reflected the increase in the scale of production in the ceramics industries. In this context the surviving Saggar House and Drying Shed at Sharpe's are characteristic of the industrial phase of ceramic production.

Saggars were made generally by hand (this account is based on Sandeman 1917, 203-12). Saggars were made of marl or fireclay mixed with grog. The latter consisted of bricks, sand or any previously fired materials, including broken old saggars, ground in a small mill. The marl and grog were mixed together on the floor of the Saggar House, sprinkled with water, passed through a small pug mill, and then beaten with mallets. The saggars were formed by hand at a bench and then removed to the drying room. It was essential that the saggars were dry before they were fired, otherwise they would split. The drying room was therefore heated, either from a hearth or using steam pipes like a modern central-heating system.

Saggar-making was a skilled operation but the archaeological footprint it leaves is quite small. Given the scale of the Saggar House at Sharpe's, if a grinding and a pug mill were used inside the building they are likely to have been small and hand operated. The only archaeological evidence this would leave behind is on the floor, to which the mills may have been bolted. The manufacturing process leaves no diagnostic evidence on the internal walls of the building. Likewise the drying room will leave no diagnostic traces on the walls. However the photographs show a large internal stack that served either a hearth or a small boiler, which would leave traces in the floor of the building. Such a building would also need to be ventilated, probably achieved by vents in the roof.

4. The building

The Saggar House and Drying Shed stand at the south-west corner of the block of buildings at Sharpe's Pottery and integral with the boundary wall along Alexandra Road (Fig. 11). On its north side the building is attached to a taller Moulding Shop,

which is also built on the boundary wall. The area immediately east and south was an open yard, still defined on its south side by a brick boundary wall.

The single-storey building is L-shaped, comprising the former Drying Shed oriented north-south along Alexandra Road, and the Saggar House at right angles to it. Construction is of hand-moulded brick bonded in a lime mortar. The Saggar House has a steeply pitched roof of clay tiles and the Drying Shed has a roof of much flatter pitch, covered with corrugated asbestos-cement sheets. The roof of the latter is partly concealed behind a brick parapet, inside which are cast-iron rainwater goods along both walls (although one original downpipe has been replaced by a plastic pipe).

Added on the east side of the Drying Shed is the single-storey former Mess Room of machine-moulded brick, incorporating blue-brick banding and sills, under a corrugated asbestos-cement roof of shallow pitch.

Doorways and windows to each building face the former yard. The Drying Shed is windowless and the Alexandra Road elevation is sunk below street level. In the north gable end is a former arched doorway that was infilled when the adjoining Moulding Shop was constructed (more clearly visible inside the building), and the current entrance is set back from the north-east angle, comprising double boarded doors under a wooden lintel (Figs, 12, 13). Evidence of earlier doors here is the survival of pintles on the internal face of the wall. The entrance to the Saggar House is offset to the right side of the east gable end, comprising double boarded doors (one leaf removed and lying close by at the time of survey) under a timber lintel (Fig. 14). Immediately left of the doorway is an added narrow external stack of machine-moulded brick, which is the stack shown in the photograph taken in the 1930s (Fig. 7). The stack stands to its full height but the chimney pot has been removed. On the left side of the entrance is a window that has been cut in (boarded over at the time of survey). On the north side wall is an original three-light window rising to the eaves, with wooden glazing bars and hopper lights above a transom. Further right is a lower added former window infilled with blockwork. The left (south) side wall appears from the interior to have had no windows, although the exterior of the building was concealed by dense vegetation and inaccessible at the time of survey.

The Mess Room has a wide gable-end doorway under a steel I-section lintel, comprising double boarded doors (Fig. 15). The side walls each have two windows under concrete lintels, but all of them are infilled with blockwork.

The interiors all have concrete floors and brick walls painted white. In the drying room is a five bay roof of machine-sawn king-post trusses (Fig 16). They are carried on wall shafts that appear to have been added separately and were not integral with the original construction of the building (Fig. 17). In the south gable end is a brick corbel similar to those in the Saggar House, which shows that the roof here was oriented at right angles to the present arrangement and was continuous with the surviving roof of the Saggar House (Fig. 18). Above the trusses a plasterboard ceiling was inserted, which was partially rotten at the time of survey. In the north-west corner of the room a two-room office was created by building blockwork partition walls (with doorways removed by the time of survey). Inside the office a door was cut into the north gable end, giving access between the Drying Shed and the Moulding Shop. This doorway, under a wooden lintel, is infilled with blockwork.

