



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM

**Historic building survey
of 134 to 138 Edmund
Street, Birmingham City
Centre**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



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Birmingham City Centre**

by
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Charles Edward Flower in the 1880s

Historic building survey of 134 to 138 Edmund Street, Birmingham City Centre

Summary

A comparative historic building survey was made of two late-Victorian buildings in central Birmingham. The survey buildings lie on the north side of Edmund Street behind Colmore Row (NGR SP068871). 134/5 is of three storeys with an attic and a basement and was built of brick and terracotta in an Arts and Crafts Gothic style, while 136/8 is of four storeys and was built of brick and terracotta in a Venetian Gothic style. Both buildings have been recognised as being of special architectural interest and are statutory grade II listed SMR 01226 – B1175, and SMR 01227 – B1176 respectively. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned to undertake the survey by KUC Properties, a subsidiary of Chase Midland Plc, through its project agents Atkins Faithful and Gould. The historic building recording was carried out between January and April 2003 in advance of, and during, a programme of partial demolition that involved the dismantling of structures to the back of these properties but the retention of the frontages within an office block designed by Associated Architects. Birmingham City Council required this work be carried out in order to satisfy listed building consent and to fulfil a planning condition imposed on the scheme.

134/5 Edmund Street was built by George James Eveson, head of the Eveson Coal and Coke Company Limited, as a suite of offices in 1897, while 136/8 was built by Flower and Sons, brewers of Stratford-upon-Avon, as a beer distribution centre and offices in 1878. Both buildings tell a story about the development of Birmingham's Central Business District in this period. The immediate catalyst for change was the end of the 120 year leases on the Newhall Estate here from 1870 onwards. However, thereafter various local, regional, national, and even international factors came to bear upon the development of the street, all of which reflect the growing importance of Birmingham as a provincial centre. The basic story is one of rags to riches – a quick comparison of the occupants of Edmund Street in 1869 and 1899 more than bears this out, but there was also tension between competing commercial and professional interests. Architecture became an expression of this change with solid Gothic commercial structures existing cheek-by-jowl with terracotta-clad Arts and Crafts chambers or consulting rooms and offices. The redevelopment of Edmund Street should therefore be firmly set within the broader story of the attempt to transform late-Victorian Birmingham into a respectable, rational, and gentrified town. Perhaps, this change can best be understood against a background of growing municipal authority, the rise of the professional classes, and a general shift in British manufacturing away from the family firm towards the limited liability company that was occurring in late-Victorian Britain.

Because of their listed status and architectural interest the maintenance and even refurbishment of the frontages should be actively considered. Moreover, it may be argued that this should not merely be confined to the exteriors of the buildings but also be applied internally to emphasise the different technological and functional character of each structure.

1.0 Introduction

The following report summarises the results of a programme of archaeological work comprising photographic survey, desk-top assessment, and a watching brief, undertaken on two Victorian commercial buildings in Edmund Street that are situated in part of the Central Business District of the city. Both buildings have been recognised as being of special architectural interest and are statutory grade II listed. Number 134/5 Edmund Street is listed SMR 01226 – B1175, and number 136/8 Edmund Street is listed SMR 01227 – B1176. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) was commissioned to undertake the survey by KUC Properties, a subsidiary of Chase Midland Plc, through their project agents Atkins Faithful and Gould. Associated Architects were the practice designing the scheme, which will involve the construction of new offices behind the listed buildings. The historic building recording was carried out between January and April 2003 in advance of, and during, a programme of partial demolition that involved the dismantling of structures to the back of these properties but the retention of the frontages and the structural bays immediately behind them. Birmingham City Council required this work be carried out in order to satisfy the listed building consent and to fulfil a planning condition imposed on the scheme. This requirement is in accordance with paragraphs 2.11 and 2.15 of government advice in Policy Guidance Note 15 ‘Planning and the Historic Environment’ (DoE 1995), and paragraphs 19 to 22 of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 ‘Archaeology and Planning’ (DoE 1990), it also complies with Policy 8:36 of the City Council’s Unitary Development Plan. The programme of historic building recording was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared in January 2003 by BUFAU and approved by Richard Hudson, the Conservation Architect of Birmingham City Council, who also monitored the project.

