

**FORMER BUTCHERS SHOP AT
131 HIGH STREET, BILLERICAY
ESSEX**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD



Essex County Council

Field Archaeology Unit

January 2005

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HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD

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	ERO

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**FORMER BUTCHERS SHOP AT
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ESSEX**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD

Client: Mr. Brian Caudle

Planning Application: BAS/957/04 & BAS/LB/958/04

FAU Project No.: 1435

NGR: TQ 673 943

Date of Fieldwork: 30th November 2004

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A programme of building recording was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on a former butchers shop complex at 131 High Street, Billericay, prior to conversion. The work was funded by the client and owner, Brian Caudle, represented by Paul Mullins Associates, and based on a brief produced by Essex County Council Historic Building and Conservation Team (HB&C).

Copies of the report will be supplied to the HB&C Team, the local planning authority, Essex County Council Heritage Environment Record (former SMR) and the Essex Records Office, who will also hold the project archive.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site Location and Description (fig.1)

The recorded building is located on the western side of the High Street in Billericay town centre, in the south of the county. It comprises an 18th century shopfront facing onto the High Street with a later, 19th century, range to the rear. The front is attached to an 18th century premises known as The Old Shambles (133 High Street), which is part of the application but not subject to the recording condition. They are listed together, grade II status.

131 High Street formerly functioned as a traditional butchers shop in the 19th century and probable early 20th century, although the exact dates are unknown. However, according to the client (B. Caudle pers comm.), several diverse retailers have traded from here since the 1950s, but none of them butchers. It is known from map evidence that the structure was in existence and presumably trading by 1881 (Appendix 1). Latterly the premises were used as a furniture and carpet shop. It is now empty.

The building's popular and prominent position has contributed to its continual use and upkeep and consequent excellent condition. Important early fixtures and fittings relating to butchery have survived behind recently-removed modern shop interiors and are discussed in the report.

2.2 Planning Background

Basildon District Council received a planning application for conversion from shop to café in July 2004 (BAS/957/04 and BAS/LB/958/04). A preliminary internal assessment, made after the modern shop interiors were stripped out, established earlier interiors and fixtures associated with use as a butchers shop, incorporating a slaughterhouse and stabling area. The survival of such a relatively intact group is rare (Hurst 2004). Therefore a condition was attached to the planning permission to record these elements within the context of the listed building.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the historic building survey, as outlined in the brief (Hurst 2004) was to 'preserve by record' the structure prior to alteration and conversion. To achieve this, a written, photographic and drawn record was required.

The survey would also analyse and interpret the structure and assess its importance within a local and regional historical context to inform conservation decisions and its future management.

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

Measured floor plans and sections, compiled as part of the application were supplied by the client and used as the basis for all illustrations in the report. External and internal architectural descriptions were made and surviving fixtures and fittings relating to function were identified and where appropriate located on the floor plan and sections (figs. 2-4).

A selection of photographs (including monochrome and colour medium format prints, 35mm colour slides and digital images) were taken of the exterior and interior. Specific shots were taken of areas of important architectural detail, fixtures and fittings. A representative selection is reproduced at the back of the report as plates 1-15. The remainder can be found in the archive.

5.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS (figs. 1-4)

5.1 General Description (fig. 1)

The structure is rectangular in plan and orientated west to east, fronting onto the High Street. There is a small paved yard to the rear (west) enclosed by modern brick walling and outhouses; to be demolished as part of the proposals. Beyond this is a modern office development and car parking. Other modern offices stand to the north, limiting access to this elevation. On the south side the shop complex is partly attached to number 133, with a narrow paved walkway between the two buildings behind.

In form there are two conjoined elements: shop and slaughterhouse. Despite having connecting usage, they have different construction dates and architectural styling. They are therefore described separately and labelled as such on the illustrations included in the report. The slaughterhouse is further divided into the central working area and former animal stalls.

5.2 The Shop (figs. 2 and 3; plates 1-6)

5.2.2 External Description (plates 1 and 2)

Facing onto the High Street, this was the prominent, public side of the business. The listing groups number 131 with 133, The Old Shambles (plate 1), but does not make specific reference to it. Traditionally the shambles were markets for the slaughter, butchery and the sale of meat. Architecturally its plain-tiled mansard roof and brick build reflects the character of the main building. Like the main building, the east elevation, or shop façade, is rendered, obscuring constructional detail. The prominent features on this side are a large six by three light ovolo-moulded bow window and a modern two by six light plain shop door (plate 2). Both door and window are surmounted by a cavetto and bead-moulded wooden entablature, onto which modern awning fixtures are attached. No other historic features were noted on the shopfront.

