

**THE FORMER HALSTEAD GIRL'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
PRIORY HALL  
COLCHESTER ROAD  
HALSTEAD  
ESSEX**

**HISTORIC BUILDING SURVEY**



**Essex County Council  
Field Archaeology Unit**

**May 2011**

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**THE FORMER HALSTEAD GIRL'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
PRIORY HALL  
COLCHESTER ROAD  
HALSTEAD**

**HISTORIC BUILDING SURVEY**

**Client:** Hallmark Developments

**FAU Project No.:** 2382

**NGR:** TL 8206 3055

**OASIS No.:** 96203

**Date of Fieldwork:** 9th & 10th March 2011

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

A programme of historic building recording was undertaken by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) on an Edwardian grammar school prior to conversion to apartments and the redevelopment of the school site as a retirement village and care home. The work was commissioned by Hallmark Developments and carried out in accordance with a brief issued by the Historic Environment Management team of Essex County Council (ECC HEM), who also monitored the work on behalf of the LPA.

Copies of the report will be supplied to ECC HEM and the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) at County Hall, Chelmsford. The archive will be deposited with Braintree Museum. An OASIS online record has been created at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/oasis/index.cfm>.

Halstead Grammar School for Girls was purpose-built in 1909 to provide a broad curriculum for up to 100 girls. A caretaker's house was added in 1911 in similar style to the main building. Neither is Listed, but the school building retains much of its original layout and character and is a locally-important building involved in the movement to supply better educational provision for girls. The Priory Hall site became part of the Ramsey Comprehensive School in 1975. Latterly it was used by the ECC Adult Education and Youth Service.

The historic importance of the school and its unspoilt interiors was highlighted in a desk-based assessment (DBA) carried out by Ellen Heppell (2006) shortly before the building ceased to be occupied.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Site location and description**

Priory Hall stands along the Colchester Road 500m north-east of Halstead town centre, on the north-west slope of the River Colne valley towards the north-east side of Halstead town (TL 8206 3055, fig. 1).

The grounds of Priory Hall are bounded by a residential property to the west and the Courtualds sports ground to the east. The main school building is set in the central southern part of the site on an elevated position cut into the natural slope (Heppell 2006). The caretaker's house, which is slightly later, is situated to the south-east and fronts onto Colchester Road. There are playing fields at the back and tennis and netball courts to the east. There are also tree plantings around the driveways and around the periphery of the site (plate 1).

Priory Hall has fallen into disrepair since closure, and works to prepare the site for redevelopment had started prior to the building record with the demolition of the 1960s extension, which was not subject to the recording condition. Site offices in the form of porta-cabins had been stacked up in front of the front elevation and the main areas fenced off. The historic building survey coincided with an archaeological evaluation of the school grounds, also carried out by ECC FAU and reported on separately (Sparrow 2011).

### **2.2 Planning background**

An application to convert and extend the Edwardian school to form six apartments and refurbish the old caretaker's house was approved by Braintree District Council in June 2010 (BDC08/01714/FUL). This formed part of a wider redevelopment scheme for the whole Priory Hall site that also includes new houses, apartments, day centre and a 59-bed care home. In view of the impact of the proposed conversion works on the historic integrity of the school-era buildings, ECC HEM advised Braintree District Council that a condition for historic building recording to be made before development be stipulated, based on Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment. A condition was also placed on the proposals for archaeological trial trenching in areas of significant groundworks in the

surrounding school grounds. These requirements were specified in a brief issued by ECC HEM in February 2011. In response, ECC FAU issued method statements (written scheme of investigation) for approval, prior to carrying out the works.

### **2.3 Objectives**

The purpose of the historic building survey was, as stipulated in the brief (ECC HEM 2011), to produce a detailed record of the school prior to redevelopment of the site, addressing plan form, materials and method of construction, dating and phasing, room function and internal spatial layout, fixtures and fittings to 'preserve by record'.

Emphasis in the brief was placed on the recording of the 1909 school, which was carried out to English Heritage level 2 standards (2006). A lower, level 1, record was required of the caretaker's house, which had been stripped-out before the survey started.

### **3.0 DESCRIPTION OF WORKS**

At the start of the survey, plans and elevation drawings of the school were provided by the client as well as elevations of the caretaker's house. Original plans of the caretaker's house were obtained from the Essex Records Office and these were also used in the survey. No original plans are known to exist of the school building.

Windows and doorways had been boarded up before the survey, leaving much of the school without light. Portacabins had been positioned in front of the main elevation. Torches and flash photography were therefore used in the survey. The caretaker's house was only partly-boarded, although parts of it had been stripped-out previously.

Most of the school furniture had been removed before the survey, thereby exposing the surviving fixtures and fittings. However, the interiors had deteriorated since the previous visit in 2006 through damp, break-ins and graffiti, and photographs from the previous work have been included as much as possible to represent the true character of the school. No access was available to the roofspace.

As part of the survey, external and internal architectural descriptions were made and plans and elevations of the school buildings were annotated and amended. A series of digital photographs were taken internally and externally, alongside general 35mm black & white print shots. Specific shots were taken of any areas of architectural detail, fixtures and fittings.



A representative selection of photographs is reproduced at the back of the report as plates 1-46, combined as much as possible with photographs taken for the DBA, labelled as 2006, when the building was recently unoccupied, and the electricity was still on. The remainder can be found in the archive.

#### **4.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT**

The origins and development of the girl's grammar school are summarised here from the DBA (Heppell 2006). Some of the historic plates are included in this report also.

A boy's grammar school had been founded at the bequest of Dame Mary Ramsey in the 16th century (Medlycott 1998) which by the 19th century was becoming difficult to maintain (Heppell 2006). At the turn of the 20th century, the Halstead Unity Charities, who were responsible for the schools in the area, closed the boys school and transferred the pupils to the more modern Earls Colne grammar school, approximately three miles away. In its place, a new girl's grammar was to be constructed following new national educational requirements for girls.

A large field, known as Upper Priors (presumably owned by Earls Colne Priory at some stage) was purchased for the school in 1906 and plans drawn up by the architects Goodey and Cressall, prominent Colchester architects who built the Co-operative department store in the town and the Wilson Marriage School, now a centre for adult learning. Building work started on the school in 1909. Much of the original building survives today apart from the linear projection of outbuildings at the back (fig. 2) that was lost when the modern school extension was built in 1965.

The school was opened in September 1909 and the first headmistress was Miss Amy Brooks. A prospectus (ERO T/P 121/9) was issued that contains early photographs of the school, some of which are included as historic plates in figure 3. According to the prospectus, the school took girls between the ages of 5 to 18 who were taught a curriculum of holy scripture, reading, writing, English grammar, English literature, composition, arithmetic, geography, history, maths, German, French, Latin, science, cooking, needlework, drawing, drill and class singing (ERO T/P 121/9).

An account of the building was published in the Halstead Gazette, quoted from a book on the grammar school by Goodall and Branwhite (2003), included below.

*It will accommodate 100 pupils and of this number 30 are already attending. There are four classrooms on the ground floor one of which will accommodate 30 pupils, two for 25 and one for 20. There is also a large library at the front of the building and a room provided for the mistress. In the Cloakroom there are special arrangements made for drying the clothes of the pupils. At the rear there is a large cycle shed for the purpose of storing bicycles used by pupils coming to school. On the upper floor there is a laboratory and a cookery and dining room. There is an Art Room and a large room for use when it is required to assemble all the scholars together"*

The book also includes several internal photographs that are included in this report with more recent photographs.

The main entrance to the school was by a half-circular driveway at the front, cut into the natural slope (Heppell 2006), whilst the girl's entrance was located at the side, close to the rear of the school. To the rear were playing fields for netball, hockey, etc and tennis courts to the east. The school day began at 9.00 and finished at 3.30, with lunch between 12.30 and 2.00. In 1912 a Preparatory Department was established for boys and girls, and this is included in the prospectus in the ERO.

The caretaker's cottage was built c.1911 and was also designed by Goodey and Cressall. Original plans from the tender documentation are in the ERO archives (ERO E/S 25/12), along with the floor plan (ERO E/S 25/12), though they are a mirror image of how the building turned out. The cottage had three bedrooms, parlour, pantry, scullery, WC and coal store. A rear extension, used as a storage area, was added soon after, between 1911 and 1923 (fig. 2).

In 1965 the school was enlarged with the addition of a new hall, kitchens and classrooms, on the west of the existing building (Downey and Potts 1986), more than doubling its size (fig. 1). In 1975, ten years later, the school was merged with the Ramsey Secondary School along Colne Road just to the north, to become a sixth form centre (Downey and Potts 1986; Potts 2003). From this point onwards, it was known as Priory Hall.

In c.2000 the Ramsey school expanded and the sixth form moved to the main site on Colne Road. Up until 2006, Priory Hall was used by the North Essex Community College and the Essex County Council Youth Service until closure. The DBA was undertaken shortly before closure, in May 2006. Since then the school was boarded up and left empty while new uses were considered. Unfortunately over the years the school was subject to break-ins and

vandalism, but the caretaker's house, situated close to the road, fared much worse, being stripped out illicitly for building materials (M. Beaven pers. comm.).