2.0 Location and description (Fig. 1, Plates 1, 2 & 3)

The survey buildings lie on the north side of Edmund Street in Birmingham City Centre (NGR SP068871). They consist of two properties: 134/5 is of three storeys with an attic and a basement, and is built of brick and terracotta in an Arts and Crafts Gothic style; 136/8 is of four storeys, built of brick and terracotta in a Venetian Gothic style. The Edmund Street frontage is some 3m higher than the ground level on Cornwall Street to the rear and this enabled a large two-storey basement with brick barrel vaulting sprung from cast-iron columns and frames to be built underneath and behind 136/8. The upper storey of the basement opens onto a yard formerly flanked by stables and cottages that opened onto Cornwall Street. Both buildings had been empty for a number of years and were in a generally poor structural condition which meant that some areas were inaccessible for health and safety reasons.

3.0 Method

The survey consisted of:

- (i) A photographic record (in black and white format for archive purposes and colour print for illustration and details) of as much of the structures as was safely accessible.

- (ii) Hand-checked annotations of existing survey floor plans and elevations designed to show the significant structural phases in the development of the buildings.
- (iii) Desk-top historical and map research targeted towards understanding the development of the buildings and their changing function over time.
- (iv) A watching brief during demolition works of features identified as being of particular interest by the survey or by Richard Hudson the conservation architect for Birmingham City Council.
- (v) A synthetic summary description and interpretation of the buildings contained in this report.

The survey work followed the requirements set down in the Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999A), and more specifically the relevant parts of the definition of Level 3 recording of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England specification of 1996 for recording historic buildings. The range of historical sources was that recommended in the 'Standard and Guidance for Desk-Based Assessments' (IFA 1999B) and Birmingham City Council's list of key historic sources for the city. The written, drawn and photographic records will be deposited with Birmingham Museum within a reasonable time of completion of the project, following consultation with the Birmingham City Council Conservation Group.

4.0 Historical context

Edmund Street was developed out of parkland belonging to the Newhall estate, owned by the Colmore family in the mid-18th century (Fig. 2). This former parkland sat upon a north-facing slope falling away from the sandstone ridge on which Saint Philip's Church is built, and Edmund Street itself lies half-way down this slope. The 100 acre Newhall Estate grew rapidly between 1746 and 1750 by the purchasers of 120 year leases who also developed their own plots (Fig. 3). There was some building control, for example the Colmore family stipulated that buildings had to be constructed in a straight line, were to be of three stories in height, and also built to a minimum standard as defined by cost. However, gradually over the life of this first lease the area declined as the population of Birmingham rocketed from 23,000 in 1731 to 170,000 in 1831. What is now the eastern end of Edmund Street first developed as a minor street called Little Charles Street carved along the spine of larger plots facing Colmore Row and Charles Street. This infill of the plot pattern was also reflected in the progressive subdivision of housing within the Newhall or Colmore estate, the land behind being developed into courts and small manufactories (Fig. 4). The intimacy created by this type of development can be seen in the area around Saint Paul's Square in Birmingham's historic Jewellery Quarter today.

Therefore, when the first set of leases began to expire between 1866 and 1870 a second chance arose to improve the character of the area. Significantly, this coincided with both a period of relative prosperity and a reforming zeal in the municipal government of the town. There was an aspiration that Birmingham, being the 'workshop of the world', should also begin to look like a provincial centre. Perhaps the best known example of this improvement was Joseph Chamberlain's plan for Corporation Street, which took

advantage of the new powers created by the Artisan's Dwellings Improvement Act of 1876 for compulsory purchase of large tracts of 'slums' to create a 'Parisian boulevard'. The improvement of the southern end of the Newhall estate had begun nearly a decade before this, although it was much more piecemeal or *laissez faire* in character (Fig.5), and some reconstruction continued into the 20th century in areas like Margaret Street. A cluster of municipal buildings began to spring up at the west end of Edmund Street and its eastern continuation, New Edmund Street, was adopted in 1871 to form part of a regular grid between Colmore Row and Great Charles Street (Fig. 6). Redevelopment of this grid generally proceeded from the periphery of the area towards the centre. The Georgian properties fronting Colmore Row were replaced with more massive commercial buildings such as the Grand Hotel and the premises now occupied by the Royal Bank of Scotland. These provided a unifying scale, but, as Asa Briggs noted, not an overall style (1952, 14), to an area that was rapidly becoming a new extension to the Central Business District. In addition, Snow Hill Station to the east was also rebuilt in 1870/1, together with the Great Western Hotel and Arcade to the south. The redevelopment of the street grid behind Colmore Row was not as grand, but again displayed a certain coherence in terms of scale - most buildings being four storeys or more in height, and choice of building material - almost consistently in red brick. However, there was an almost eclectic mixture of styles, and because of this Victorian Birmingham does not look like other provincial towns rebuilt in this era such as Manchester, Bradford or Liverpool. While it is possible to characterise this overall style as inspired by secular gothic rather than classical ideals, Birmingham's, being later, is not a full-blooded version, and Arts and Crafts and Venetian influences are also notable. The use of terracotta in several late-19th century buildings does introduce another element of unity, although it should be stated that *The Builder* thought that its dominance in Birmingham was due to the fact that it could withstand the generally smoky atmosphere.