The Saggar House has a three-bay roof of machine-sawn king-post trusses with diagonal struts, carried on brick corbels (Fig. 19). The concrete floor is uneven, sloping upwards toward the east end, as does the roof line. Inside the room a small office was created by erecting a plasterboard partition in its north-west corner. At the time of survey, the office retained wooden shelves and paper files. A partial loft was created by adding joists to the innermost of the three bays. Connection between Saggar House and Drying Shed is by boarded door. Inside the entrance doors is a second, large steel door. Although it was manufactured as a door it is clearly not an original feature, or in its original location, as the door has been turned on its side, with three hinges along to the top surface (Fig. 20). New hinges were welded on and attached to a plate that was fixed to the original door frame.

The Mess Room has a two-bay roof with a machine-sawn king-post truss.

5. Discussion

The Saggar House and Drying Shed were an integral construction, built between 1856 and 1873, as indicated by the cartographic evidence and confirmed by examination of the brickwork (Fig. 4). The west side of this block formed the boundary of the site and is integral with the boundary wall that continues northwards, on which the Moulding Shop was later built.

The roofs of the block are no longer entirely in their original form. The Saggar House was originally a two-unit building with central dividing wall and roof extending to the boundary wall on Alexandra Road. The 1873 map indicates this, and it is confirmed by the presence of a brick corbel on the south wall, showing that the building was originally three bays on the east side of the dividing wall (which remain) and two bays on the west side (Figs. 4, 18). However, there is no evidence of a corresponding wall on the north side of the Saggar House, suggesting either that the truss was carried on a timber post or cast iron pier.

The original appearance of the Drying Shed is more difficult to determine. The present roof is concealed behind a parapet, which would necessitate the building of internal wall shafts to support the trusses, as is actually the case (Fig. 17). However, the wall shafts at the south end must have been added at a later stage since the Saggar House roof originally extended here. In the gables of the Drying Shed there is no original brickwork. The Moulding Shop was later built on top of the drying-house north wall at eaves level, suggesting that the gable was originally open or vented with wooden louvres.

At the end of the 19th century the Moulding Shop was added, built partly on top of the drying-house gable end, and on to the existing boundary wall. The infill of the original Drying Shed doorway uses the same bricks as were used for the Moulding Shop.

The arrangement of the roofs was also changed, although perhaps at a later date, although there is no shadow of an earlier roof visible in the Moulding Shop south gable end. As indicated above, the drying-house roof was extended southward and

part of the original Saggar House roof was taken down. Evidence of this is visible in the form of the corbel inside what is now the Drying Shed gable end, and in the wall on Alexandra Road. The original saggar-house gable end was taken down and the wall was tidied up by adding new, machine-moulded brickwork, complete with a new coping course. At the same time new gable-end brickwork was added to the south wall of the Drying Shed, which in its internal face is corbelled out slightly from the brickwork below it. Because the Drying Shed is wider than the Moulding Shop a small triangle of the north gable remained open, which was infilled at a later date using machine-moulded brick bonded in a cement mortar. This brickwork can be seen clearly to abut the Moulding Shop wall. These bricks are different from the distinct yellow bricks of the Moulding Shop and the hand-moulded bricks of the Drying Shed (Fig. 21).

The trusses of the Drying Shed appear identical and the Drying Shed therefore seems to have been completely re-roofed when the roofs were altered. Its shallow pitch suggests that it was originally covered with corrugated-iron sheets, as the photograph from the 1930s appears to indicate, as opposed to clay tiles. The present asbestos-cement roof is likely to have been added in the mid 20th century, when such roofs were common.

The Saggar House also underwent modifications. The doorway in the east gable end is not original, but was probably an enlargement of the original. Its lintel is too big as it extends to the verge, above which there is replacement brickwork in cement mortar. The window in the left side of this elevation is also an insertion. Of the two windows in the north wall, the larger is original, whereas the smaller blocked window is secondary.

The nature of saggar production is such that little diagnostic evidence would be expected inside the building. No evidence was seen that benches or other fixtures were attached to the walls. The white paint on the walls seems likely to have been applied after closure of the works in 1968. Photographs indicate that there was a stack in the Drying Shed as late as the 1970s, but there is no longer any visible evidence for this (Fig. 9). The present concrete floors therefore appear to have been inserted later, and almost certainly after the works closed in 1968. The internal flue probably served a hearth as a boiler would have restricted the space inside the building. Of the stack attached to the south wall of the Drying Shed, no evidence was found, as this part of the exterior was inaccessible at the time of survey. It might have been a boiler stack, although there is no visible evidence of any pipes that would have been inserted through the brickwork.

