

birmingham archaeology

7, 8 and 8A Freeman Street,
Birmingham

Supplementary Historic Building
Recording
2006

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7, 8, and 8A Freeman Street, Birmingham
Supplementary Historic Building Recording 2006

By

Shane Kelleher

For

Countryside Properties (Northern) Ltd

For further information please contact:

Alex Jones (Director)

Birmingham Archaeology

The University of Birmingham

Edgbaston

Birmingham B15 2TT

Tel: 0121 414 5513

Fax: 0121 414 5516

E-Mail: bham-arch@bham.ac.uk

Web Address: <http://www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau>

7, 8, and 8a, Freeman Street, Birmingham

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SUMMARY

A programme of historic building recording was undertaken at 7, 8, and 8A Freeman Street, Birmingham, West Midlands (NGR SP 0747 8685). The work was commissioned by Countryside Properties (Northern) Ltd in advance of the demolition of the buildings as part of the proposed City Park Gate development. Recording work was carried out here in January 2006. However, previously inaccessible historic fabric, including cellars, has subsequently been discovered, and the purpose of the present phase of work was to record the newly exposed fabric to the same level of detail as the earlier work, and to issue this supplementary report. The recording work was carried out to a degree equivalent to English Heritage Level 3 (English Heritage 2006). This included the visual analysis and photographic survey of the recently exposed historic fabric and the production of measured plans and sections. The removal of later cladding revealed areas of the 18th- and 19th-century boundary wall. Two cellar areas were also revealed; these are largely of 19th-century form, but the walls may retain 18th-century fabric. The principal cellar, under No. 7, has three separate rooms, one of which was altered significantly in the 20th-century with the removal of its vaulted roof. The other cellar, under No. 8, also had its vaulted roof removed at this time. The survival of this earlier fabric itself is significant in this part of Birmingham; however, they do not warrant any changes or alterations to their protection status.

**7, 8, AND 8A, FREEMAN STREET, BIRMINGHAM
SUPPLEMENTARY HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING, 2006.**

1 INTRODUCTION

In November 2006 Birmingham Archaeology carried out supplementary building recording of 7, 8, and 8A Freeman Street, Birmingham (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Countryside Properties (Northern) Ltd in advance of demolition of the buildings as part of the proposed City Park Gate Development. Recording work was previously carried out here in January 2006 in accordance with a condition of planning consent for redevelopment of the site (Hislop and Lobb 2006). Previously inaccessible historic fabric, including cellars, has now been discovered, and the purpose of the present phase of work was to record the newly exposed fabric to the same level of detail as the earlier work. It must be noted that this report is intended to be supplemental to Hislop and Lobb (2006), and should be consulted in conjunction with it.

This report outlines the results of the historic building recording, which was carried out on the 17th of November 2006, and which was prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (IFA 2001).

The work conformed to a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2006), which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation, in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (DoE 1994).

2 SITE LOCATION

The buildings, which now form a single block (Fig. 2), are situated on the south side of Freeman Street in Birmingham city centre (NGR SP 0747 8685). Formerly three distinct properties, the street front to Nos 7, 8, and 8A forms a terrace aligned east west facing north to Freeman Street. No. 7 lies to the west, No. 8 to the east, and No. 8A is in the centre.

3 OBJECTIVES

The principal aim was to complete an analytical record of the recently exposed historic fabric prior to demolition.

4 METHODS

Measured Survey

Measured plans and sections of the cellars were compiled by hand measurement, at a scale of 1:50.

Photographic Survey

A photographic survey was made of as much of the structures as safely possible; this included both general and detailed photographs incorporating appropriate scales. Photographs were recorded on a register, giving a brief description, scales used, orientation, photographer and date taken.

Written Record

An analytical description was compiled on *pro forma* building and room record sheets, and involved a systematic elevation-by-elevation, and room-by-room, treatment. These field notes were used as basis for the definitive account.

