

**FISH-CURING SHED
TO THE REAR OF 170 MOULSHAM STREET
CHELMSFORD
ESSEX**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD



Essex County Council

Field Archaeology Unit

May 2007

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HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

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As part of our desire to provide a quality service, we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or the presentation of this report.

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CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location and description

2.2 Planning background

2.3 Historical background

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

4.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTION

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Contents of Archive

Appendix 2: EHER Summary

FIGURES

Fig. 1 Location plan

Fig. 2 Extract from First Edition OS map, 1874 (enlarged)

Fig. 3 Existing floor plan and cross section

PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATES

Plate 1 Curing shed (indicated) viewed from west across George Street car park

Plate 2 Shed viewed from west

Plate 3 Shed viewed from east

Plate 4 Inserted corrugated iron wall below main smoke vent

Plate 5 Interior viewed from entrance (south-east)

Plate 6 Interior viewed from north

**FISH-CURING SHED TO THE REAR OF
170 MOULSHAM STREET
CHELMSFORD
ESSEX**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD

Client: ADH Ltd

FAU Project No.: 1755

NGR: TL 7071 0626

OASIS No.: essexcou1-26921

Date of Fieldwork: 13th February 2007

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A programme of building recording was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) prior to the demolition of a disused fish-curing shed to the rear of 130 Moulsham Street, Chelmsford.

The survey was carried out on behalf of the developers, ADH Ltd, in accordance with a specification issued by ECC FAU and approved by ECC Historic Environment Management team (HEM), who also monitored the project.

Copies of the report will be supplied to the client, ECC HEM and the Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at County Hall, Chelmsford. A version of this report will be uploaded to OASIS (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/index.cfm>). The archive will be kept at Chelmsford Museum.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location and description (fig.1)

The subject of the survey is a small brick shed to the rear of the 'Lychee Garden' Chinese take-away, 170 Moulsham Street. The suburb of Moulsham lies on the south side of modern

Chelmsford. The shed is positioned against the north-western boundary with the George Street car park and is walled-off from the Chinese take-away, occupying its own plot alongside recently-built houses at the backs of nos. 166-67 and 171-73. It now looks somewhat out of place in its new surroundings (plates 1 & 2). For many years the shed has been left to decay and is now in a poor state. The structure appears to be unsafe, with large cracks appearing in the shallow foundations.

At the time of the survey, clearance work had started within the proximity of the shed, exposing some of the footings, but the structure itself was unaffected.

2.2 Planning background

Plans were submitted by the client to Chelmsford Borough Council to demolish the shed and build a residential on the vacant plot. The Conservation Officer agreed to the plans on the condition that a low-level survey be undertaken to 'preserve by record' the structure in its present state and passed his recommendations to the HEM team to implement the recording works.

2.3 Historical background

Moulsham Street was the main road into the Roman town and an important suburb in the Roman and medieval periods. Today the street continues as a self-sufficient commercial centre and comprises retail premises occupying buildings that date to around the 16th-century, with long plots at the rear.

During the 19th-century the street was extremely busy, with tradesmen of all kinds selling their wares. Trades Directories of the time show a profusion of independent butchers, bakers, fishmongers and grocers rather than the charity shops and take-aways found on the street today. The first edition OS map of 1874 shows the shed on the boundary between nos. 170 and 169 (fig.2). Kelly's Trades Directory of 1899 mentions that No.170 was a sweet shop at the time, but there was a fishmongers at 169 Moulsham Street, owned by Mrs Rebecca Smith. Such establishments commonly had sheds out the back for washing and smoking the fish as a way of curing or preserving it before refrigeration became widespread. The plans from 1909 of a fish-curing shed at 207 Moulsham Street are documented at the ERO (D/B 7 Pb325) and are similar in size and form.

Numbers 168 and 169 trade as Robinson's chip shop, which was established around the time of the First World War. According to the owner, the shed was formerly owned by the shop but had not been used for curing fish in the past 50 years. Its more recent history is

unknown, but it was converted after curing ceased and was latterly used to store furniture, which remained inside during the survey.

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

Following recommendations by the Borough Conservation Officer, the HEM monitoring officer asked the FAU to provide a design brief based on English Heritage level 1 or 2 recording specifications (English Heritage 2006). This involved a low-level photographic and drawn survey, basic architectural descriptions and limited analysis and research.

Maps were studied at the Essex Records Office, Chelmsford to understand its historic development. However the scale of the maps in general was found to be too small to allow satisfactory identification in such a built-up area.