Partitions were created inside the Drying Shed and Saggar House after the concrete floors were inserted, and appear therefore to post-date the closure of the pottery. In the Drying Shed, the blocked doorway that led from the small office into the Moulding Shop, is probably also of this phase.

Sharpe's is the best preserved of the former pottery and sanitary-ware manufacturers in Swadlincote. Sharpe's Pottery had a working life of over 140 years and during that time production expanded and contracted. This is an important general characteristic of the pottery industry and its industrial archaeology. The Saggar House and Drying

Shed document that aspect of the works history, specifically the expansion of production in the third quarter of the 19th century.

The principal value of the Saggar House and Drying Shed is their contribution to the surviving group of buildings that constituted Sharpe's Pottery. Neither retains any diagnostic features associated with their original function, which has diminished the historical integrity and the 19th-century industrial character of the buildings. The Mess Room is modern and adds nothing either to the 19th-century character of the block or to the understanding of the buildings' function.

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M12 Swadlincote Local Board District, 1873.

The Magic Attic (at Sharpe's Heritage Centre)

CSP-121 photograph of Drying Shed and Saggar House in the early 1960s.

CS1-162 photograph of Drying Shed and Saggar House in the early 1970s.

TV5-234 photograph of Drying Shed and Saggar House in the 1930s.

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7. Acknowledgements

Access to the site was arranged by David Raybould of David Raybould & Associates Ltd. He provided architectural drawings, which were used as base drawings to be enhanced and amended on site as necessary, and provided the levels surveyed in 2005 by Chilcote Engineering Services.

ULAS
University of Leicester
University Road
Leicester LE1 7RH

Tel:0116 252 2848
Fax: 0116 252 2614

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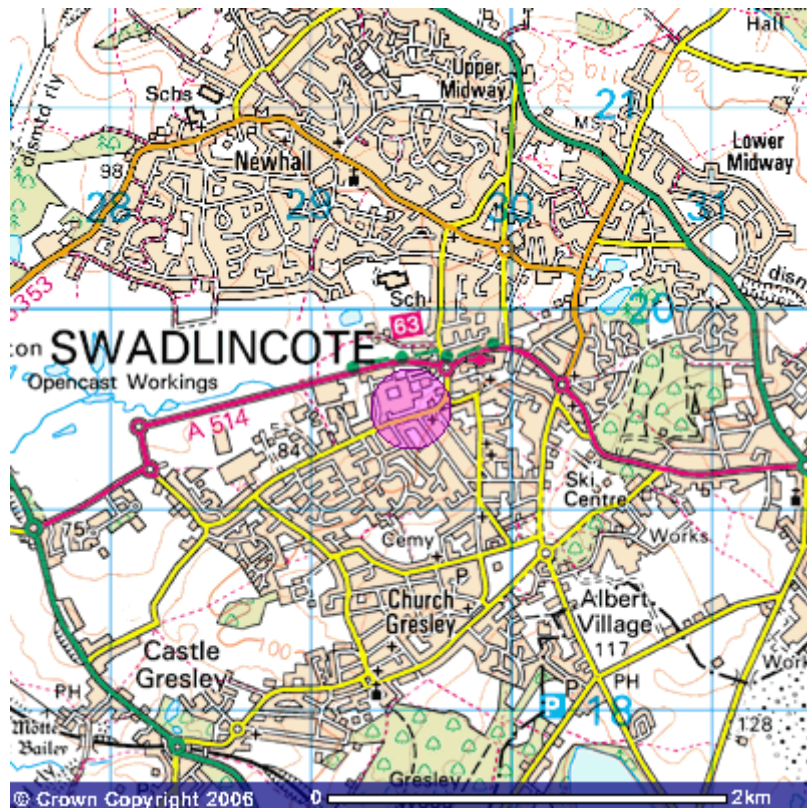


Figure 1 Location of former Sharpe's Pottery within Swadlincote

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Figure 2. Location plan. The Saggar House and Drying Shed are highlighted in red.