The less prominent north elevation is not rendered, apart from the upper part of the mansard gable. Here wall detail was observed comprising soft orange bricks in a lime mortar; identical, perhaps, to those in the main house. They are laid in Flemish bond with almost consistent dimensions of 230 x 110 x 68mm (9 x 4⁵/₈ x 5⁵/₈" each).

The former west elevation was removed in the 19th century when the extension to the rear was built, presumably when the butchers shop was established. The south side adjoins The Old Shambles.

Internally the shop is divided into two approximately 3.7 x 2.7m bays demarked by 0.25m wide boxed beams. Both walls and ceiling are clad in horizontal matchboarding, 255mm or 10" wide and beaded, with moulded timber cornice above (plate 3). This style of cladding, used for hygiene reasons, was a common feature of 19th century butchers shops (Morrison 2003). Either side of the chimney stack (which is also clad) are blocked areas of walling that formally linked to the main house forming one room around a central fireplace. The smaller one to the east may represent an earlier blocked doorway. The blocking to the west is modern, comprising breeze block beneath a stucco-effect render (plates 3 and 4) and is to be removed as part of the redevelopment.

5.2.3 Internal Description (plates 3-6)

Large York sandstone flags, varying in size, cover the floor. Above, a hatch leads into the loft, where the roof truss is exposed, as well as the internal gable wall. This has an internal timber frame not apparent from outside (plate 5) and a lath and plaster upper section corresponding to the rendered area mentioned previously (5.2.2). The loft is likely to be contemporary. The hatch, similar in style and dimension to the hayloft hatch in the stall area, appears a secondary insertion. Inside there are no floorboards, only bare joists. Inspection established a basic roof frame of thin winnowy rafters set at two levels, reflecting the change in pitch of the roof (plate 5). Each set is attached to its own plate and both plates sit within the break of pitch. The upper plate contains a series of mortises set at c.0.35m intervals, in line with the rafters (plate 6). These originally held collars. Two collars remain, one in the centre and another beside the chimney breast to the south. The first of these has additional support from a later, twin-sectioned, king post (plate 5). The collars appear to have been replaced by crude diagonal struts connecting from central floor joist to plates either side by birdsmouth joints. The dating and reason for this change is unknown. However, it is speculated that this occurred when the 19th century extension was built. It is possible that any floorboards were removed at the same time to form the new hayloft floor over the stalls to the rear.

5.3 Slaughterhouse (figs. 2-4; plates 7-15)

5.3.1 External Description (plates 7-9)

Externally the slaughterhouse is very different to the shop. It is timber-framed with weatherboard cladding and a low pitched Welsh slate roof, hipped to the west (plate 7). All except the east elevation, which connects to the shop, carry windows glazed in frosted glass, perhaps as a regulatory requirement.

The two doors on the south elevation provide access from the working area and stalls onto the narrow yard between this and the rear of number 133 (plates 7 and 8). That to the east is glazed with eight panes of frosted glass. The second is plain. Between the two doors is a fixed four pane window. At first floor level are two further sets of windows. The larger, set above the glazed door, has four fixed lights set around a twin-light centrally-hinged vent. A small two-light oblong top hung sash acts as a fanlight to the second door. A fourth, further to the west, lights the hayloft to the rear. This is a two-light oblong top hung sash of identical proportions over a larger, fixed, two-light window (plate 8).

The western end of the slaughterhouse opens out into a small modern yard area (plate 9), so small that no general photographs could be taken of the elevation. Its lower part, from the base of the internal hayloft down, is a later construction, built from 20th century fletten bricks, with a contemporary central doorway and flanking windows. The former stalls were situated inside. The use of later construction materials shows this end of the building was originally open-sided. Attached to the south-west corner is a wrought iron meat hook (plate 9). It stands to a height of 2m, just above the yard wall and, attached to a wooden post, has a 1m wide arm that swings through 180°. The curving end hook is complimented by a second vertical spike. Its precise function is unknown, but its light-weight frame suggests it was used to hang game or poultry. In Victorian times, as it is today with some traditional butchers, only those animals ready for sale were hung outside the front of the shop.