A series of digital and 35mm monochrome photographs were taken externally and internally. The presence of several large discarded items (mattress and other furniture) and the cramped internal conditions in such a small building limited the range of photographs taken. There were no such problems externally. A representative selection of six photographic plates is reproduced in this report. The full photographic record can be found in the archive.

4.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTION

The shed has an oblong plan that tapers inwards slightly on the north-west end. It is aligned north-west to south-east along the boundary wall of number 168-69 (fig.1). A small chimney is situated on the north-east side, possibly for a later copper or stove. The structure is built from soft red bricks arranged in Flemish bond, similar to those in the wall but not of the same building phase. A cement render covers much of the exterior, but is falling away in places due to cracking brickwork from shallow foundations. The south-east elevation, which lies within the boundary of 168-69, has a more recent pebble-dashed exterior (plate 2). This side forms part of the boundary wall as well as the inner wall to modern sheds associated with the chip shop.

There are clear areas of rebuild above the window, which is inserted, and the chimney/stub wall, probably repairs/adaptions carried out after fish-curing ceased in the mid 20th-century. The south-east elevation, facing the rear of No. 170, contains the only entrance, set within a

corrugated tin front, beneath the main smoke vent (plate 3). The tin wall is unsuitable for a smokehouse and is clearly a later insertion contemporary with the concrete loading ramp (plate 4), perhaps representing a more recent but lesser-known commercial phase of use associated with No.170. Any scars for original brick walling on this side have been covered by the render.

Two wooden smoke vents appear to be the only original external features. They are positioned opposite one another on the two short sides (fig.2, plates 2-4 & cover) to regulate the temperature inside the shed. Any internal shutters have since been removed.

The roof is gabled both ends and pitched at 30°. It is slate-covered with a partly weatherboarded gable on the north-eastern side (plate 3).

A single, collared, roof truss divides the interior into two bays. The interior is lath and plastered in lime, including the roof, a sensible fire precaution. However, none of the surfaces are fire-blackened (plates 5 & 7), suggesting the shed has been re-plastered since. A tie rod passes through the gables to prevent the walls distorting through the heat. Otherwise there are no additional fixtures or fittings of note. The concrete floor and lower parts of the walls are obscured by discarded furniture.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The curing shed behind No.170 Moulsham Street was smoking fish for Rebecca Smith's fishmongers at Nos.168-69 in the 1890s. However, its inclusion in the neighbouring plot is confusing, unless there was an earlier fishmonger (or butchers) here, of which there is no evidence. No entrance from the fishmonger's side was recorded but this may have been blocked and covered by wall plaster.

Up until the 1950s, the shed was used by Robinson's chip shop, which still occupies the premises of 168-69. Modern alterations such as the inserted stack and window and corrugated iron wall and ramp date to an unknown phase or phases of use before it was left to fall into decay. It is tentatively suggested that the position of the chimney in the corner suggests a copper was installed inside for a wash house behind No.170. This would also explain the re-plastering of the walls inside.