The 1965 block was demolished in February 2011 prior to redevelopment works starting on the site.

## **5.0 BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS**

### **5.1 General description**

The historic grammar school is a large two-storey building lying on a north to south alignment at the centre of the plot. The modern extension, which was considerably larger, was located on the western side and at the time of the survey was merely a pile of rubble. The caretaker's house is a small two-storey structure positioned along the road frontage further to the south-east (fig. 1, plate 1).

The main entrance was on the south side of the building, but was only used by staff and visitors. The pupil's entrance was on the west side, towards the rear of the school, and latterly became the linking corridor between the two main blocks. Each corresponded to their own stairs and circulation routes inside the building in a well-ordered manner. The layout of the modern extension was centred around one large hall/stage and comprised largely of utility areas rather than classrooms, with the exception of the art department.

Around the school, the basic landscape has changed little, with the exception of new gates and an access route off Colchester Road which lead to the student's car park (fig. 1) and staff parking at the front of the school. Original school gates seen on the old photos (fig. 3a) were probably replaced when the new access was put in, but the original gate piers remain that replicate the stone banding that is a feature of the school.

### **5.2 1909 Grammar School**

The main core of the school survives virtually intact apart from some alterations at the back (north) and the removal of the single-storey outbuilding range (fig. 3a) that was demolished to make way for the 1965 extension. It is a complex building externally but internally is quite uniform with a logical layout fairly typical of contemporary school design.

The school has an oblong plan form orientated roughly north to south. It is built of 9 inch soft red bricks arranged in Flemish bonded in a lime mortar. Narrow projections extend outwards

on all sides with dormer windows and decorated with codestone banding. The main gables at the sides and back have mock Tudor timberwork. Windows remain largely as original, comprising a large number of multi-pane sashes, mainly fixed at the top, but occasionally with rows of smaller hopper windows above. Many original cast iron gutters and downpipes survive. Roofs are pitched at 45° and tiled and their tall chimney stacks have codestone banding and oversailing tops.

Although unified in scale and character, the school is essentially constructed as three blocks, joined in the middle by the flat-roofed first floor corridor. Their plan-form is relatively complex, having three double-pitched blocks (one L-shaped- east and south) slightly elevated around a narrow flat roof above the first floor corridor, which allowed light through windows in the upper parts of the ranges(plate 1). This accounts for the ranges having different numbers of bays, represented by large beams that provide internal support for floors and ceilings, probably boxed iron or steel joists.

### **5.2.1 External description**

The main façade is the **south elevation** (plate 2) at the head of the driveway, which would have been used by the teachers, school governors and visitors. It was only as 'old girls' that pupils were allowed to use it (Goodall & Branwhite 2003).

The front is approximately five bays long. The central bay projects outwards and has window ranges on both floors; the lowest ones lighting beneath the stair and the upper ones the landing. Codestone mullions and transoms separate the windows into multiples of six, with stone aprons below. Between the ground and first floor are the school coat of arms bearing the motto "Get wisdom and forget not", the motto adopted from the original boy's grammar school, and it is likely they shared the same arms too (note the ram in the lower left). Either side are the Essex and Halstead shields (plate 3). Within the gable is a nine-light oculus window.

The main entrance porch is on the second bay from the west (plate 4). Two steps lead up to the doorway, which, like the windows, has codestone dressings. On the right-hand side is the location of the former door bell. Above the opening is a Baroque-style stone canopy supported on moulded brackets with two fixed windows above following the canopy's curve (plate 4). The interior of the porch has a red earthenware tile floor and glazed brick tiles to the lower parts of the walls. A semi-glazed two-panel bivalve door sits within a bullnose brick surround, though it is unlikely to be original.

The projecting end bays either side contain bay windows to light the headmistress's room on the west side and library to east. First floor windows are common to most elevations, being eight-over-twelve sashes (plate 2).

The **west elevation** (plates 5 & 6) is broadly five bays long, with projections on the end bays and either side of the middle bay. More recently the north end was joined to the modern extension (plate 5). The end bays are gabled, forming the western ends of two ranges. Each has a mock-Tudor gable, the one to the south containing the main chimney stack that heated the headmistress's study and the staff room above. The north end bay was damaged when the modern extension was built, which housed the corridors that linked the two areas. The historic elevation (fig. 3a) shows a two window range and pupil's entrance on the ground floor and a single window on the first floor. Now each level has corridors (plate 6, left). One feature that remains, however, is the Ramsey emblem on the south side, set within a pointed, almost Egyptian-style cartouche, providing the foundation dates for both grammar schools (1594 and 1909, plate 7). Apart from the main projections, ground floor fenestration is of eight-over-eight sashes, spaced closely-together to light the classrooms. Those above are six-over-nine sashes, with additional six-pane windows above in the shorter projections on the second and fourth bays, the same as on the main bay at the front. These light the assembly hall. Tie rods were added at the tops of the gables at a later stage, but were not seen internally.

The old photograph of the **north elevation** (fig. 3b) shows the main block as a four-bay hipped roof range with twin central in gable-ended projections (fig. 4). At some stage, the mock-Tudor projection in figure 3b was lost, probably when the art room was re-located in the 1965 extension, leaving only the gable lighting the pupil's stair (plate 8). The existing projection matches that of the front, with its large first floor windows and oculus window, since damaged. All other fenestration, as can be seen, has codestone sills and heads of contemporary date. The rear gable of the L-shaped block occupies the eastern side of the elevation and displays mock-Tudor timberwork common to all. In the upper half of the gable are two openings to light the attic space where water tanks were located to supply the kitchen and toilets (plate 8, left). The original octagonal chimney at this end has been replaced with a plain one.

With the trees and bank so close to the north end, the **east elevation** (plate 9) was difficult to photograph in its entirety. The character of this part is essentially a six bay range with two bays of the north range at the far end, stepped-back. The main east range has a uniform window range on the ground floor apart from the first (south) bay where there are none. The

second bay has a series of four windows separated by stone mullions and transoms underneath a mock-Tudor gablet (plate 9, left). Uniform windows occupy the rest of the first floor. Narrow projections on the fourth and sixth bays have additional windows above. A photograph was taken of detailing to the north projection, which shows a moulded stone architrave and triangular pediment (plate 10), a standard form of decoration to the minor gables.

### **5.2.1 Internal description**

The layout of the main school is broadly symmetrical on both levels and remains largely unaltered. Staff areas were located at the front (south end) and pupils at the back (north end), connected by corridors. The rooms have high ceilings and plenty of windows to maximise light levels. Right from the start the school was equipped with electric lighting and central heating, as well as fireplaces in the more prominent rooms. Many fixtures and fittings of the period are retained, such as the parquet flooring, wall-tiling, panelling, internal doors and windows, but very little in the way of cupboards, desks, and other fixtures and fittings, which were probably replaced over time.

The interiors have suffered badly since the DBA was undertaken in 2006, but fortunately there are good photographs from the site visit that are included in this report, along with others taken more recently.

In the following text, the rooms are titled and discussed by their primary function and any numbers allocated are for reference use only and added to the existing plans (figs. 4a and 4b). Descriptions start at the front of the school to the back, i.e. from south to north. Photographs taken in the early years of the school are included with those taken in 2006 and 2011, and are indicated thus where appropriate.

#### ***Ground floor***

The main/staff entrance was at the southern end, entered through an open porch and bivalve (fire) doors. A central corridor connects all the ground floor rooms, which consisted of four classrooms lit by large glazed panels that copy the multi-pane themes of the external windows, offices (for headmistress and later on a secretary), library/governor's room, store rooms, toilets and changing rooms (fig. 4a) that linked to the pupil staircase at the back.

The **porch** leads into a **lobby** area, currently filled with various office equipment but relatively free in 2006 (plate 11). From here access was available through tall arched apertures to the headmistress's office, stationery cupboard (later secretary's office), the main corridor (and

classrooms) and stairs (plate 12). The walls of the lobby are decorated with glazed green 'brick' tiles to the lower parts, framed to good effect by a stained wooden dado (plate 11). The green tiling continues up the stairs (plates 12 & 13) and along the corridor as a major feature of all gathering points/access routes. Walls have rounded corners to enable the easy flow of pupils and staff and a moulded cornice, seen on both floors.

Around the lobby, doors and other openings are placed within tall arched openings on moulded consoles (plate 11), which are also a major design feature throughout the old school. Radiators are housed in tiled rebates along the wall, especially-designed (plate 11, left). On the east wall is a recess that may represent the blocked doorway into the former **governor's room**, before this became the library (fig. 4a, plate 11).

On the west side of the lobby are the **staff stairs** (plate 12), which are framed by an elegant, but now rather dilapidated, archway (plate 13). The green tiling continues from the lobby around the corners of the arch and above the stone steps, which have a dog-leg form. Arches repeat themselves between the flights opening them up to light from the landing window. Under the stairs are a short flight of steps down to a **staff toilet** that retains its original sink and white ceramic tiling typical of date and function, lit by a series of four multi-pane tilting windows (plate 14).