Figure 3. Sharpe's Pottery, as depicted on 'Township of Swadlincote in the parish of Church Gresley, 1856'. Not to scale. North is toward the top right-hand corner. Pottery buildings are shown on either side of West Street. The footway is what later became Alexandra Road. (Swadlincote Library M19)



Figure 4. Sharpe's Pottery, as depicted on a map of 'Swadlincote Local Board District' in 1873. Not to scale. The map shows considerable expansion of the works since 1856. In the lower left of the picture are the L-plan Sagger House and Drying Shed, opposite the legend 'Public Foot Path'. Immediately north of the building is the solid line of a yard wall. The south and east boundaries of the works are shown as a dot-dash line, indicating that a boundary wall had not yet been built. (*Swadlincote Library M12*)

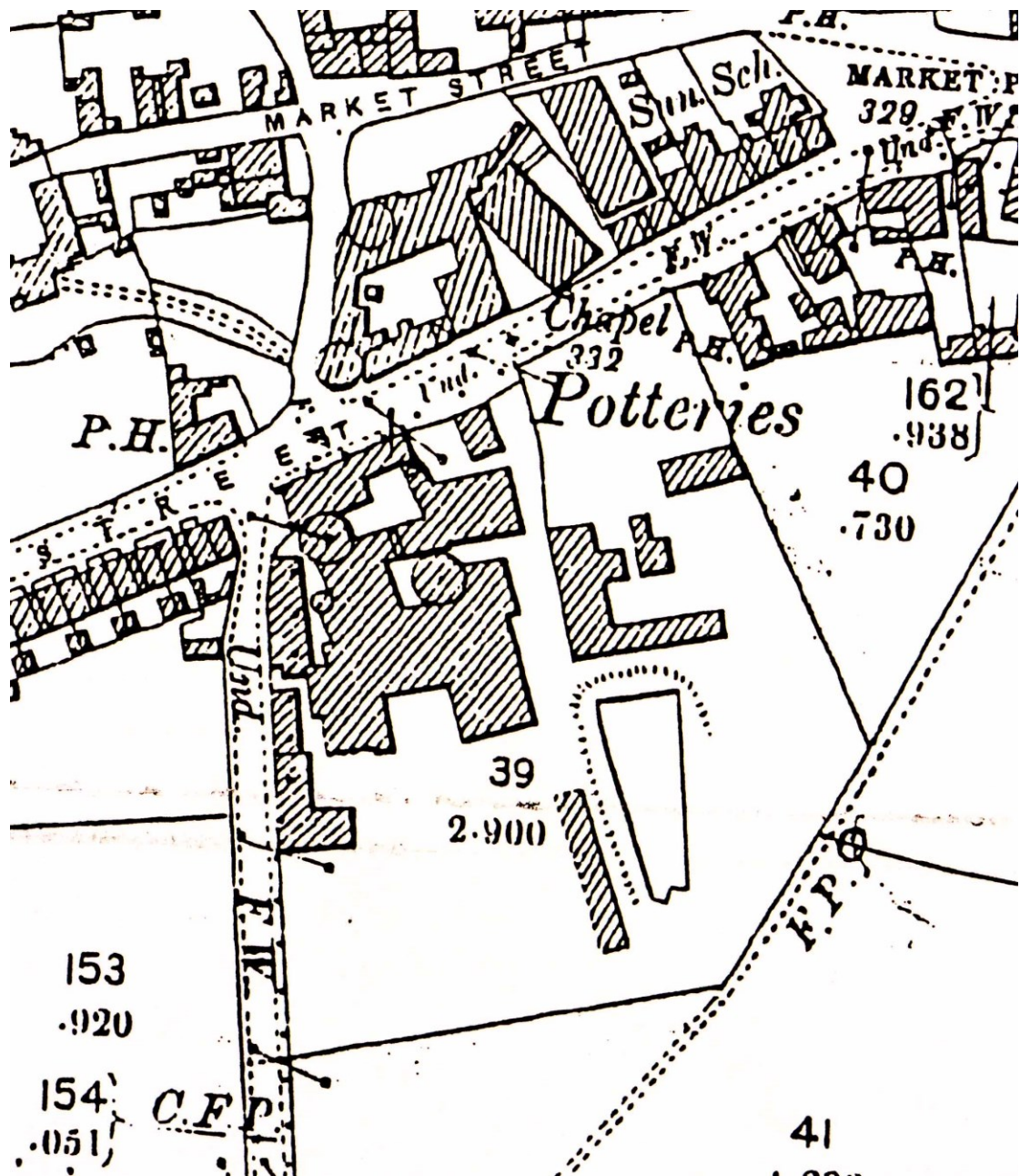


Figure 5. Sharpe's Pottery as depicted on the 1901 Ordnance Survey. It shows the Moulding Shop added to the north side of Saggar House and Drying Shed. The south and east boundaries of the works are defined by walls. The footpath to the west of the works has been upgraded to a road. Not to scale.