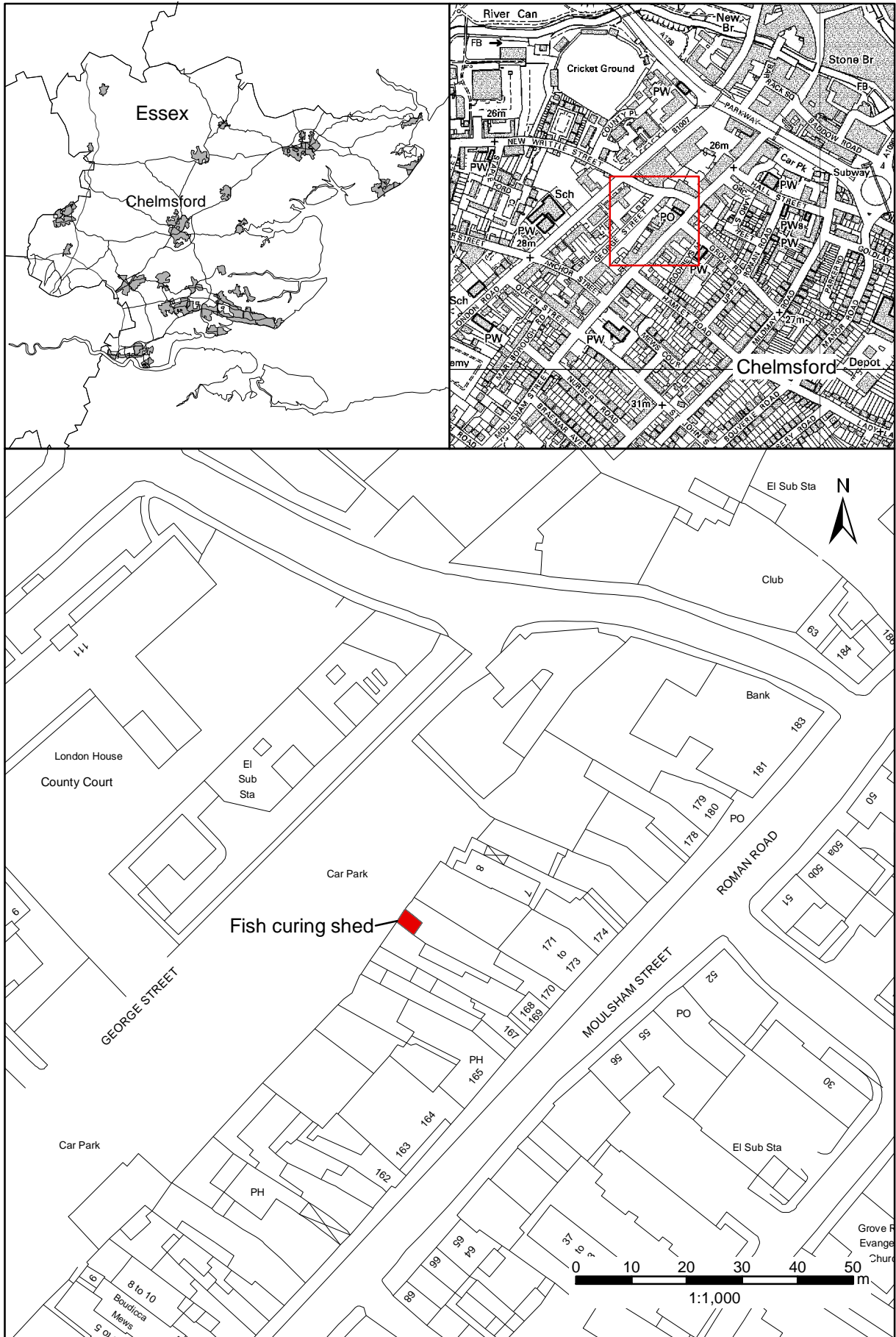
The structure displays little in the way of architectural merit and is in poor condition, but stands as an important relic of thriving 19th-century industry and commerce in this part of Late Victorian Chelmsford. It is useful to understand and record these buildings before they disappear. Several fishmongers traded from Moulsham Street at this time and it would be worthwhile to discover how many other associated structures survive. Many of these small utility buildings have little use in the modern age and sometimes stand on prime redevelopment land. The curing shed at No.170 is in an unfortunate location exposed as something of an eyesore to the George Street car park and looks in a sorry way against the modern houses that are now being built at the rear of the old medieval plots.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The photographic survey was commissioned by the owner developer, ADH Ltd. Recording and photography were undertaken by the author and report figures produced by Andrew Lewsey. Pat Connell monitored the project for ECC HEM Chelmsford Borough Council.