5 ANALYTICAL DESCRIPTION

Exterior

The targeted removal of later cladding has revealed earlier fabric along the east elevation of No. 8 Freeman Street (Plate 1, Fig 3).

5.1 Elevation 1

Elevation 1 was the east elevation of the main north range. Stucco-type render was removed here to reveal what may be a section of the boundary wall. This is of red brick (8¾ ins x 2½ x 4 ins) laid in English Garden Wall bond, but the unsatisfactory bonding of this wall with the north and south walls of the building suggest that both these two elevations have been rebuilt, leaving the east wall as a remnant of an earlier structure. The brick size may suggest a date in the late 18th century or early 19th century. There is no evidence for fenestration on this elevation (Plate 2).

5.2 Elevation 2

Two-brick thick cladding and render was removed in this area revealing a red brick elevation laid in stretcher bond with occasional rows of headers, the lower courses of bricks measuring 9 ins x 2¼ ins. This is the mid 18th-century boundary wall mentioned by Hislop and Lobb (2006, 10-11). It would appear that this boundary wall rose to first-floor level and was then raised during the 19th century, possibly in the 1860s when the site may have been redeveloped (Hislop and Lobb 2006, 3). A row of headers and a ramped section of wall, also recorded on the interior of Building 8.2 (Hislop and Lobb 2006), is likely to be the extent in height and coping of this boundary wall, a fact attested to by the presence of oversailing brick at this point in the interior (Plate 3). In the later 19th century this wall was raised again as the east wall of a workshop (Building 8.2 in Hislop and Lobb 2006, 11).

Interior

5.3 Cellar C1

Cellars C1 are found beneath the northern half of No. 7 Freeman Street. They all appear to be of 19th-century date, although the sizes of some of the bricks may indicate that they incorporate 18th-century fabric. There are three separate and distinct cellars within this space, entered through a doorway in the west wall of G3. Access is gained down a flight of mid-20th-century concrete stairs with 13 steps to C1B below. C1A is along the corridor to the east, C1B is to the west (Fig 4).

The east wall of the stairwell is covered in a thick concrete render. The west wall is a thin inserted 20th-century wall of red brick (8 ½ ins x 3 ¼ ins x 4 ⅛ ins) laid in stretcher bond, with concrete footings. This clearly abuts the south wall of C1A.

5.3.1 C1A

This is entered through a brick segmental-arched entrance from C1B (Plates 5 to 8). There is no evidence of a door here. The two most westerly courses of this arch are inserted, presumably to match the thickness of the wall, following the insertion of the stairwell. This rectangular shaped room has a concrete floor surface to the north and a brick floor surface to the south. These bricks measure $8 \frac{5}{8}$ ins x $2 \frac{1}{2}$ ins and run from north to south. There is a raised line of bricks c. $\frac{1}{2}$ a brick high along the south and east walls. The walls and vault of semi-circular section are of red brick laid in stretcher bond. Interestingly, the brick used in side walls ($8 \frac{1}{2}$ ins x $2 \frac{1}{4}$ ins x $4 \frac{1}{4}$ ins) are thinner than those used in the vault (9 ins x 3 ins x $4 \frac{1}{4}$ ins). The vault contains three traps, the most northerly and southerly of which are later 20th-century inserts being square in profile with concrete sides. The other trap, which is circular and lined with red brick, appears to be an original feature.

5.3.2 C1B

This cellar currently acts as a corridor running east-west under G1 (Plates 9 and 10). It was originally one large room, but has been altered to accommodate the insertion of a large oil tank, which occupies much of the northern half of the space. This cellar has a concrete floor and an inserted poured-concrete slab roof. The oil tank, is raised on concrete piers, and was fabricated and installed by Holyhead Engineering Co Ltd, Meadow Lane, Bilston, Coseley. The segmental arch headed chute on the north wall appears to be an original feature. The red brick piers laid in stretcher bond measuring 9 ins x $3 \frac{1}{8}$ ins x 4 ins to the west of this, and in the northeast corner of the room are inserts, and were probably inserted to support the concrete roof. The upper courses of the pier to the south of this were also inserted to support the roof. The remainder of the east wall, which is built of red brick, appears to be original.