On the west side of the lobby is the **headmistress's study** and the **stationery cupboard**, latterly the secretary's office. In the early days of the school the head did all her own admin work (Goodall & Branwhite 2003). The headmistress's office commanded the main position at the front of the school that was well-lit by the bay window at the front and decorated with a 7" torus skirting board and moulded picture rail (plate 15). Originally there may have been a fireplace on the north wall since it has a chimney attached (fig. 4a), though there is also an old cast iron radiator below the window. The entrances into the study and stationery cupboard retain their original nine-pane semi-glazed two-panel doors with 6-pane hopper fanlight over and these are typical to most rooms, though those in the classrooms are stained rather than painted. Most remain intact on both floors. Plate 16 shows the doorway into the **stationery cupboard/secretary's office** and the original stationery cupboard beside it. Inside, the room has a parquet floor but no decorative features.

Entry into **corridor 1** from the front lobby is through a glazed partition underneath one of the decorative archways. The screens, one either end, contain single firedoors to channel pupils through the corridor in an orderly fashion (plate 17). They are found on almost all circulation

routes within the school, though it is not known whether they were fitted originally or added later as a consequence of fire legislation.

The corridor continues the same theme of green tiling, with recesses in the walls for radiators. A wooden dado above the tiles also forms the sills to the windows lighting the classrooms either side, a functional but decorative detail (plate 17) and replicated in the classroom windows above the wood panelling. These internal corridor windows were designed to bring in extra light into the classrooms and facilitate a general level of surveillance by staff. They tend to be arranged in rows of three; three nine-pane windows below three six-pane windows, the central one of which is a hopper window - the only opening part. The corridor ceiling on this level is wood-panelled (plate 17).

The **library** was latterly used as a large classroom (there is a blackboard at the north end) and is entered at the west end of the corridor. According to sources, the room was originally the governor's room, for meetings, etc. The fact that there appears to be a second (now blocked) doorway off the lobby, and a fireplace toward the front end, suggests this was once two rooms, presumably divided along the beam shown in fig. 4a, which would allow for a small classroom next-door. The governor's room was, like the headmistresses office, at the front of the school, and entered from the main lobby (fig. 4a). Many of the features of the library are the same as the classrooms. The room has a parquet floor ('lifting' underneath the carpet through damp) and dark-stained wood panelling along the walls (plate 18). However, its roll-moulded picture rail and cornice, which are features not found in the classrooms, indicates its former importance. One of the main features of the room was the fireplace (plate 19) located at the south end close to the bay window that would heated the governors room. Unfortunately it had been stripped out before this survey.

The **classrooms** are entered from corridor 1 through semi-glazed doors. They are uniform in character, each having thick beams across the ceilings, stained wood panelling, ovolo-moulded windows with continuous sills following the dado, plain architraves and large cast iron radiators. All classrooms retain fixtures and fittings dating from 1909, apart from the original electric lights seen in early photographs. **Classroom 1** is typical of its type (plate 20). **Classroom 2** is smaller in size and linked by an inserted connecting door, as well as to the corridor by a small lobby (fig. 4a). **Classroom 3** has a modern door but the rest of the interior is original (plate 21). Storerooms are situated either side of the corridor. Both have panelling, though the lack of it on one wall suggests these may be formerly part of classrooms, though this is unlikely. **Storeroom 1** is entered from a small panelled lobby off the north end of Corridor 1 that also serves classroom 2. It has a parquet floor and wooden panelling on three



side, which the present shelving does not match (plate 22). Low down on the external wall is an air vent, regulated by a metal lever mechanism (plate 23). **Storeroom 2**, located between the library and classroom 3, has the remains of rudimentary shelving and a calico blind over its external window.

At the bottom (north) end of the corridor 1 is **corridor 2**, leading off at right angles either side (fig. 4a). Its decoration is the same as the main corridor, with green tiling and arches over the main junctions. Originally this represented the girls' entrance (fig. 4a), and latterly formed the link with the main entrance through the modern part of the school (plate 24). On the north side, the corridor leads past **classroom 4**, whose interior has been modernised, though is still part of the old school. The room has been reduced in size by adding a stud wall across the west end, opening this end up to the main entrance area of the modern extension (fig. 4a). To the north of the junction of corridors 1 and 2 are the **pupil's stairs** which have the same features as the staff stairs at the other end but are in poorer condition through damp and are now boarded-off (plate 25). Below the stairs are short steps down to the **caretaker's room** which is entered by a thick four pane door. Amidst the unwanted debris inside is an *in situ* sink laid on iron brackets that probably dates to the founding of the school (plate 26). Concrete steps with cast iron stair rails lead beyond the caretaker's room down to the **basement** (not on fig. 4a). The basement is quite small given the size of the building and contains a lot of junk spread over two rooms and a battered modern boiler.

Through a glazed partition on the east side of corridor 2 is the original **washroom/toilets**, featuring the same stained panelling and 7" skirting boards seen in the classrooms, though now painted over in blue (plate 27) and incorporated into the now demolished modern toilet block (fig. 4a). Some 9" cream-coloured brick tiling survives around the sinks. The **cloakroom** at the east end of corridor 2 has low benches fitted with steel cages for shoes, but otherwise the fittings are modern (plate 28).

### ***First floor***

The broad layout of the ground floor is mirrored on the floor above, though there are fewer classrooms. Being under the roof, this floor has suffered more from dampness, particularly the corridor and hall and, with some daylight managing to illuminate parts of it, the lighter areas, particularly the hall, has suffered from graffiti.

In the same manner as below, **corridor 3** on the first floor links between the staff stair (plate 29) and pupil's stair and is furnished the same as the corridor below in green tiling (plate 30), though lacks the firedoors at either end. The lath and plaster ceiling is directly below the flat

central roof and is suffering from damp, especially at the north end. At the south end, on the left side, is the **staff room** (fig. 4b). This is a self-contained collection of rooms entered through a glazed partition that has a central door, unlike the more prolific side-entry fire doors already mentioned. Upon entry into the staff room, a short lobby area leads into a small kitchen (door removed); part of the original layout but with modern fittings, and through a broad opening into the staff room itself. Decoration in the staff area is the same as seen downstairs in the headmistress's office, with 7" high skirting boards, a rolled cornice and no panelling (plate 32). The fireplace at the west end is intact, but is a later version. The layout of the attached toilet and washroom has not changed (fig. 4b) but the fixtures inside have been updated.

The **hall** has suffered more than most rooms through damp and graffiti, the latter to a large part due to the fact there is more natural light. In the grammar school days it was used for assemblies, music lessons, P.E. and dancing (Goodall & Branwhite 2003), and one of the early photographs shows it being used as a classroom, with desks around the sides (plate 33). The northern half-bay originally contained the stage, where school assemblies would be taken. No evidence remains of the stage now, nor the doorway through from corridor 4 shown on the left of the stage in plate 33 (though it could be argued that a doorway from the staff room would have been more likely). Both were probably removed when the new hall was built in 1965 and the hall became a classroom.

The room is three bays long with two half-bays either end (fig. 4b). It is well-lit from the glazed lights in the corridor and the outside windows but also from dormer windows on the outer full bays, those on the eastern side overlooking the flat central roof that was designed for this purpose. Room décor has not changed, even if the interior has been painted over and the ornate light fittings seen in plate 33 have been removed. A parquet floor remains underneath the present-day carpet and the lower walls are panelled above tall 9" torus skirting boards, though with oblong panels rather than the stained vertical panelling seen inside the classrooms. Semi-glazed doors are set midway along the corridor and there is a blackboard at the south end (plate 34). One of the main features of the hall is its barrel-vaulted ceiling (plates 33 & 34) whose moulded ribs and Greek-style pilasters define the bays with the theme continued in the thick cornice around the room and the window mullions.

Opposite the hall, on the south end of corridor 3, is the **laboratory** (plate 35). This room is similar in size to the library below and was originally fitted out with benches and other equipment (plate 36), that have since been removed. Like many others, the room has

suffered somewhat through disuse, but retains its original features. Typical decorative features are the parquet flooring and stained pine panelling, along with an ovolo- moulded dado rail. A good deal of light enters the room through the big central window, fitted with blackout curtains, and five others on the two outer walls below the canted ceiling, and a sixth against the corridor (fig. 4b). There are fewer windows along the corridor. One of the main features are the two fume cupboards in the south-west corner, which used the draught of the chimney flues to expel noxious smells (fig. 4b & plate 37).

Some evidence of other fittings was recorded in the south-east corner, perhaps a cupboard, but since fitted with a modern sink unit, both now removed. The outline of another earlier fixture was recorded on the floor next to store room 3 (fig. 4b), though its date is uncertain. It is possible the laboratory was extended into the store room here, but this cannot be proven either way. A curious feature set in the floor alongside the east wall is a cast iron gully that exits out the south-east corner and into the drain hopper outside (fig. 4b). The drain is covered by 6 x 24 inch cast iron covers (plate 38) and was presumably associated with a sink that no longer survives.

Stems of the old electric light fittings have been cut back to the ceiling, but do protrude slightly from square ceiling panels (plate 36).

**Store room 3** has access from both the laboratory and the corridor, but with so few classrooms on this level, it is likely to have primarily served the former. Shelving has been removed but other features such as the high glazed panel on the east side and stained timber panelling around the walls survives. Although shorter than the stores downstairs, it seems to retain its original proportions (fig. 4b).