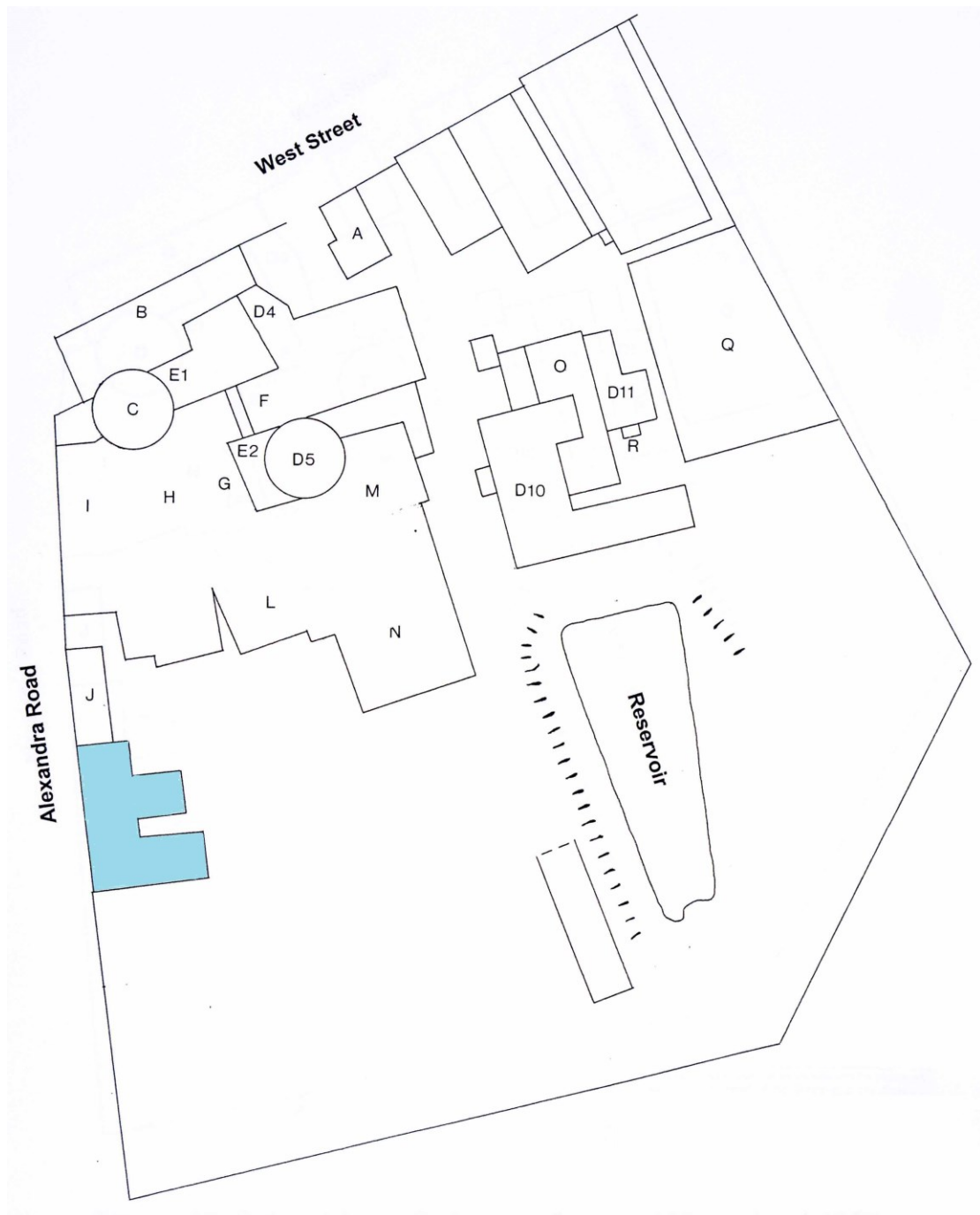


Figure 6. Sharpe's Pottery in 1959, based on the Ordnance Survey revision of that year. The Saggar House and Drying Shed are shaded blue, and includes the Mess Room added in the 1950s. Not to scale. (after SDDC 1999, fig 15)