There is a raised brick bench area along the south wall. This is coped with quarry tiles measuring $8 \frac{1}{4}$ in sq. The south wall itself is of red brick measuring $8 \frac{1}{2}$ in x $3 \frac{3}{8}$ in x 4 in, and at the west end is a segmental arch doorway to C1C. The west wall is of red brick in stretcher bond with occasional headers measuring $8 \frac{1}{4}$ ins x 3 ins x $4 \frac{7}{8}$ ins. There is evidence of scarring at roof level where the original segmental arch vaulted ceiling was once situated.

5.3.3 C1C

This cellar is entered through a segmental-arched opening from C1B (Plates 11 to 15). On the east side of the lobby between the two rooms is a blocked doorway, apparently to the original staircase, now blocked or removed. There is a red brick arch running north-south, and another bullnose brick segmental arch inside the entrance running east-west inside this entrance.

The cellar space itself is floored in concrete and has a semi-circular-arched vault of red brick laid in stretcher bond. There is a red brick bench/settles along the north wall with a chamfered edge and quarry tile coping. A boiler covers much of the east wall; there is evidence on the floor of further machinery to the west of this. A chimneystack base containing a round-arched alcove projects from the east wall. There is a bullnose brick segmental arch chute near the southeast corner.

The walls are of red brick laid in stretcher bond. As in C1A the bricks of the side walls are thinner ($9 \frac{1}{4}$ ins x $2 \frac{1}{4}$ ins x $4 \frac{1}{4}$ ins) than those of the vault ($8 \frac{3}{4}$ ins x $3 \frac{1}{8}$ ins x 4 ins). The northern section of the west wall is laid in English Garden Wall bond, which may mean that it is not an original feature.

Cellar C2

This cellar was uncovered beneath the northern section of No. 8 Freeman Street (Plates 16-20). This square-shaped room is entered through a trapdoor along the north wall of room G8. It is accessed down a flight of 10 steps; the two uppermost have brick coping, whilst the remaining steps are coped with wood planks. The floor is of concrete, whilst the vaulted ceiling has been removed and supplanted by a concrete slab replacement.

The south wall is of red brick measuring 9 in x 3 in x 4 in. the upper three courses have been inserted in order to heighten the wall to accommodate the concrete ceiling. This has been replicated on each of the other walls. There is a wooden plank in this wall at around waist level, which was probably used for levelling purposes during construction. There is an I-beam inserted above the entrance to the cellar. A chimney base projects from the west wall with a central blocked opening. A short length of brick wall projecting eastwards from the north end of this retains a door hinge. The east wall is of red brick; scarring at roof level of this wall indicates that the roof was originally a vaulted segmental arch. The north wall is of red brick and has a central chute. A 20th-century I-beam supports the roof above. There are the remains of a machine/boiler base in the southwest corner.

6 PHASING

The stripping of cladding on the east elevation of No. 8 Freeman Street revealed the remains of the 18th-century boundary wall, probably dating from the staking out of Freeman Street in the mid-1720s (Hislop and Lobb, 2006). This was later built upon and covered by later fabric. The brickwork on elevation 1 may also be of this date

The cellars appear to be mainly 19th- century in date (Fig 5), although they may retain 18th-century fabric, in which case it is possible that the layout owes something to the original phase of development at this site, which is purported to have been built between 1731 and 1750 (Hislop and Lobb, 2006).

The majority of C1A is part of this original phase of construction. The brick floor, semi-circular-arched vault, and the circular hatch all survive from this phase. The concrete floor and square hatches are 20th- century additions.