On the same side of the corridor as the store room and laboratory is the **cookery and dining room**. The preparatory school operated here in the mornings, which was also used for cookery classes and became the dining room at lunch time. Tables were put out by the caretaker and prefects supervised the laying of tables with white table clothes and knives and forks by pupils, for which there was a rota (Goodall & Branwhite 2003). Pupils brought in sandwiches and were provided with cocoa by the caretaker (Downey & Potts 1986). Cooked school meals were not commonplace until the new kitchens were built in 1965. This room is similar in form to the classrooms, but has a large white-tiled hearth at the north end where the cooking range once stood (plate 39). This is now blocked, as is the archway next to it that would have led to the washroom and cloakroom (fig. 4b, plate 40). Panelling is retained on the other three sides of the room and there is also a heavy roll-moulded cornice, though

more basic than that seen in the laboratory. Through the now-blocked arch are the present-day **washroom/toilets and cloakroom**, which may have been preparation and pantry areas originally. They are fitted-out with benches and metal cages for shoes, etc, like those downstairs, but have a modern tiled lino flooring.

**Corridor 4**, off the north end of Corridor 3, is a relatively recent introduction since it originally formed part of the art room with its north-facing gable windows (plate 3b). More recently, the corridor formed the upper floor into the 1965 extension and the old art room was partitioned-off as music practice rooms. Glazed tiling and wooden dado rail of the original corridor décor finish where the fire door begins, but the parquet flooring continues along the side of the music rooms, though like below, the music rooms lack any historic décor.

The landing to the **pupil's stair** is exactly the same as the one for the staff stair at the opposite end of Corridor 3, though in much poorer condition through damp. The stairs are lit by three long windows on the half landing and the tops of the walls have roll-moulded cornices and flat beaded arches, like those on the opposite side (plate 41).

### **5.3 1911 Caretaker's house**

The caretaker's house stands to the south-east of the school, on raised ground overlooking the Colchester Road (fig. 1). Its mock-Tudor style reflects that of the school in many ways, and it was designed by the same architects. It is a reasonably-sized two-storey three-bedroom house, with a single-storey storage outbuilding added on the north side before 1923.

After many years of use, the caretaker's house became redundant when the school closed. Photographs taken during the 2006 survey show the building boarded up, but since then the building has been broken into and ransacked for building materials, etc. Its current external appearance is little changed, and some external fixtures and fittings such as the front door and several multi-pane sash windows remain, but much of the interior has been gutted.

The main part is broadly square in plan and of two-by-two bays. It is constructed of brick in an early cavity wall bond, with stone and timber dressings. The roof is tiled and the main elevations are on the south and west sides, which are seen from the road. A plan and level 1 record was made in accordance with the brief.

### **5.3.1 External description**

The main facade is on the south side, overlooking the road. The front door is set behind an open-sided veranda at the base of a catslide roof. A small mock-Tudor dormer window lights the stairs inside (plate 42). The second bay projects outwards on two levels and contains a bay window on the ground floor and a gable with codestone dressings the same as those seen on the minor gables of the school building. A relatively large chimney is located centrally along its ridge that served the front room and kitchen below.

The west elevation has a large ground floor window (removed) and two upstairs ones beneath a painted studwork gable (plate 42). Detailing on the east and north elevations is minor. Plate 43 shows the twin-gabled rear elevation with a flat-roofed modern extension removed and a blocked original kitchen window. The single-storey post 1911 outbuilding is attached to the second bay but all its fittings have been removed (plate 43). As a utility structure it matches the main building and was probably built soon after, though it is built in Flemish rather than cavity wall bond.

### **5.3.2 Internal description**

In its current state, there is very little to describe of the interior, since all fixtures and fittings including internal doors, ceilings and floorboards have been removed and the walls stripped-back. However, the original layout of kitchen, dining room, front room and hall and three bedrooms upstairs, remains largely unaltered, apart from the insertion of a first floor bathroom through the partitioning of bedroom 3 (fig. 5). Plates 44 & 45 give a general idea of the current condition. The only relatively intact parts are around the stairs, in particular the hall, where the original front door and window survive and parts of the stair itself (plate 46).

## **6.0 DISCUSSION**

National educational provision began in 1833 when the Government offered building grants to set up new schools in an effort to raise standards of education across the country. This established National Schools through the Church of England and British Schools by Non-Conformist organisations. Public and grammar schools, endowed and proprietary schools, Dame Schools, Sunday Schools, Ragged Schools (for the very poorest) and mill schools were already established, but there was no compulsory education.

The need for improved educational provision for girls was recognised by the Schools Inquiry Commission (1864-68) who unanimously concluded that there was a “..general deficiency in

girl's education.." caused mainly by many parents not recognising a need or even being opposed to it (Report of Schools Inquiry Commission Parliamentary papers 1868 Vol. XXVIII, Chapter VI). This view was supported in the subsequent Endowed Education Act of 1869 which included the recommendation that: " ..in every town large enough to be worthy of a grammar school...there should be a day school for girls under public management and with moderate fees.." (Barnard 1961).

Through the recommendations, the numbers of girl's schools began to increase nationally, although it was not until 1870 that school became compulsory for all. The Education Act of that year (also known as the Forster Act) required all 5 to 12 year olds to attend school and established local boards to build schools where further provision was required.

Further reform of the education system took place in 1902 when the Education Act (Balfour Act) established two types of secondary schools (endowed grammars and municipal/county secondary schools) grant aided or maintained by newly established local education authorities (Heppell 2006).

Amidst this background, it is easy to understand how national requirements filtered down to local level. Although regret was shown in Halstead on the closure of the boy's grammar, the need for a school for girls was clearly recognised. In 1906 Michael E Sadler noted in his report to the Essex Education Committee that " ..there is no doubt that a public secondary school for girls is greatly needed in the district." (Sadler 1906).

Shortly afterwards, Halstead Girl's Grammar was built. Its location above the Colchester Road looking over the town and Colne Valley was, and still is today, a prominent one, and it remains one of Halstead's most recognisable buildings. Its design and outward appearance reflects late Victorian and Edwardian architectural tastes, a mixture of Jacobean and mock Tudor styles, a compact quite dominant brick structure, with projecting gables, stone dressings and banding, tall chimneys, exposed timbers and multi-paned windows. The same features are replicated in lesser form on the caretaker's house and together they have strong group value, both architecturally and historically. The only significant omission to this group is the old outbuilding range to the rear of the school, which was lost when the school was enlarged in the 1960s.

Internal layout and use of space is typical of many schools built in the first half of the 20th century. The front end of the building was the most important, with the more formal rooms (headmistress's office, governors room, staff room) gathered around the main

entrance/reception area leading onto a corridor between classrooms either side, lit both externally and internally. Windows onto the corridor and glazed classroom doors meant that the children could be easily monitored during class-time, although the location of staff rooms at the front seems symbolic rather than functional. To maintain and emphasise order and discipline, the entry point for pupils was separate, located towards the back of the school where ancillary rooms (toilet, caretaker's room) were also located. Thus each group (staff and pupils) had clearly defined areas at either end of the building and circulation routes leading from designated entrances and stairs. The spatial layout of each floor is broadly the same, though the first floor rooms are more functional: the hall, laboratory, art room and cookery/dining room/later preparatory school also. It is perhaps surprising that the hall was located on this floor, especially since it doubled up for P.E., dancing and music classes, which were bound to disrupt the proceedings below.

Much of the original fixtures remain unaltered, though some areas are clearly deteriorating through damp and long-term disuse. One of the more distinctive features is the green wall-tiling which appears in all circulation routes (stairs and corridors). The classrooms retain their wood-panelling on the walls, the internal windows and most of the original doors. Their bleak interiors and dark-stained panelling provides a sombre atmosphere, presumably considered to be conducive to learning, and the windows are suitably high enough to deter distraction. The hall in particular is interesting for its barrel-vaulted ceiling and wider panelling; offering a clear departure from the other very uniform interiors. Changes in room hierarchy within the building, as signalled by décor, are quite subtle. Throughout there are surviving fixtures deserving mention such as the fireplace in the cookery room, the fume cupboards in the lab and the old ventilation control in the stores.

Although externally intact, the interior of the caretaker's house has suffered immeasurably over the past six years and it is unclear how the original compared to those in the school. It does appear, however, from schoolday recollections (Goodall and Branwhite 2003), to have contained some "remarkable" early 20th century tiling, so it can be assumed to have had a similar level of internal detail as the school.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

The former Halstead Girls Grammar School is an important local building which offered a high level of education and quality facilities for almost one hundred years and still arouses great affection within the community. It is also of national significance as part of the late 19th and early 20th century movement for better education for girls, a product of progressive Victorian attitudes towards education for all.

It offered a broad curriculum and pleasant surroundings. Its internal layout was fairly typical of schools and institutional buildings in general, with clearly-marked areas and circulation routes for teachers and pupils. There is great internal conformity in the internal design and good-quality well-preserved fittings survive as important historic and functional features that are part of the building's character, representative of Edwardian design of middle class schools.