Today, walking from west to east along Edmund Street you pass from civic buildings, including the Art Gallery, Gas Hall and the School of Art into a belt dominated by wine bars and the offices of architects, solicitors and accountants between Newhall Street and Church Street, and finally an area with several hotels and hostels adjacent to Snow Hill Station. This three-fold division would also have been apparent in the 1880s, although the middle section was dominated by the offices of merchants and manufacturers of more up-market products, including Thomas Radmore and Sons, billiard table makers, or, in the case of 136 Edmund Street, a wholesale jeweller, a printer and a publisher. The fact that 136/8 Edmund Street was built by Flower and Son, brewers from Stratford-upon-Avon should be seen in this context. In fact, the building was cleverly designed to be multifunctional with commercial activity focussed on offices in Edmund Street and storage and distribution facilities, including two basements and a shipment yard, feeding into Cornwall Street behind. Flower's beer distribution centre also consisted of an office accessible from Edmund Street and was designed to service the growing hotel and railway trade as well as fully licensed and beer houses in Birmingham.

Brewing was a very dynamic business between 1830 and 1880 and the Flower family rode this tide very well. The family had London and American connections, but returned to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1831 to set up a new brewery there that prospered. Flower's

was very much a 'County Brewery' a type that characterised the industry of this period, with a core market in the South West Midlands that was centred on Warwickshire but stretched down as far Cheltenham in the West Country. Flowers took full advantage of several improvements in the production techniques, including refrigeration and distribution by rail from the 1860s onwards, and their brand of India Pale Ale rivalled Burton Ales in what was rapidly becoming not only a national but also an international market for clear beer of consistent quality and good taste. In 1870 they opened a new state of the art tower brewery in Stratford-upon-Avon with a direct connection to the railway. Flowers were also renowned for their clever organisation of product distribution. Indeed, it might almost be said that their India Pale Ale 'reached the parts other beers could not reach' such as Madeira, Madras and Hong Kong – not just Birmingham. A system of local agents were tasked with promoting the Flower brand and in Birmingham sales doubled between 1869 and 1873. The rising sales in Birmingham must have led to the decision to set up a distribution facility, particularly after the Great Western Railway revamped Snow Hill Station as this would have provided a direct link to Stratford-upon-Avon. Livery Street became the main goods access for this station, so the distribution facility was literally only 100 yards away. It is also tempting to see the office to the rear of 136/8 Edmund Street not only as an overseeing station for keeping track of movements into and out of the yard, but also as a place where clients could be entertained and promotional campaigns thrashed out by the Flowers agents.

However, by the end of the century the manufacturers were being progressively edged out of the middle section of Edmund Street by professional classes like solicitors and surgeons as the Central Business District expanded and later buildings like 134/5 were constructed. Edmund Street has remained part of the Central Business District up to this day, although its fortunes have fluctuated. This has contributed towards the survival of a good percentage of the later Victorian building stock, although fluctuating demand for office space has led to the wholesale replacement of some and the construction of new offices behind the frontages of others.

5.0 Specific history

Little Charles Street began to be cleared of buildings in 1870 and New Edmund Street was formally adopted by the council in 1871. The earliest documentation for 134/138 Edmund Street relates to 136/8. In the Flower collection of records held by the Shakespeare Heritage Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon (SHCS DR 227) there is a reference in a schedule of property drawn up in 1897 (DR 227/170) to *The Stores Offices, Buildings, Cottage and School* at 138 Edmund Street being held under leasehold for a term of 99 years from 25th March 1871. The value of the property was very high at £12,000 being by far the largest of the portfolio of 15 fully licensed and beer houses and stores in Birmingham all held under leasehold. Beerhouses were valued lowest at between £250 and £1450, while fully licensed houses varied between £1,500 and £5,500. However, other evidence suggests that while title to the land may have been taken out then, the actual buildings were not constructed until 1878. This is contained in a schedule of Deeds and Papers dated from the adoption by Flower and Son of the status of a limited liability company in 1888 (DR 227/187/122). Here an indenture is referred to made

between Digby Latimer of the first part, William Barwick Colmore of the second, and Charles Edward Flower and Edgar Flower of the third part, for a building lease in New Edmund Street and Bread (the former name of Cornwall) Street, Birmingham, dated 2nd September 1876. This was followed by another indenture made between the Flowers and Boughton and Company to purchase a strip of land in New Edmund Street dated 24th June 1878. Boughton and Company occupied 139/140 Edmund Street and the strip of land may have been for the passageway down the eastern side of 136/8 Edmund Street that provided access from the frontage to the Flower offices behind. Therefore, the most likely date of construction for 136/8 is the year 1878, and this is borne out by the fact that this was also the first date that Flowers appear under New Edmund Street in *Kelly's Street Directory*, although no number is given, presumably because it had only just been built (Fig. 7).