The north elevation was difficult to assess externally due to overgrowth and its proximity to the building next door. Its main feature is a row of six windows at first floor height that, along with those opposite, would have illuminated the area around the meat hoist (section 5.3.3) and provide ventilation. They are arranged either side of a supporting timber brace in two pairs of three. Only the middle ones are designed to open, and each bears identical fixtures to their opposing counterparts.

5.3.2 Internal Description

Inside, the area is split into two components: the working area where the animals were slaughtered and stalls at the back. Animals were either reared in the stalls or kept here having been purchased from the local livestock market (Morrison 2003). Their locations are shown on fig. 2.

Because of the clad interiors, very little was seen of the wall framing, except for a pegged edge-halved scarf joint connecting two wall plates on the west wall of the working area. Additional framing, primary-braced, was observed in the un-clad hayloft above the stalls. However, the roof truss is exposed throughout the building. It is of clasped collar purlin type, with cleats and ridge

plate. This style is typical for a functional building of the period. Black roofing felt indicates the roof has been re-laid in the modern period.

5.3.3. Working Area (plates 10-13)

The working area comprises one large single bay 4m wide between the shop to the east and stalls to the west (fig. 2). Reflecting its more utilitarian role and status to the shop, the interior is clad in weatherboarding rather than horizontal panelling (plate 10). As mentioned before, prior to stripping out, the cladding was mostly hid. In plate 10 the sudden change on the west wall from black to white reflects the extent to which the roof truss and fixtures were concealed by modern boarding.

The eastern part, open to the shop area, contains the main butchery-related feature of the building: the meat hoist (plates 10-12). The hoist was used to raise the heavy carcasses after slaughter for preparation and is in full working order. The hoist is set up inside the roofspace, supported centrally on a cross-piece resting on two heavy parallel beams that run the length of the area, braced either side (figs. 2 and 4). It works on a rope and pulley system and is set at an angle of 30° to maximise height within the working area. A chain hangs in front. One end of the rope is anchored by a hook to the end of hoist. The other part, holding the hook, runs up through a slot in the timber, over a wheel (partly observed), along a groove along the top of the hoist to a second wheel. It then runs back down and onto the floor (plate 12, fig. 3), although originally there was probably some form of tying off point to the side. There is no indication of maker's marks on any of the hoist ironwork, suggesting it was probably locally made at the blacksmith shop.

Set against the sole plate of the north wall are two tethering points where the animals waited to be slaughtered (fig. 2). The smaller of the two, situated towards the west, is formed from a simple iron hoop and is mostly obscured by a later concrete floor (approx. 0.16m thick) that covers the entire working area. This floor may have been laid after the butchers shop closed, to hide the channels often seen in such establishments that carry fluids away from the slaughtered animal. Conversely it may have been added within the life of the butchers shop after on-site slaughter ceased to be practiced. Evidence for this was also found in other parts of the building.

The second tethering point, to the east, is more robust. It is formed from a thick iron ring strapped to a thick wooden post. A blocked area in the boarding above may provide evidence for an earlier post (plate 13).

The working area is linked to the former stalls by a central doorway positioned between two heck doors, both original features (plate 10). Animals were led from the stalls into the working area through these. Both doorways, as well as an inspection hatch to the north, are now blocked (fig. 2),

yet the doors have been retained as features, which is unusual. The heck doors are carried on crudely-fashioned strap hinges with rough spearhead terminals and have heavy bolts. The inspection hatch, in the right of plate 10, has butterfly hinges and would have acted as a means of keeping an eye on the animals.

5.3.4 Animal Stalls (fig. 2, plates 14-15)

This area encompasses a single 2.4m wide bay with former hayloft over, which later became an ancillary area for shop staff after kitchen and WC facilities were installed.

Originally the extant heck doors led into two stalls at the west end, where the animals were kept before slaughter. Exposed ceiling joists and floorboards in this area are limewashed (plate 14), presumably another early hygiene control. Stall divisions are represented by empty mortice holes in two of the longitudinal ceiling joists. They define a narrow central walkway (0.5m wide) between stalls (fig. 2). After their removal, presumably when animals ceased to be killed on-site, the open west end was closed off with a new brick wall and the internal walls plastered over. A tiled floor was added (each 0.15m/6" square), sloping downwards toward a circular drain in the north-west corner of the room. The scar to a possible brick partition remains, apparently zoning off the area around the base of the ceiling hatch (fig. 2). This may be a later development, post-dating the butchers shop.