The internal division of space of C1B was altered in the mid 20th-century. Hislop and Lobb (2006) note that No. 7 Freeman Street was gutted and rebuilt at this time. The brick vault was removed or had been removed by the mid 20th-century and replaced by a poured-concrete slab ceiling. The brick piers along the north wall were inserted at this time as supports for the ceiling. The stairwell, and its west wall, are also likely to have been inserted as part of this phase of work, which also saw the installation of the oil tank and its associated brick bund. The quarry tile step/platform to the south of this room may date from this period, however it is also possible that this was altered and was originally similar to the bench in C1C. The addition of two extra courses of brick to the entrance of C1A is related to the insertion of the stairwell during this phase of construction.

The most interesting feature of note in C1C is the blocked doorway on the east side of the entrance lobby. It is likely that this leads/led to the original staircase to these cellars. It is possible that this may have been blocked prior to the insertion of its replacement in the mid-20th-century. This staircase would have been entered from above through an opening in the wall to the west of the current opening. There is no evidence in this wall for a previous opening; however, there is an I-beam at floor level, which may have been inserted to support the blocked entrance. The cement floor and boiler are also 20th- century insertions. The

remainder of the cellar appears to have been from the original mid-18th-century phase of construction. However, the north section of the west wall may be of a subsequent phase as it is of a different brick bond to the remainder of the cellar, and has an interesting arrangement of brick segmental arches above.

Whilst No. 8 Freeman Street itself has been much altered to be of a mid to late 19th-century appearance, cellar C2 seems to have been constructed as part of the initial phase of construction on site. The most striking alteration to have taken place is the removal of the original vaulted ceiling. This was supplanted by a poured-concrete ceiling in the mid- 20th-century. The concrete floor was also added at this time. There is also a blocked doorway on the west wall; this may have led to another cellar/room, or to a staircase. The staircase itself however, would appear to be in its original position, the deviation in material for its uppermost two steps is consistent with the raising of the ceiling height. This raising of the ceiling height is also evident where two courses of brick, and an I-beam on the north wall, have been inserted above the original ceiling level.

7 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The buildings at 7, 8, and 8A Freeman Street are neither statutorily, nor locally listed, nor do they reside within a conservation area. The subsequent uncovering of earlier fabric prior to these demolition works, whilst further illuminating the construction history of these buildings, and this part of Birmingham, does not specifically alter this status or significance. The removal of later cladding has revealed sections of the mid-18th-century property boundary. The cellars themselves are significant in that they remain a vestige of the initial phase of construction on the site, however they do not provide supplementary information regarding function or form, nor illustrate further the buildings that were erected above them. They are an interesting survival for Birmingham city centre, where much of the cellars of their date have been removed in the Victorian period or during modern development in recent years. They are largely in a much altered state, C1B and C2 have had their once impressive vaulted roofs removed and supplanted with concrete replacements, a fact that acutely detracts from their aesthetic appeal and significance.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Countryside Properties (Northern) Ltd. Thanks are due to Sean Ging of CPL, and to the demolition team for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. Mike Hodder monitored the project on behalf of Birmingham City Council. The building recording was undertaken by Malcolm Hislop and Shane Kelleher. Shane Kelleher produced the written report, which was illustrated by Nigel Dodds, and edited by Malcolm Hislop who also monitored the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