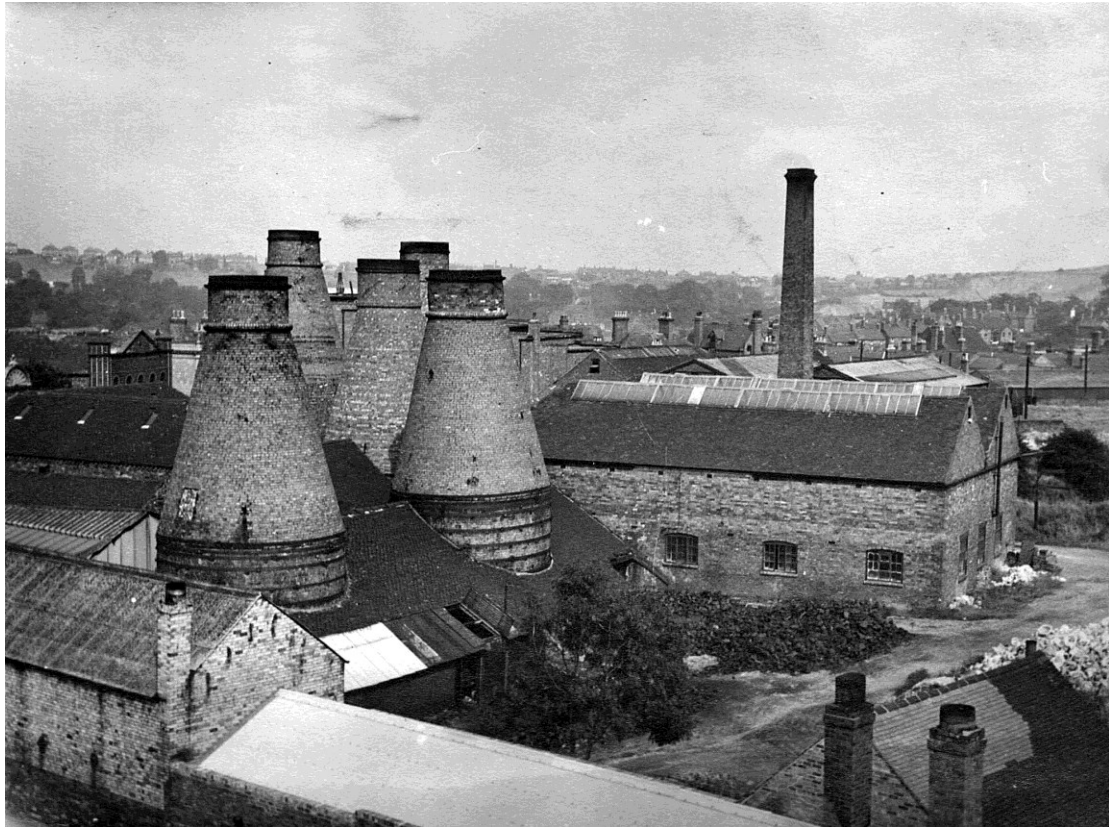


Figure 7. Sharpe's Pottery, photographed in the 1930s looking north-east across Alexandra Road from the former Majestic Cinema. The Saggar House and Drying Shed are shown in part at the very bottom of the picture, with the Moulding Shop bottom left. By this time the roofs had already been changed, with the Saggar House roof no longer extending to the boundary wall on Alexandra Road. There are two large stacks, one inside the Drying Shed and the other seemingly an external stack. No archaeological evidence of these has been found. The chimney pot is just visible of an external stack in the Saggar House gable end, which has survived. (*The Magic Attic TV5-234*)