A ceiling hatch leads up to the former hayloft. The hayloft can also be reached from the working area by a central doorway, with the aid of a ladder (plate 10). Bedding straw could be forked down to the stalls from the hatch or onto the working floor around the tethering points. The room is currently empty. This was a clean area and is the only part of the building where the timber wall framing is exposed. It has primary-braced machine-sawn timbers with nail fixings, typical of 19th century utility buildings. The main structural elements, corner posts and plates, are however pegged for extra strength.

6.0 DISCUSSION

Since medieval times, the shambles was the traditional place where animals were slaughtered and sold. They were like open markets, regulated by the local authority (Morrison 2003). By the 19th century separate butchers shops outside the markets were established. Like the market stalls, these often had open fronts or else wide-opening windows for ventilation. Shopfronts displayed carcasses hanging from rails or on iron railings outside the shop, especially during festive occasions such as Christmas. In the traditional butchers, away from the city slaughterhouses, animals were either raised on the premises or brought from the local livestock market. They were

slaughtered to the rear of the shop and prepared for sale. De-hairers, scalding and scraping tanks (Morrison 2003) were used to prepare the carcass and the rendering process produced by-products such as sausages and lard. Fresh meat and joints were preserved either in natural ice or salted in tanks of brine. Refrigerated stores were introduced in the early 20th century (Morrison 2003). Inside the shop, carcasses hung from hooks on rails in the ceiling and the walls were clad in matchboarding. Floors were covered in sawdust to soak up blood. Cash booths were installed in larger shops so the bloodied hands of the butcher did not come into contact with money (Morrison 2003).

Some of these characteristics survive at 131 High Street in remarkable condition, important examples of fixtures and fittings associated with butchery. Evidently, animals were held, possibly reared, and slaughtered here. Evidence for stalls and hayloft remain, plus tethering points, external meat hook and a meat hoist. Evidence for ceiling rails, tanks and floor-drainage channels has either been removed by subsequent owners or survives beneath a later concrete floor. Early hygiene controls, lime washing in the stalls and matchboarded interior, plus a practical York stone floor in the shop area, appear to have survived subsequent changes of use to the premises.

Several phases of building development are represented here. However without further research details and dates are hard to establish. 131 and 133 High Street were constructed in the 18th century. Stylistically they are identical, reflecting the European influence on 18th century architecture and 'Georgianisation' of town centres in general. It is not known whether 131 was originally built as a butchers shop, but its position fronting the shambles, the traditional meat market, makes this likely. At an early stage 131 and 133 were connected at ground floor level. It is not clear if the first floor was occupied. Design-wise, the double-pitched mansard roof creates more headroom on the level above. However, unlike most inhabited mansarded structures (including the adjoining house) there are no dormer windows facing onto the street. Therefore the mansard roof appears less a practical feature and more a product of fashion and conformity to its neighbour.

The slaughter area and stalls at the back were added before 1881, as their inclusion on the OS map of this date shows. It is possible the roof trusses were altered at this stage. The slate roof, weatherboard cladding and primary-braced frame typifies 19th century light utility buildings. It is tempting to speculate a link with the closure of the shambles behind, possibly led by new health and hygiene legislation.

At some later date, animals ceased to be slaughtered here. Several factors may have influenced this decision: the importation of cheap frozen meat from the colonies and South America, the introduction of refrigerated storage, improvements in transport or larger and more efficient

abattoirs. Judging from the use of fletton bricks to wall-in the former open-sided west wall, this occurred in the first part of the 20th century. The stalls were removed and a tiled floor added. It is possible the concrete floor in the working area was laid , after the hoist became redundant. By the 1950s the butchers had closed and since then the building has had other retail uses. During this subsequent period of use, the historic interior lay hidden.

7.0 CONCLUSION

131 Billericay High Street is a rare surviving example of a 19th century butchers shop complex that remains remarkably unaltered since its construction. As such, it is of regional if not national importance. It incorporates a small Georgian structure, contemporary with the townhouse next door; The Old Shambles, a name evoking the medieval meat market that stood here. Research on butchers complexes such as this is still in its infancy and further documentary and cartographic research would improve our understanding of this structure's historical development. It is hoped that information gained from the survey will contribute to research on a broader scale, as well as highlighting conservation priorities for this grade II listed structure.