Both the school and the nearby caretaker's house were designed by prominent Colchester architects Goodey and Cressall and have good group value. Their Jacobean/mock Tudor form architectural form reflects and adds to the local sub-urban streetscape, being close to the mock Tudor Courtaulds houses and Nether Priors and suggests order, continuity and stability. However, although the buildings reflected earlier styles, they were built with modern materials and incorporated new developments such as electric lights and central heating.

The main structure is a well-preserved example of an Edwardian school that has much historic value and local interest. It will be retained and converted along with the caretaker's house as part of the new development, thus preserving its historical identity and the diversity of the built environment of Halstead.

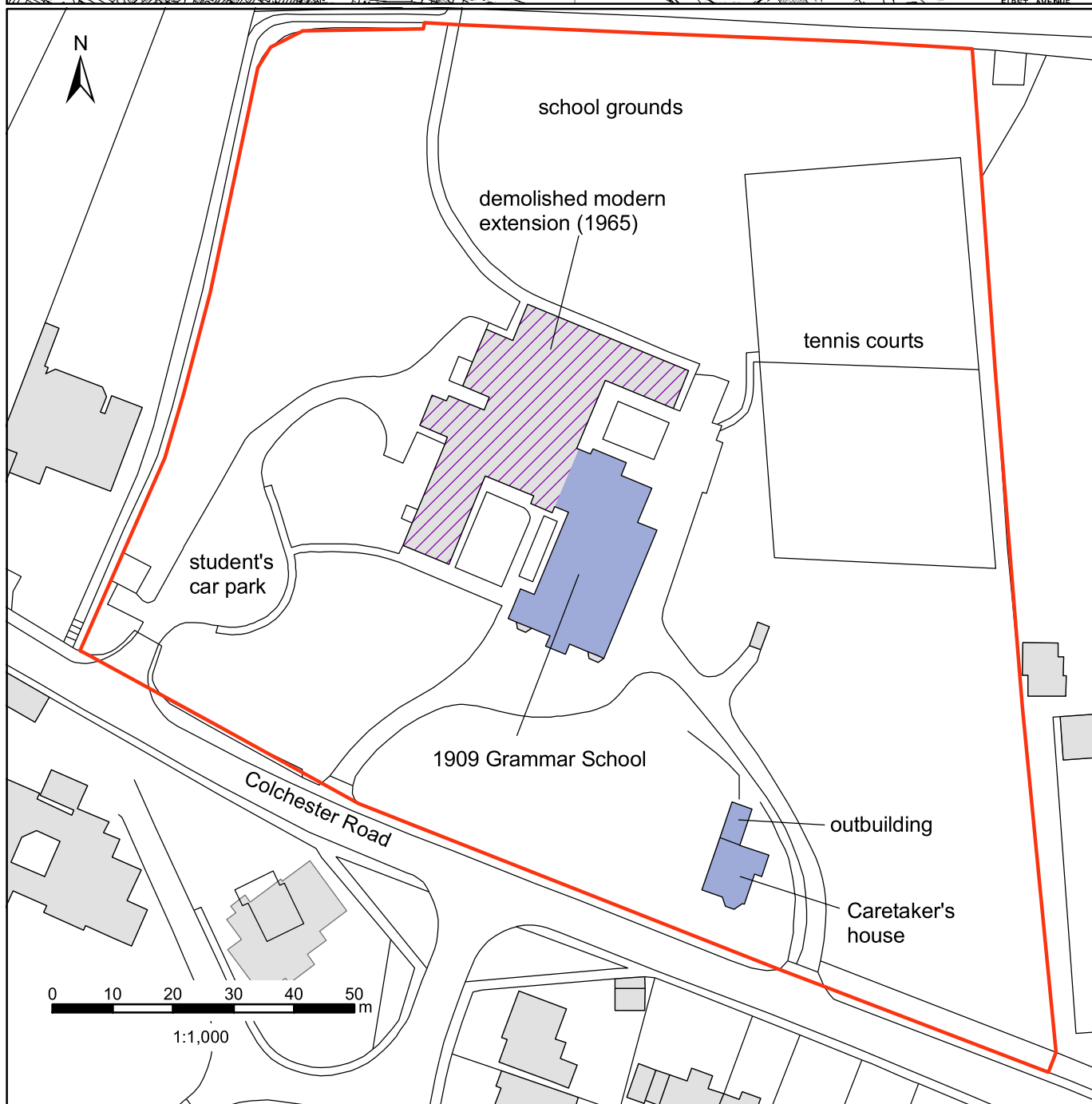
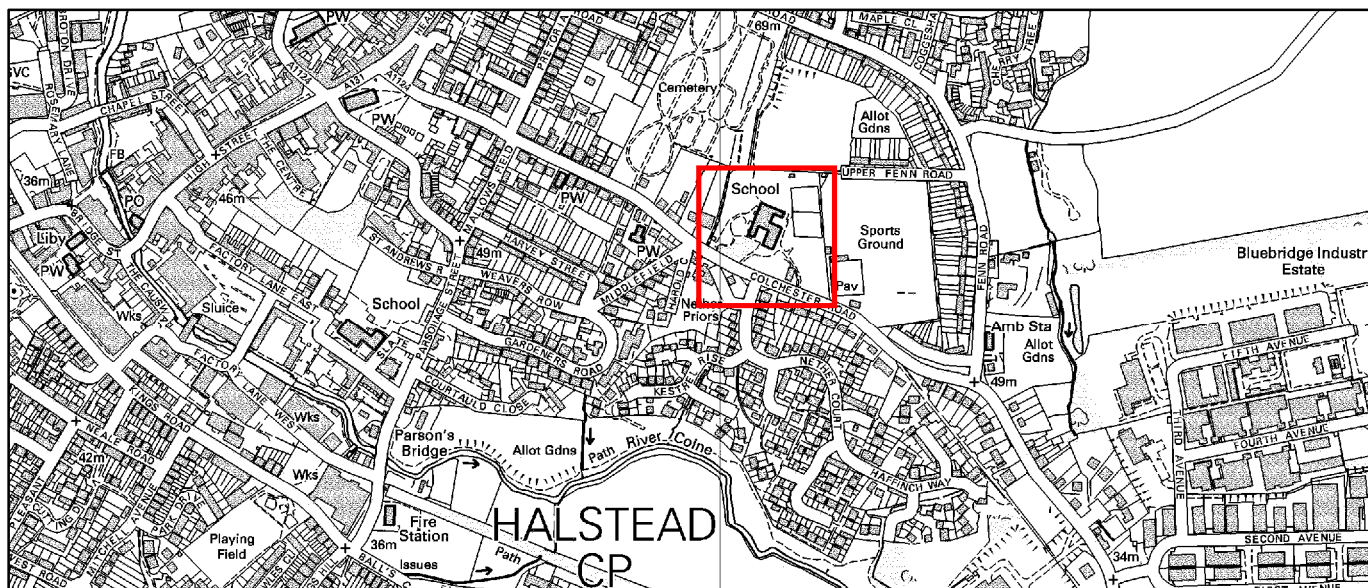
## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks are due to Hallmark Developments for commissioning this survey and to Barry Brown for supplying site drawings. Thanks also to the site agent Martin Beaven for facilitating the works and to the staff at the Essex Records Office. Fieldwork, recording and photography were undertaken by the author. Illustrations were prepared by the author and produced by Andrew Lewsey. The project was managed by Mark Atkinson and monitored by Teresa O'Connor of ECC HEM, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.



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Fig.1. Location and block plan