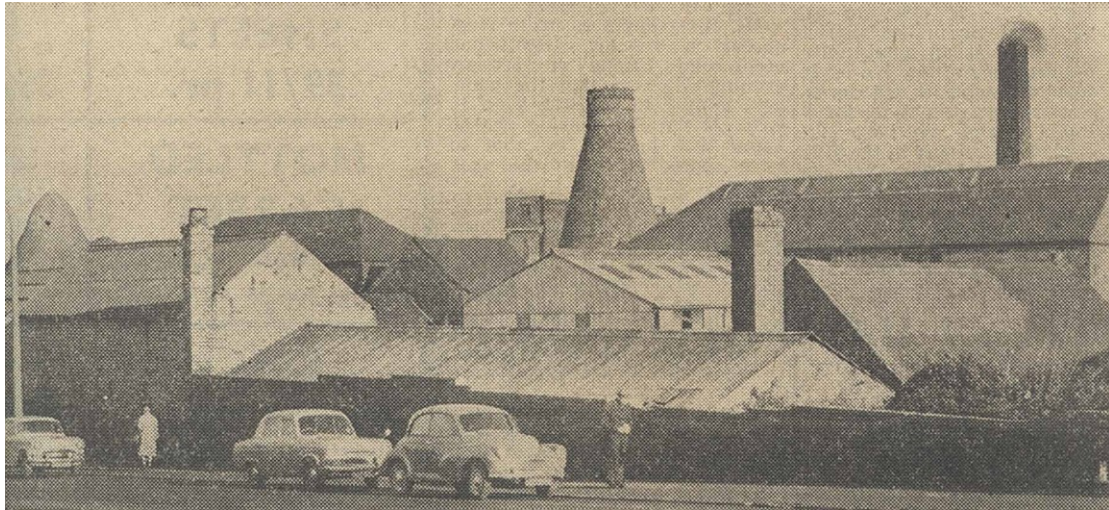


Figure 8. Sharpe's Pottery, photographed probably in the 1960s before the works closed, looking north east from Alexandra Road. The Drying Shed is in the centre foreground with the Saggar House to its right. The Drying Shed retains one internal stack, but the second stack visible in the 1930s had been taken down by this time. The boundary wall of the works extended southwards (uphill) from the Drying Shed. (*The Magic Attic, CSI-121*)



Figure 9. A photograph looking north from Alexandra Road, with the Drying Shed in the foreground and Saggar House to its right, taken probably in the 1970s. Sharpe's Pottery was closed by this time and the site was an industrial estate. The Moulding Shop, and probably also the Drying Shed and Saggar House, were let to Homefire Fuels at this time. The boundary wall uphill from the Drying Shed had been taken down to create a new entrance to the industrial estate. However the tall internal stack in the Drying Shed remained standing.



Figure 10. The Saggar House as it appeared, disused, in 2014.



Figure 11. The Drying Shed, viewed looking north west on Alexandra Road.



Figure 12. Blocked original doorway in the north gable end of the Drying Shed.



Figure 13. The Drying Shed entrance, looking west.



Figure 14. The Sagar House, looking south-west from the yard.



Figure 15. The Mess Room, looking north-west.



Figure 16. The interior of the Drying Shed, looking north. The blockwork partition is at the back on the left.



Figure 17. Wall shaft supporting the Drying Shed roof.



Figure 18. Corbel in the south wall of the Drying Shed that formerly carried a truss of the Saggar House roof.



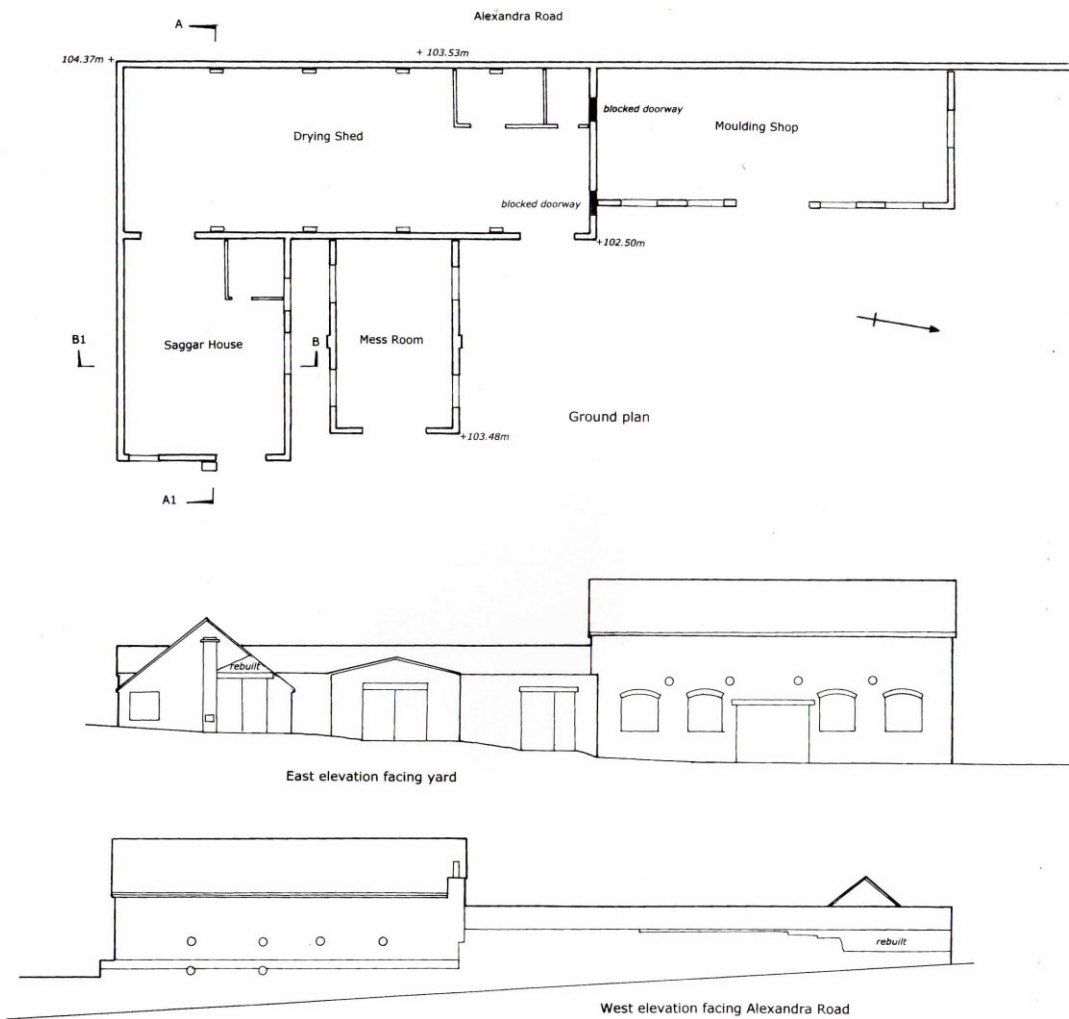
Figure 19. Roof truss of the Saggar House.