9 REFERENCES

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Fig.1

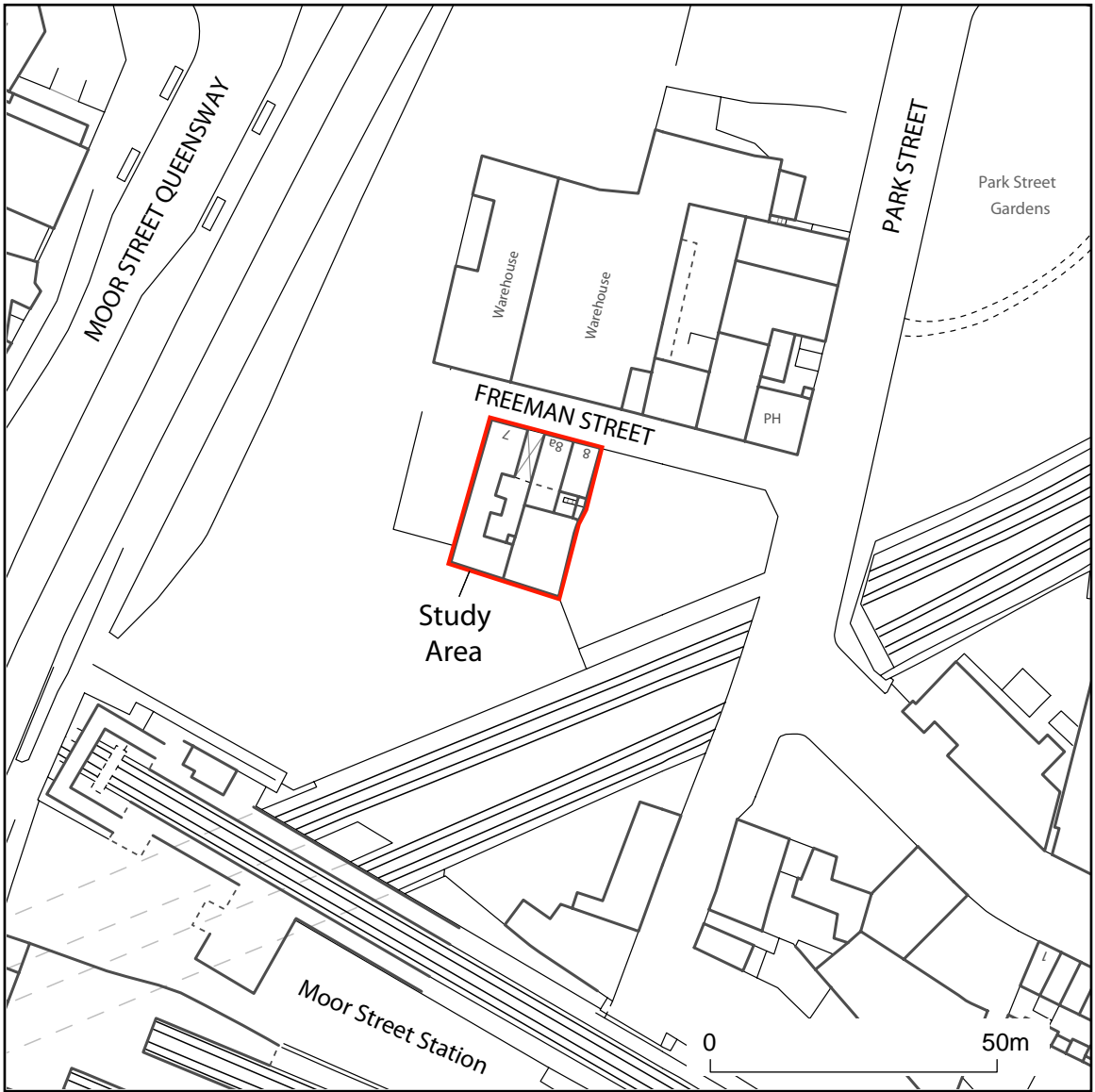


Fig.2



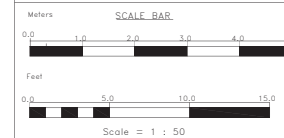
Position of Cellars

NOTES

THIS SURVEY HAS BEEN PREPARED WITH A SCALING ACCURACY FOR A PLOT AT A SCALE OF 1/50.