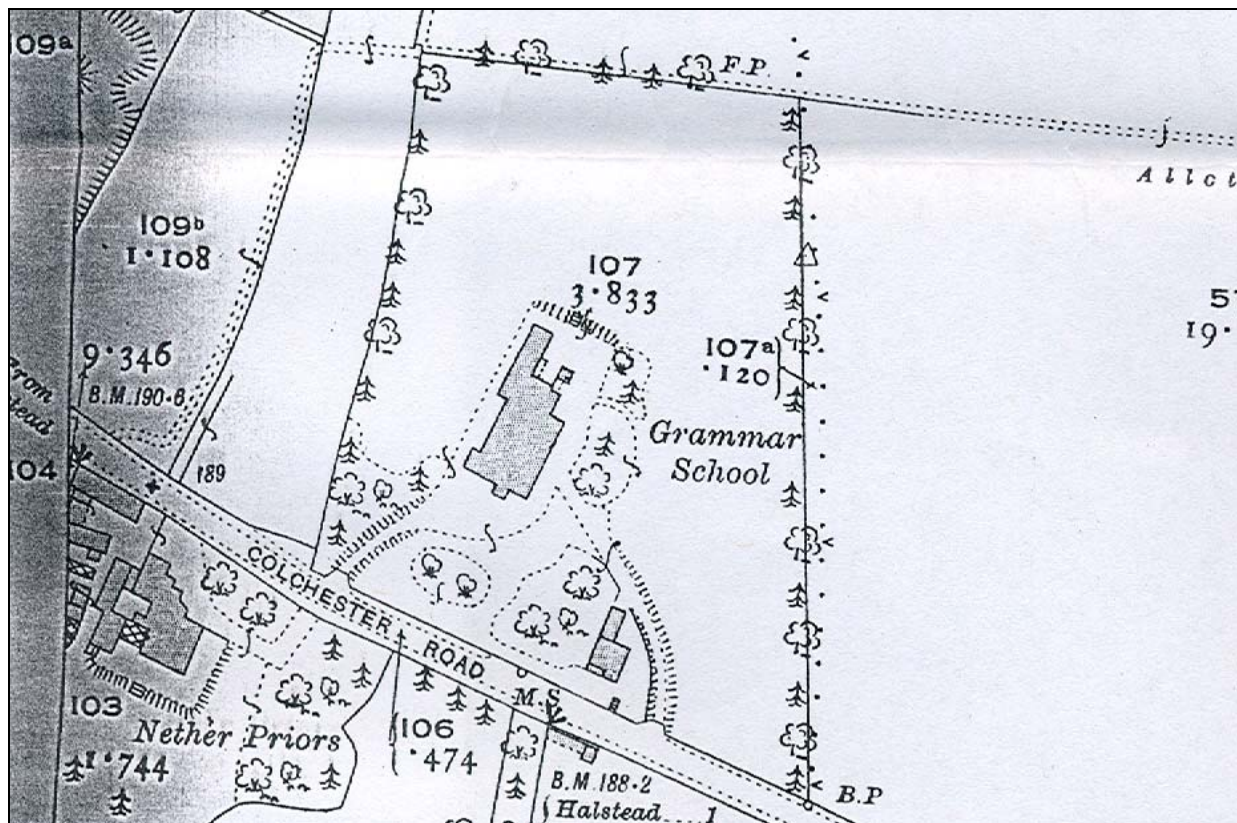


Fig. 2 Ordnance survey 3rd edition 1923



Fig. 3 Historic photographs (a) View from Colchester Road





(b) Rear of school viewed to south-west (ERO T/P 121/9)



(c) Typical classroom (ERO T/P 121/9)