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Fig.1. Location plan

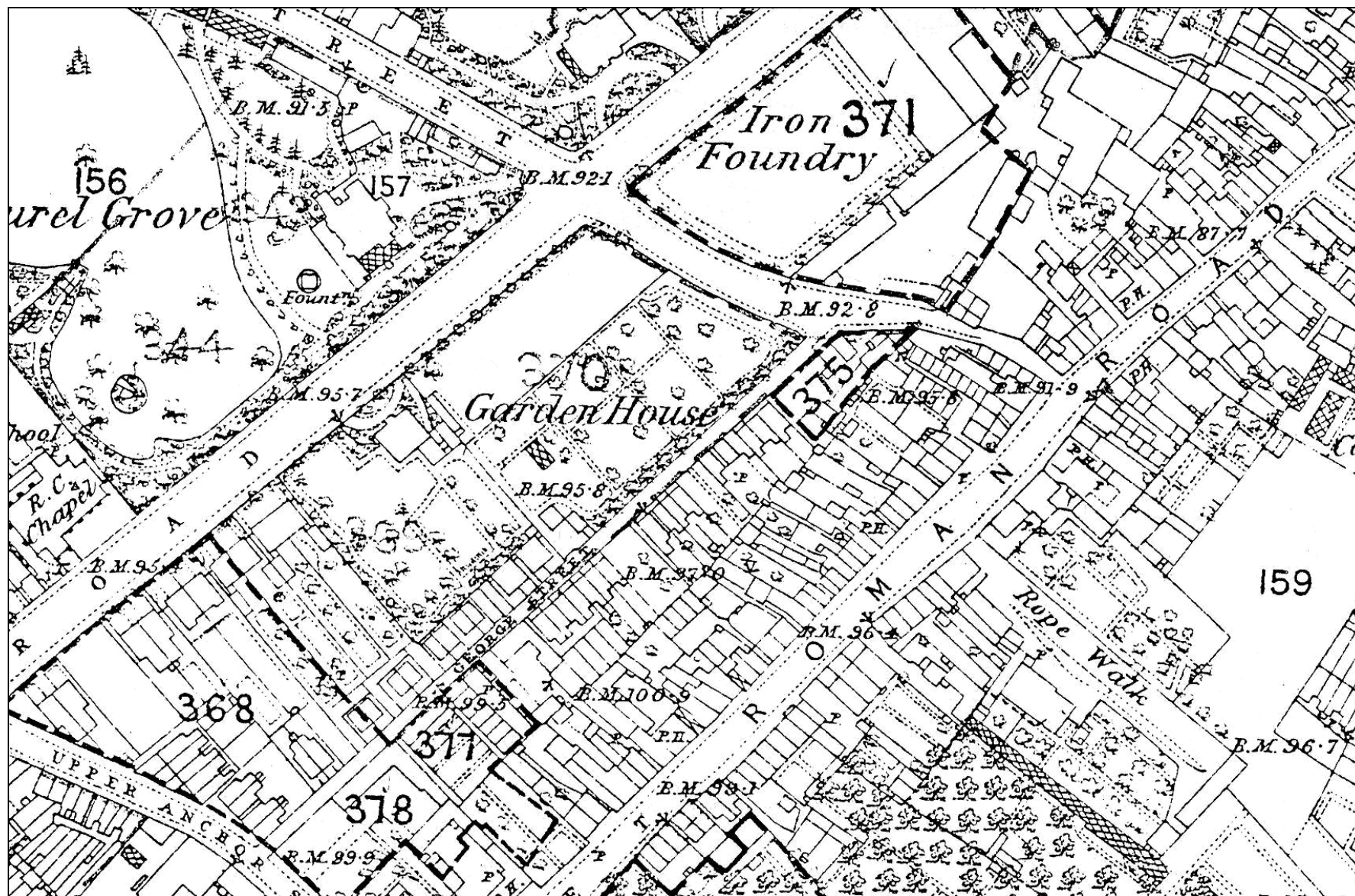


Fig. 2 O S First edition 1874

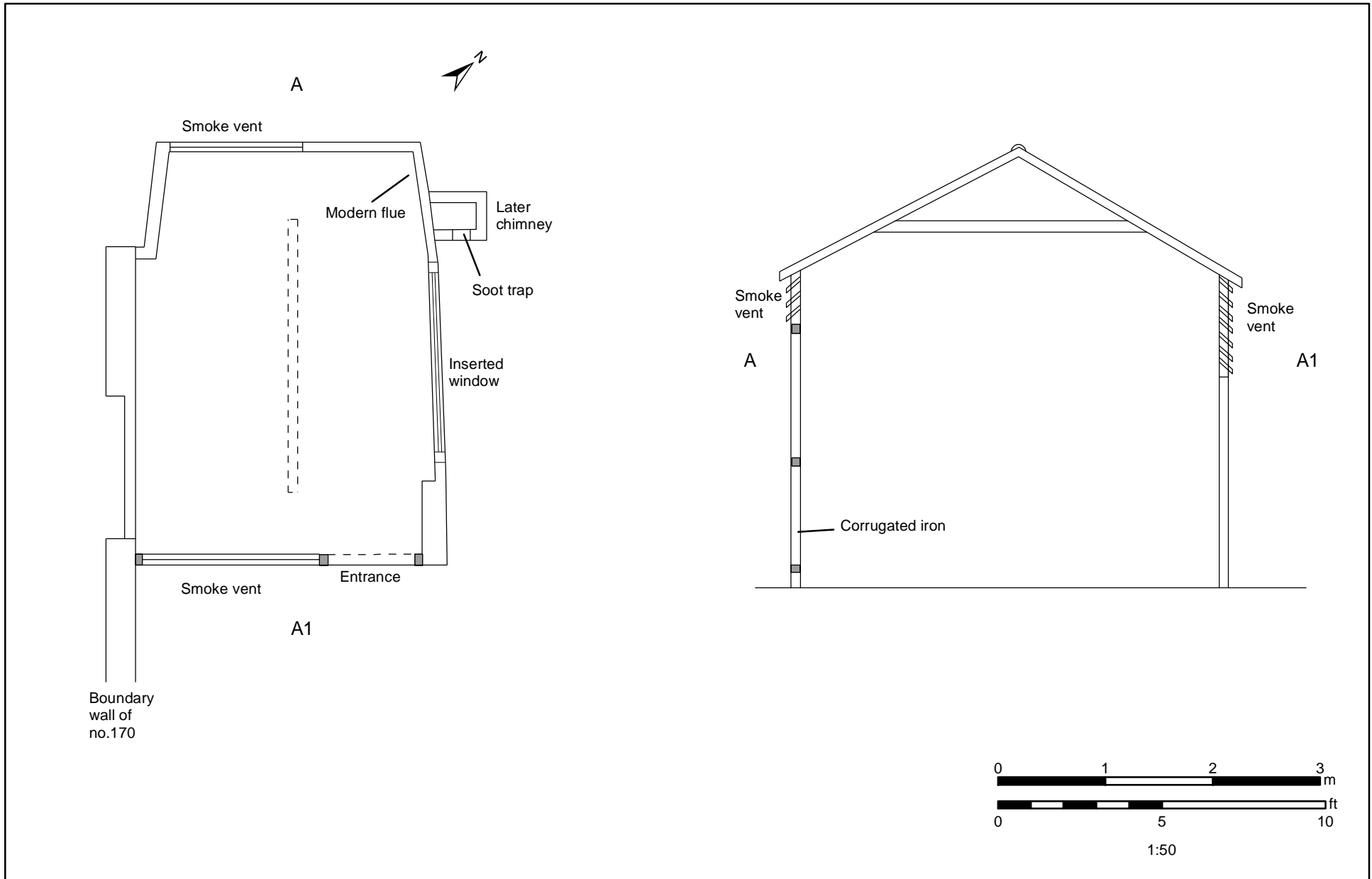


Fig.3. Plan and section



Plate 1 Curing shed (indicated) viewed from west across George Street car park



Plate 2 Shed viewed from west



Plate 3 Shed viewed from east



Plate 4 Inserted corrugated iron wall below main smoke vent



Plate 5 Interior viewed from entrance (south-east)



Plate 6 Interior viewed from north

Appendix 1: Contents of Archive

Site name: Fish-Curing Shed to the rear of 170 Moulsham Street, Chelmsford, Essex

Project no. 1755

Index to the Archive

Document wallet containing:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 FAU WSI/design brief
- 1.2 Client/archive report
- 1.3 2 copies of report

2. Site Archive

- 2.1 Photographic record (digital images & register)
- 2.2 Site notes & survey drawings

Appendix 2: EHER Summary Sheet

Site Name/Address: Fish-Curing Shed to the rear of 170 Moulsham Street, Chelmsford	
Parish: Moulsham	District: Chelmsford Borough
NGR: TL 7071 0626	Site Code: N/A
Type of Work: Building recording	Site Director/Team: Andrew Letch ECC FAU
Dates of Work: 13th February 2007	Size of Area Investigated: N/A
Curating Museum: Chelmsford	Funding Source: ADH Builders
Further Work Anticipated? None	Related EHER Nos.: None.
Final Report: Summary in EAH	
Periods Represented: Post-medieval (18th & 19th-century), modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS: A low-level English Heritage level 1/2 survey and building record was undertaken at a former fish-curing shed at the rear end of 170 Moulsham Street, facing onto the St George Street car park. The work was commissioned prior to demolition and redevelopment of the site for housing. The shed was built in the 19th-century, probably to serve the fishmongers at 168/169 Moulsham Street. This property certainly owned the structure during the first half of the 20th-century when fish was smoked for Robinsons Chip Shop, which still trades from the site. More recent history, when the shed was largely disused, is unclear, but there is evidence it may have been converted to a wash house. Although not architecturally significant, the structure has a strong association with the industrial and commercial history of 19th-century Chelmsford and is likely to be a rare survival of its type.	
Previous Summaries/Reports: None	
Author of Summary: A. Letch	Date of Summary: 15th May 2007