As a result of government control and rationing during WWII and the Slaughterhouse Acts of 1954 and 1958, which placed slaughterhouses under local government control, the number of butcher's slaughterhouses has decreased. This decline has hastened with the spread of large-scale chains and latterly the adoption of European Union standards in the 1990s. However, there is still a market for high quality meat and as such a few high-class producer-retailer butchers survive who continue to rear their own animals, though not necessarily in the traditional environment that survives at 131 Billericay High Street.

As a listed building, future development will seek to retain the surviving features and incorporate them into the conversion. If the floor in the working area is replaced, important features relating to primary use may be exposed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recording, illustrations and photography were undertaken on behalf of Paul Mullins Associates and the client, Brian Caudle. Plate 8 is reproduced from digital photographs provided by the client. The author was assisted in the survey by Jackie Longman. The project was monitored by Michael Hurst, ECC Historic Buildings Adviser.

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Fig.1. Site Location

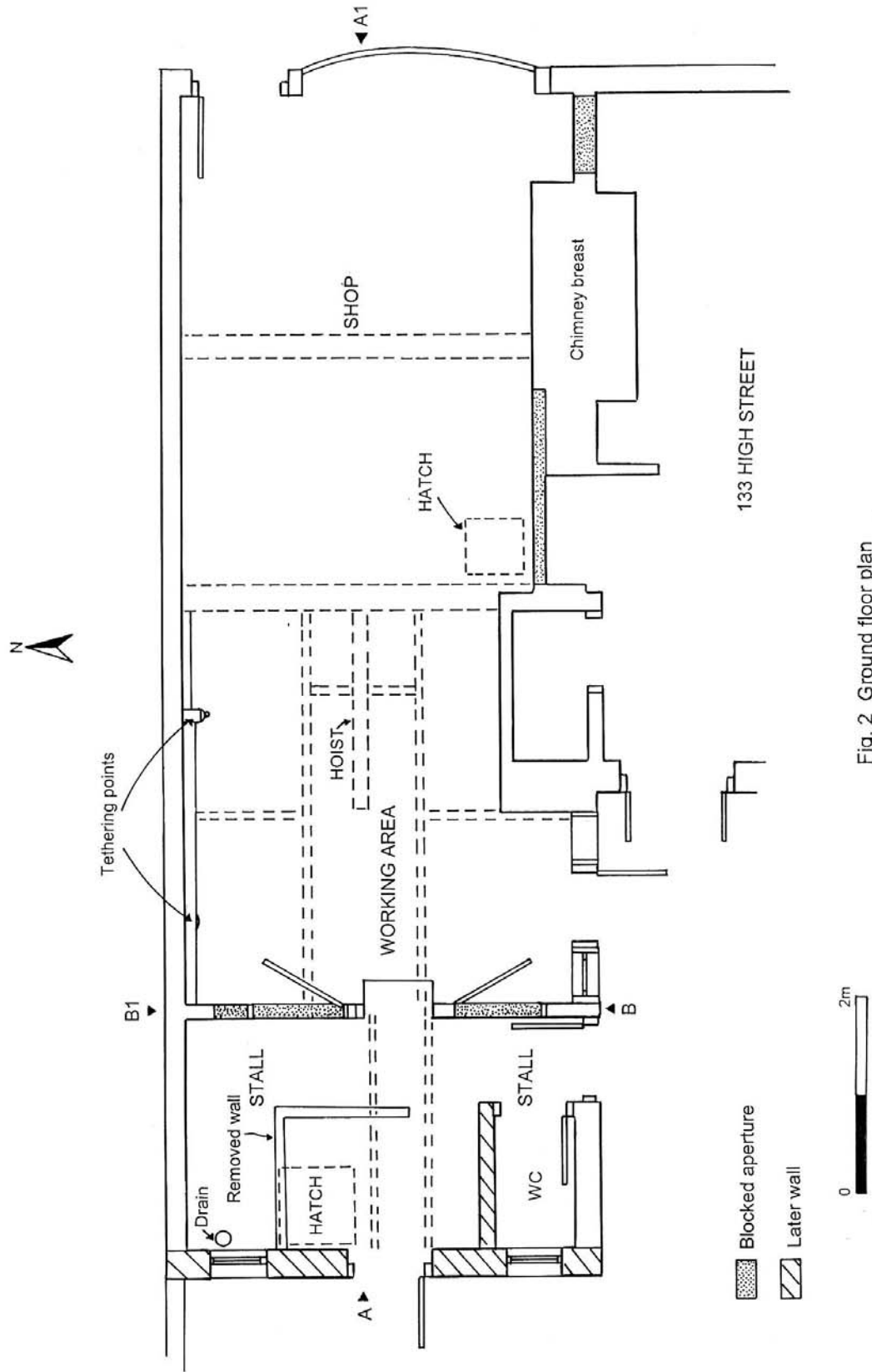


Fig. 2 Ground floor plan

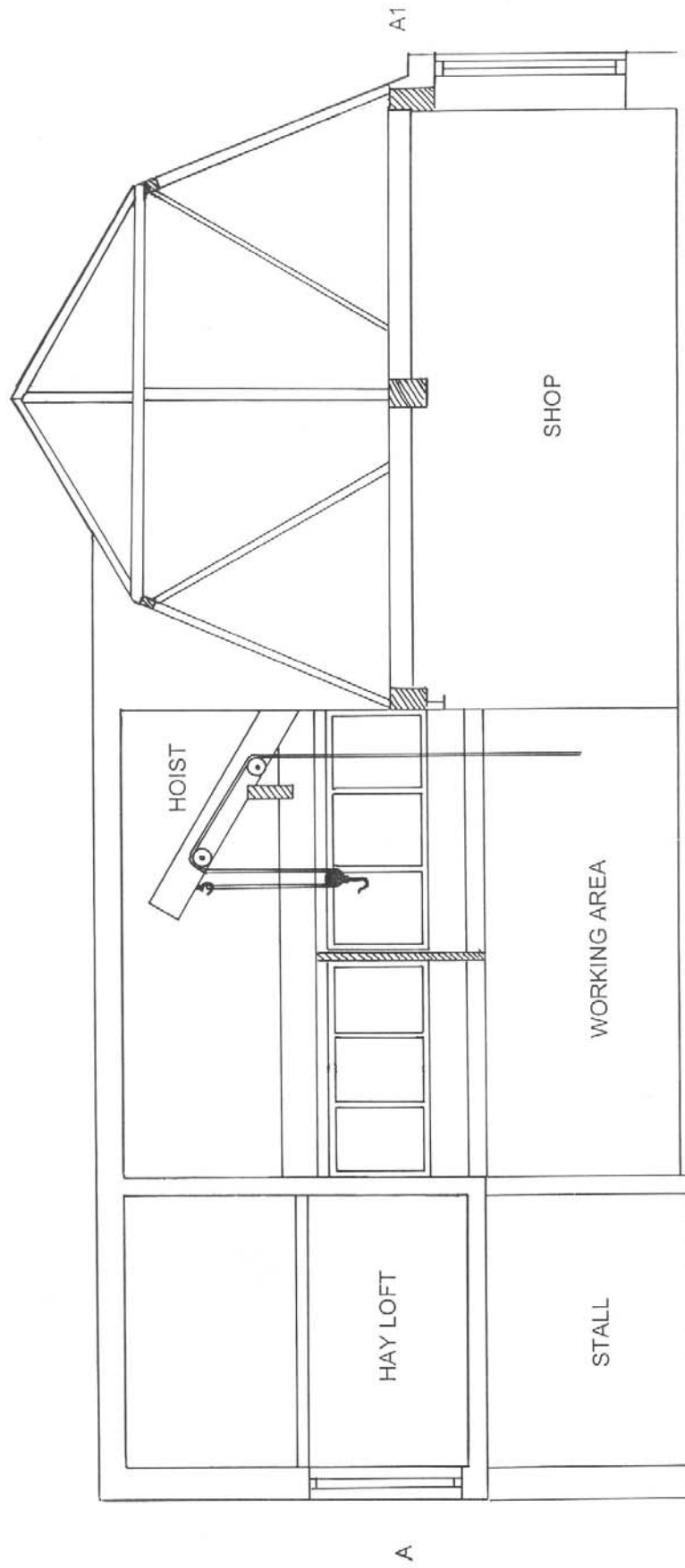


Fig. 3 Section A-A1

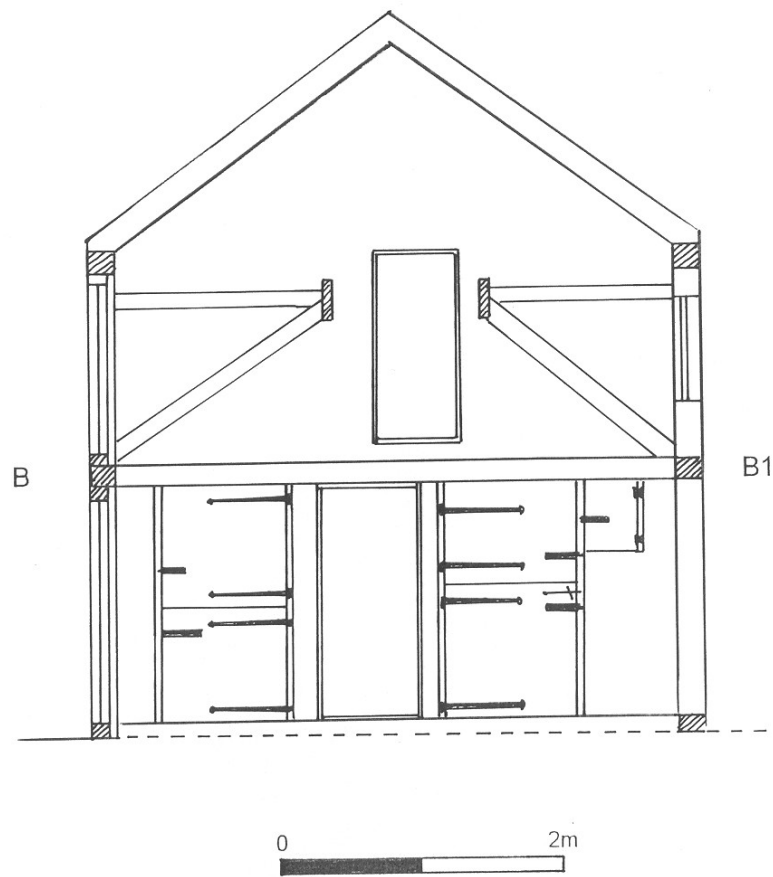


Fig. 4 Section B-B1



Plate 1: 133 and 131 High Street viewed from north-east



Plate 2: Shop frontage



Plate 3: Shop interior viewed from east toward slaughterhouse



Plate 4: Shop interior viewed from west



Plate 5: Loft above shop



Plate 6: Mansard roof structure



Plate 7: Slaughterhouse viewed from south-west



Plate 8: Slaughterhouse south elevation



Plate 9: Meat hook on west elevation



Plate 10: Working area



Plate 11: Meat hoist



Plate 12: Meat hoist mechanism



Plate 13: Tethering point



Plate 14: Area of former stalls



Plate 15: Former hay loft

Appendix 1: Historical Map Evidence



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OS First Edition 1881

Appendix 2: Contents of Archive

Copy of report
Photographic record (120mm colour and black and white prints, 35mm monochrome prints, slides and digital images)
Miscellaneous plans and drawings
Site notes
Report on disc, pdf formatted

Appendix 3: Essex Heritage Environment Record Summary Sheet

Site Name/Address: Former Butchers Shop at 131 High Street, Billericay, Essex	
Parish: Billericay	District: Basildon
NGR: TQ 673 943	Site Code: N/A
Type of Work: Building recording	Site Director/Group: A. Letch, ECC FAU
Date of Work: 30th November 2004	Size of Area Investigated: N/A
Curating Museum: N/A	Funding Source: Mr. Brian Caudle
Further Work Anticipated? Not known	Related EHCR Nos.: None
Final Report: Summary in EAH	
Periods Represented: Primarily 18th and 19th century	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS: 131 Billericay High Street represents the significant survival of a primary-braced and weatherboarded 19th century butchers shop complex, utilising an earlier 18th century brick-built mansard structure contemporary with the neighbouring property, 133. Animals were kept and slaughtered at the rear and sold in the shop fronting onto the High Street. Important fixtures and fittings remain intact and in extremely good condition. These include the meat hoist, tethering points, stall doors and external meat hook. These are to be retained within the cafe conversion. Channels associated with waste clearance may survive beneath the raised floor in the central working area.	
Previous Summaries/Reports None	
Author of Summary: A. R. Letch	Date of Summary: 11th January 2005