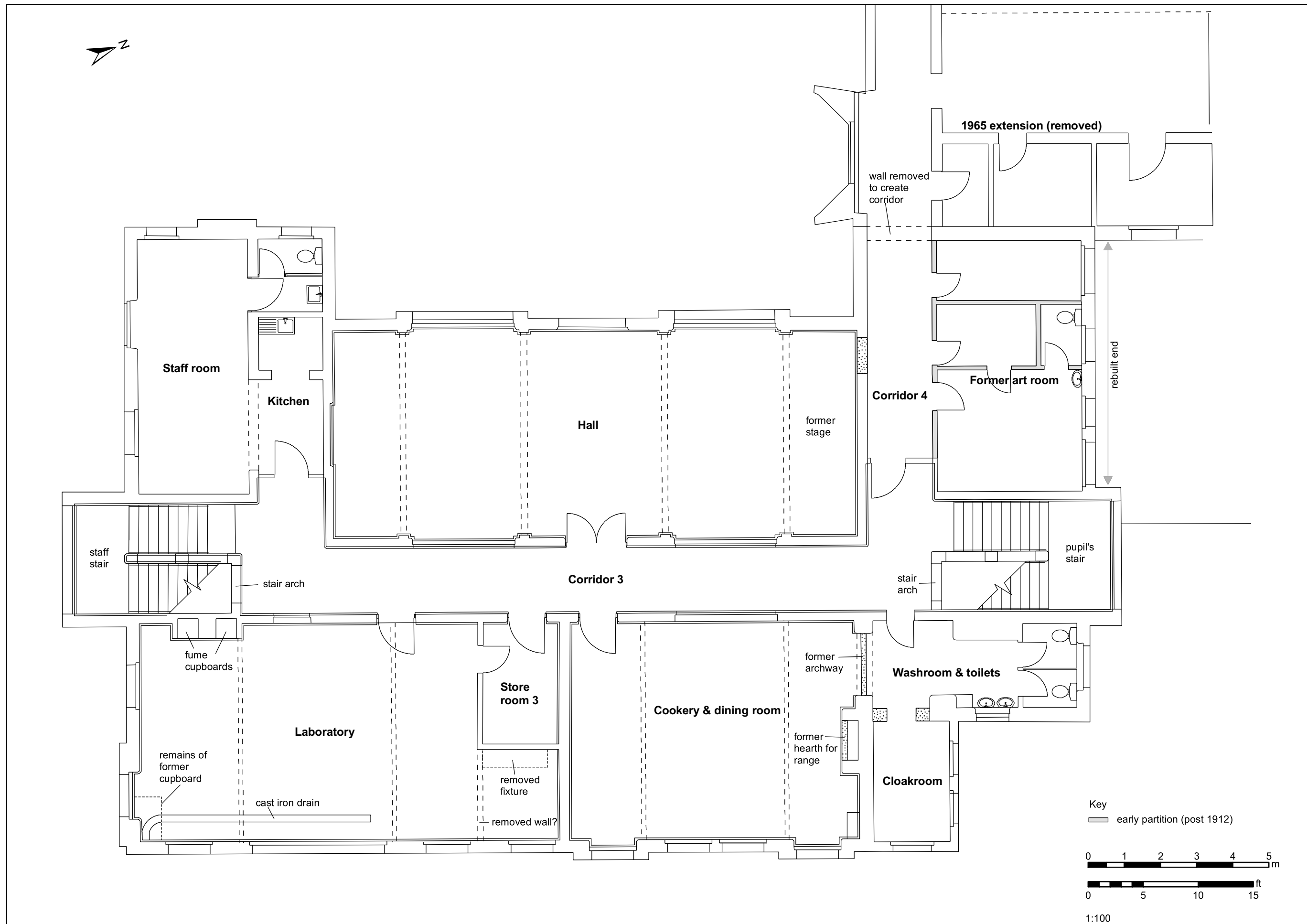


Fig.4b. Plan of 1909 Grammar School: first floor

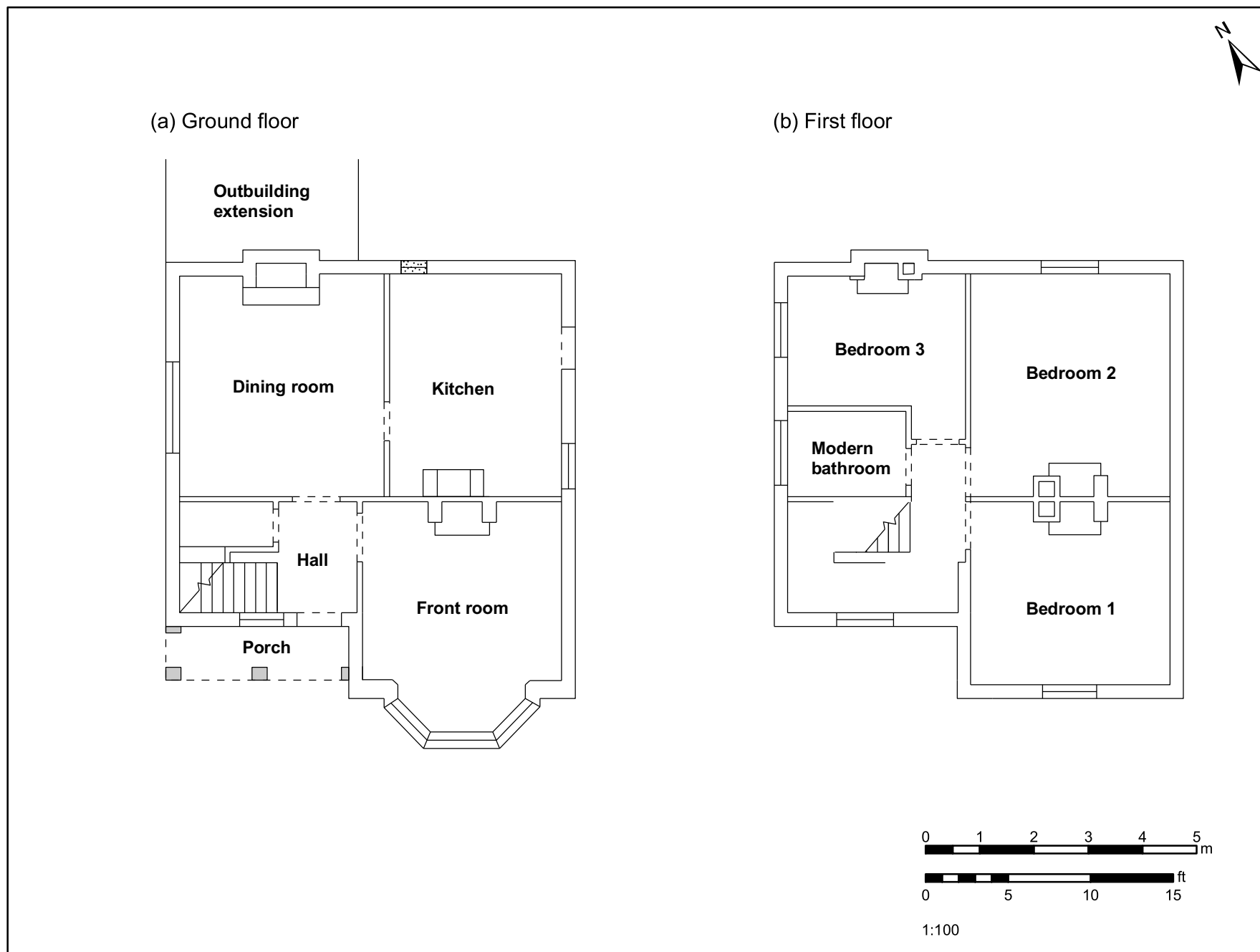


Fig.5. Plans of caretaker's house



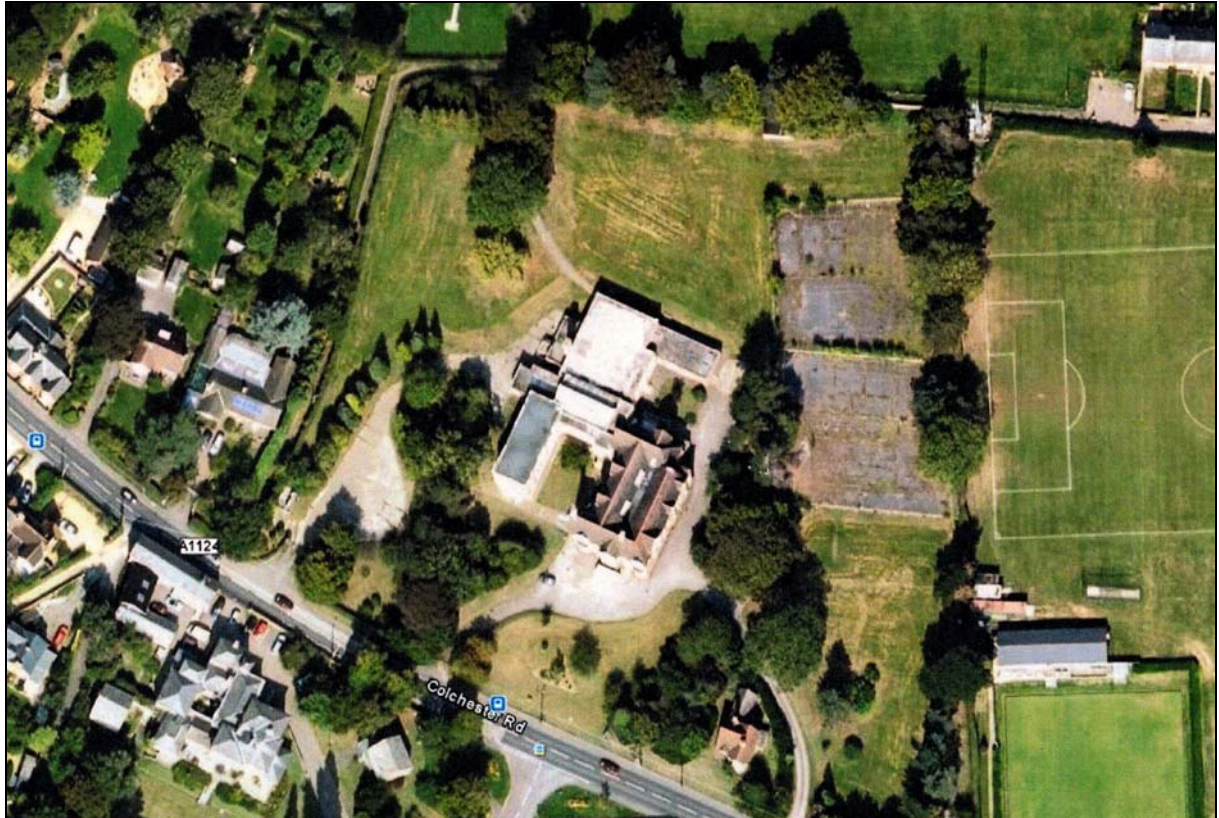


Plate 1 Aerial view taken in 2006 (Google Maps)



Plate 2 Main façade and 1965 extension in 2006





Plate 3 School shield and motto



Plate 4 Entrance porch





Plate 5 West elevation in 2006



Plate 6 West elevation after extension demolished





Plate 7 Date plaque beside pupil's entrance



Plate 8 South elevation





Plate 9 East elevation



Plate 10 Codestone detailing to gambrel-roofed projections on east side



Plate 11 Ground floor lobby interior viewed to east (2006)



Plate 12 Staff stairs at south end (2006)





Plate 13 Lobby viewed to south



Plate 14 Staff toilet



Plate 15 Headmistress's office



Plate 16 Stationery Cupboard





Plate 17 Corridor 1 viewed to south (2006)



Plate 18 Library/Governor's Office viewed to south (2006)





Plate 19 Fireplace in Library/Governor's Office (2006)



Plate 20 Interior of Classroom 1



Plate 21 Interior of Classroom 3



Plate 22 Storeroom 1





Plate 23 Air vent and control mechanism in Storeroom 1 (2006)



Plate 24 Corridor 2/original pupil's entrance, viewed from modern extension (2006)



Plate 25 Rear Lobby viewed to north-east



Plate 26 Original sink in Caretaker's Room





Plate 27 Pupil's toilets



Plate 28 Ground floor Cloakroom (2006)



Plate 29 Staff Stair viewed from first floor landing



Plate 30 Corridor 3 viewed to south (2006)





Plate 31 Entrance to Staff Room



Plate 32 Interior of Staff Room



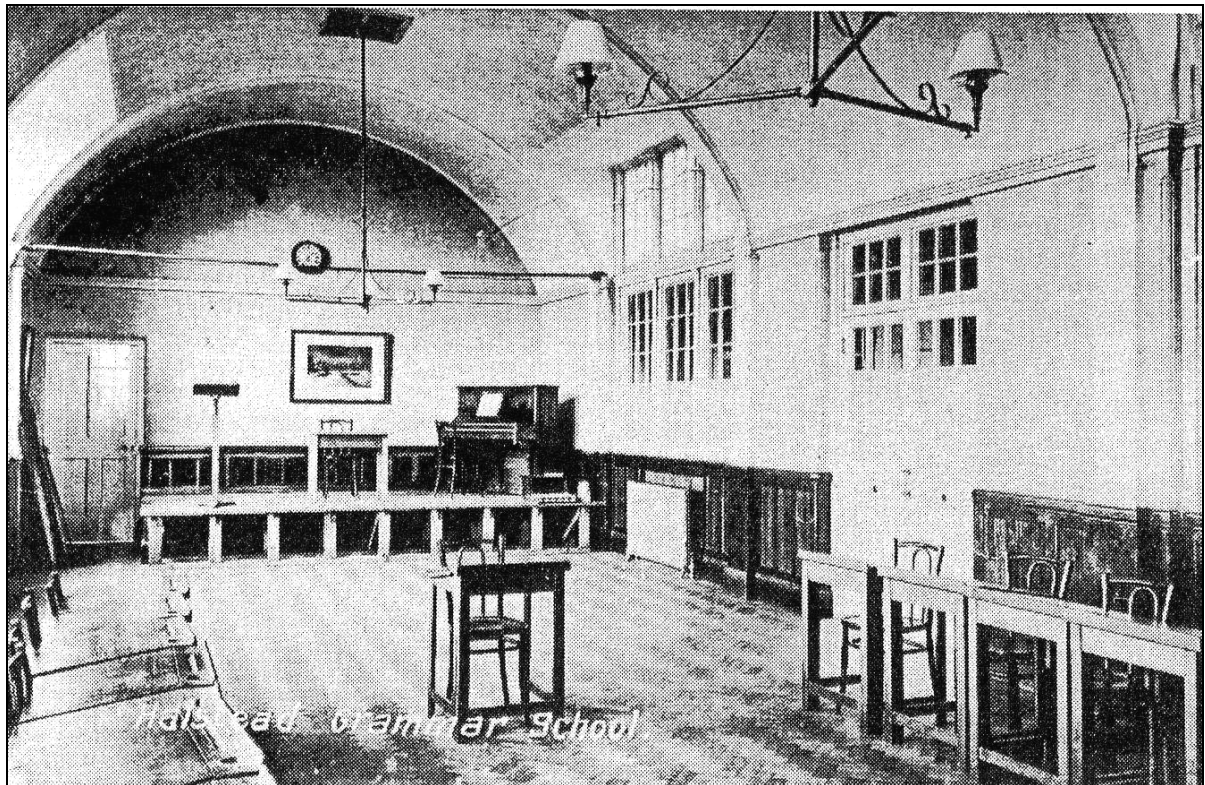


Plate 33 Hall viewed to north (c.1909)