REVISION NOTES:-

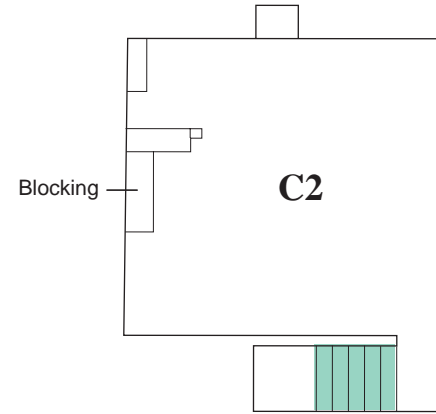
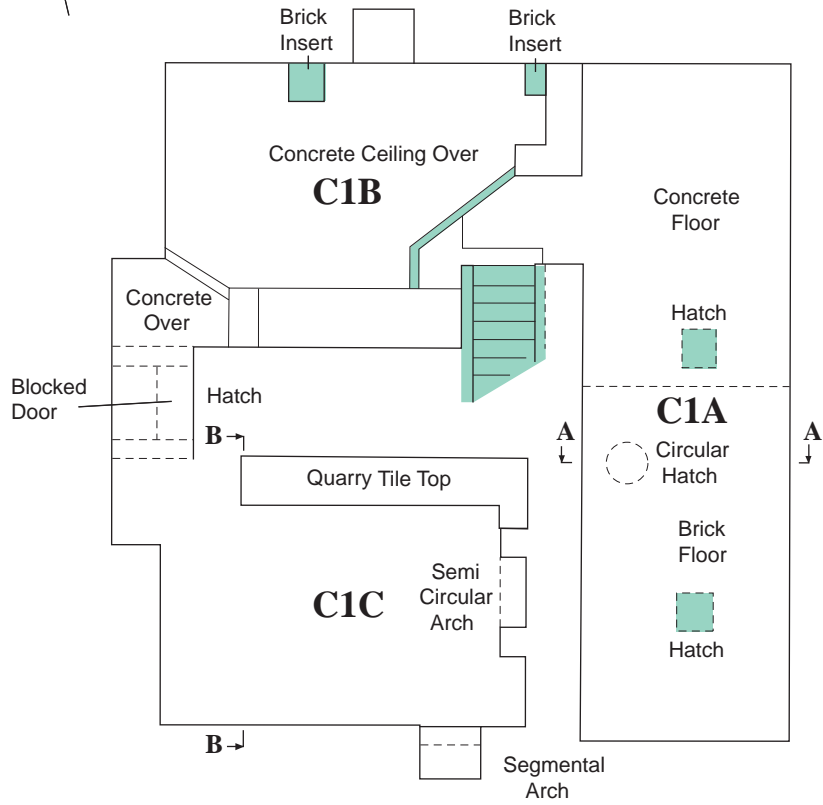
DRAWING LOCATION PLAN



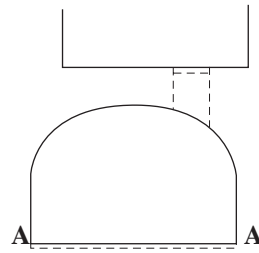
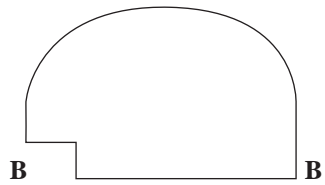
job P.N. 1418
7-8a Freeman Street
Historic Building Recording

client
Birmingham City Council

title Ground Floor Plan	fig no. 3
scale	date November 2006



 20th Century Alterations

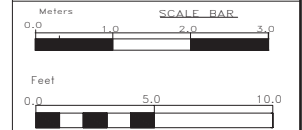


NOTES

THIS SURVEY HAS BEEN PREPARED WITH A SCALING ACCURACY FOR A PLOT AT A SCALE OF 1/50.

REVISION NOTES:-

DRAWING LOCATION PLAN



job **P.N. 1418**
7-8a Freeman Street
Historic Building Recording

client
Birmingham City Council

title **Cellar Plan** fig no. **4**

scale date
November 2006



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 12



Plate 11



Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15



Plate 16



Plate 17



Plate 18



Plate 19



Plate 20