Figure 20. Steel door added to the Saggar House entrance. Hinges along the top show that it was salvaged from another site.



Figure 21. Part of the north end wall of the Drying Shed, showing iron rainwater goods, and cement-bonded brickwork in the gable abutting the wall of the Moulding Shop on the right.



Saggar House and Drying Shed
former Sharpe's Pottery
Alexandra Road
Swadlincote
DE11 9AZ

NGR: SK 29833 19507

Drawing 1
Scale 1:100
Drawn by Richard Hayman
14/09/2015

Levels surveyed in 2005 by
Chilcote Engineering Services

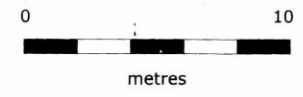
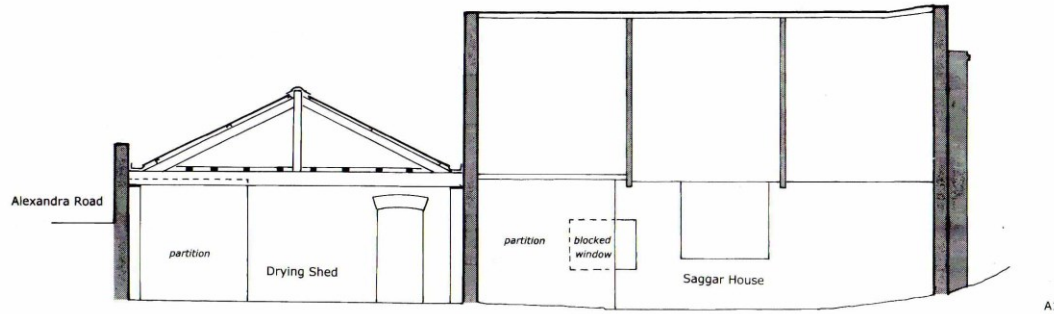


Figure 22 Ground plan and elevations

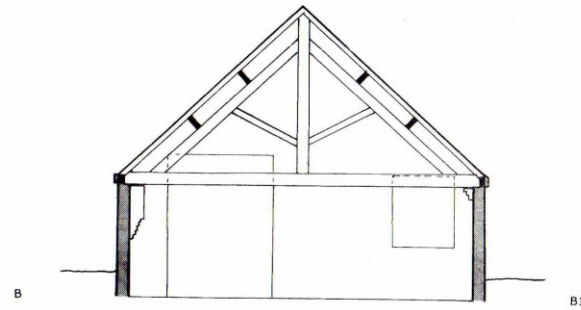
Saggar House and Drying Shed
former Sharpe's Pottery
Alexandra Road
Swadlincote
DE11 9AZ

NGR: SK 29833 19507

Drawing 2
Scale 1:50
Drawn by Richard Hayman
14/09/2015



Section A-A1: Drying Shed and Saggar House



Section B-B1: Saggar House

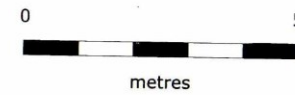


Figure 23 Sections A-A1 and B-B1