Plate 34 Hall viewed to south in 2006





Plate 35 Laboratory viewed to south

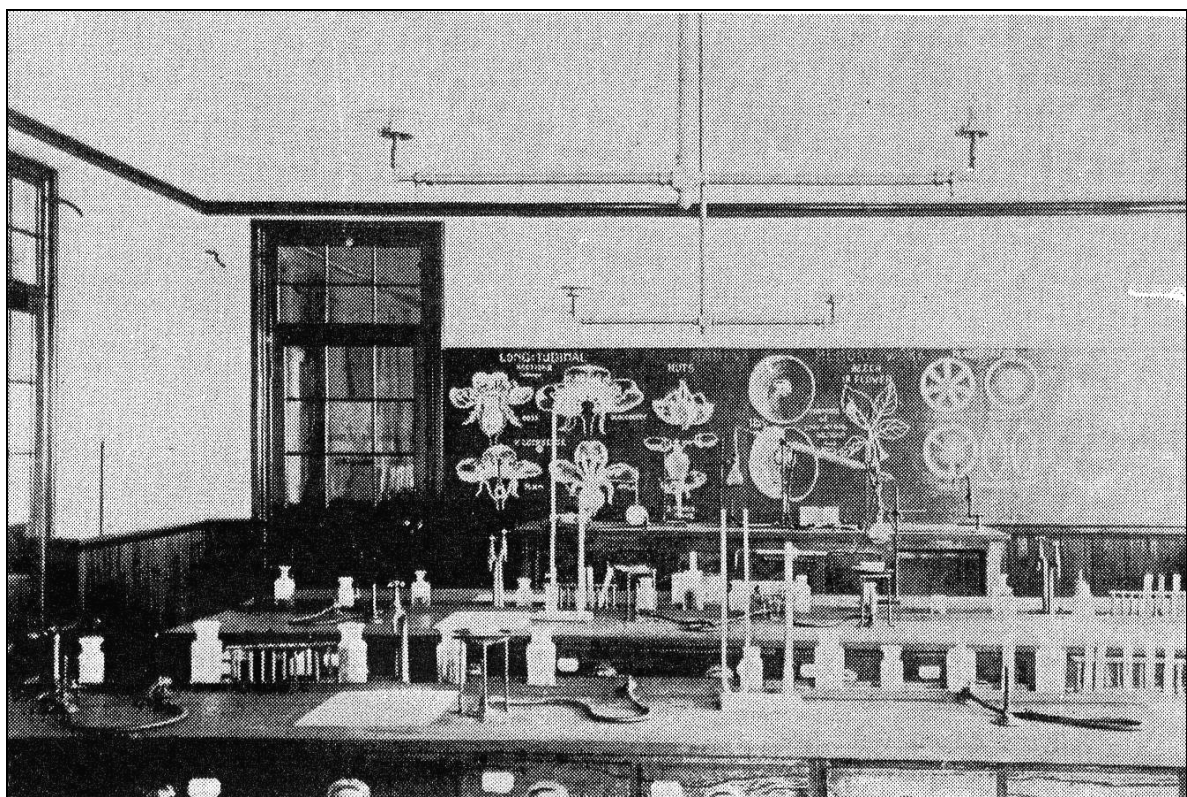


Plate 36 The laboratory in 1910 viewed to north (Storeroom 3)





Plate 37 Fume cupboards (2006)



Plate 38 Cast iron drain in floor



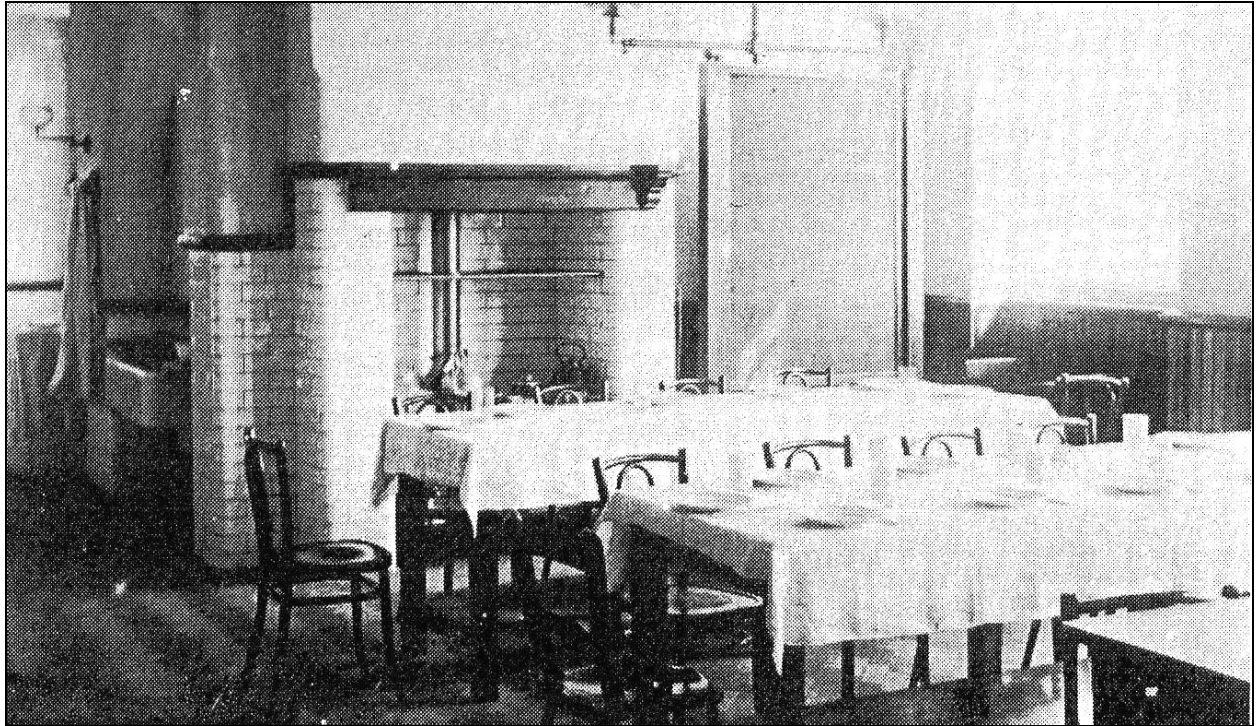


Plate 39 Cookery and Dining Room in 1910



Plate 40 Cookery and Dining Room in 2011





Plate 41 First floor landing of Pupil's Stair



Plate 42 Caretaker's House viewed to north-east





Plate 43 Caretaker's House and Stores viewed to south



Plate 44 Typical ground floor interior in 2011 (dining room)



Plate 45 Typical first floor interior in 2011 (front bedroom)



Plate 46 Entrance hall and stairs

## **Appendix 1: Contents of Archive**

**Site name: The Former Halstead Girl's Grammar School, Priory Hall, Colchester Road, Halstead**

**Project no.: 2382**

**Building Record**

### **Index to the Archive:**

Document wallet containing:

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 HEM design brief
- 1.2 FAU written scheme of investigation
- 1.3 Client/archive report
- 1.4 Unbound version of report
- 1.5 CD containing digital photographs, architect's drawings & copy of report, pdf-formatted

#### **2. Site Archive**

- 2.1 Photographic record (digital prints & monochrome 35mm prints & negatives)
- 2.2 Photographic registers
- 2.3 Site notes, annotated architect's plans & elevations

## Appendix 2: EHER Summary Sheet

<b>Site Name/Address:</b> The Former Halstead Girl's Grammar School, Priory Hall, Colchester Road, Halstead	
<b>Parish:</b> Halstead	<b>District:</b> Braintree
<b>NGR:</b> TL 8206 3055	<b>OASIS Record No.:</b> 96203
<b>Type of Work:</b> Building recording	<b>Site Director/Team:</b> Andrew Letch (ECC FAU)
<b>Dates of Fieldwork:</b> March 2011	<b>Size of Area Investigated:</b> N/A
<b>Curating Museum:</b> Braintree	<b>Funding Source:</b> Hallmark Developments
<b>Further Work Anticipated?</b> No	<b>Related HER Nos.</b> None
<b>Final Report:</b> Summary in EAH	
<b>Periods Represented</b> Early 20th century	
<p><b>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</b></p> <p>A programme of historic building recording was undertaken at the former Halstead Girls Grammar School prior to residential development of the site. The main element of the survey was to record the 1909 school to English Heritage level 3 standard prior to residential conversion. The 1911 caretaker's house was recorded to level 1. A large modern extension (built in 1965) was demolished prior to the survey taking place.</p> <p>The exterior of the school has elements of Jacobean and mock-Tudor design and is well-built in red brick with projecting gables, stone dressings, tile roof and high multi-pane windows. Formal entry points for staff and girls were located either end of the building between a corridor and classrooms. There was an outbuilding range to the rear, which no longer survives.</p> <p>The layout is an established form with an entrance/reception area and headmistress room at one end of a long corridor with, well-lit classrooms either side, which is broadly replicated on the first floor. It retains much original character particularly the green wall tiling around the circulation routes and dark-stained panelling in the classrooms. Internal windows and doors survive virtually intact and first floor hall has a barrel-vaulted roof.</p> <p>The caretaker's house has been completely stripped-out but is likely to have had a good level of internal architectural detail also. Externally it matches the school building in its detailing.</p> <p>The school building is a well-preserved example of its type, having great historic and functional character internally and externally. It also has great resonance with the local community and significance as part of the movement to provide improved education provision for girls.</p> <p>.</p>	
<p><b>Previous Summaries/Reports:</b> <i>Archaeological Evaluation at Priory Hall, Halstead</i> (Sparrow, P.) FAU report 2382; <i>Priory Hall, Halstead; Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment and Site Inspection</i> (Heppell, E.) FAU report. 1618.</p>	
<b>Author of Summary:</b> Andrew Letch	<b>Date of Summary:</b> 5th May 2011