There was an effective split in the organisation of 136/8 Edmund Street with Flowers operating behind the premises, but retaining separate access from this more prestigious address along a long corridor laid with an ornate tiled-floor by Maw and Company of Broseley (Fig. 8 & Plate 4) to their well appointed offices that overlooked the distribution yard and had an *en suite* cloakroom and toilets. For most of the 1880s the front premises called 136 Edmund Street were occupied by Evans, Watts and Company, wholesale jewellers; J.G. Hammond and Company, printers of *The Athlete* and Robert Roberts, publisher of *The Christadelphian*. The order of this list may reflect their occupancy of ground then first, second and third floors as the arrangement of the staircase allowed independent access to each floor. Towards the end of the 1890s these companies appear to have moved out and were briefly replaced by *The High School of Trade and Commerce*, (William Grove MA, Headmaster, of Saint Edmund's College), and this is presumably why the school is mentioned in the 1897 schedule of property of Flowers and Company outlined above. By 1900 Twyfords Limited, the sanitary engineers, had moved into 136 and their occupancy continued, with the addition of another printing firm (Gabb Watkin and Moulson) into 1910 (Fig. 9). Flowers vacated 138 Edmund Street in 1919, possibly affected by the decline in beer sales during the First World War, to be replaced by Atkinson's Brewery Limited (Wine and Spirit Department). By 1920 136 Edmund Street was occupied by Edmunds, Robbins and Heaven, auctioneers, who had a sale room here with Gabb Watkin a printer above. By 1930 the auctioneers had moved out to be replaced by a hall for the Theosophical Society, but by the outbreak of war in 1939 the Theosophical Society had been replaced by the Birmingham Blood Transfusion Service, run by a retired army major, and the Griffin Foundry, makers of fireplace and sanitary fittings with Atkinsons in 138 Edmund Street (Fig. 10). This arrangement continued into the 1950s, but by 1963 both 136 and 138 were occupied by Osborne, Garrell and Company, hairdressers and sundriesmen, by 1973 the property was empty.

The history of 134/5 Edmund Street is more straightforward and plans and sections from the original design of the building by the architects Newton and Cheadle have survived. These plans were drawn up in 1897 for G.J.Eveson (Fig. 11). These Birmingham architects were renowned for their use of buff terracotta and designed buildings like the City Arcades in Union Street and 56-60 Newhall Street (Plate 5). George James Eveson, whose initials feature in the terracotta design of 134/5 Edmund Street made his money

with the Eveson Coal and Coke Company, that also sold lime, and were gas and canal contractors. It is significant that the profits following the municipalisation of the gas supply to the town, that took place under Joseph Chamberlain, underlay much of the finance of the late 19th –century improvement to the town and Eveson appears to have been intimately involved with this booming industry. What is more G.J.Eveson was recorded in the 1880s as occupying 130 Edmund Street and so was already familiar with the area.

The design included three storeys plus an attic and a basement. The original frontage and floor plans can still be traced in the present building, although the back is so altered that we cannot be sure that the original design was fully carried out, particularly the design of the cast-iron framed rear extension. The overall plan of 134/5 Edmund Street was for a suite of offices on the ground and first floors, a basement containing services, and living accommodation in the second floor and attic. However, it is likely that office space quickly replaced the living accommodation which may have been for a building supervisor or possibly even a *pied a terre* for the occupants. It was, therefore, purpose-built for the professional classes who were increasingly colonising this area by the 1890s. It is not surprising to see that the first occupants comprised Charles Eaves, a house agent, John Glaiser, a solicitor, and J.Whitehouse an iron merchant. By 1910 John Glaiser was the only tenant still in place. He had been joined by Henry Hollins, an accountant for the Provident Association of London Commercial Trust, and Percy Frankham, another solicitor. In addition, G.J.Eveson and the Coal and Coke Company Limited and the Staffordshire Tube Company were registered at this address and it is interesting to note that one of the ground-floor offices was labelled ‘my office’ on the original architects plans and, presumably, must have been used for administrative purposes only. By 1920 both Eveson and the Staffordshire Tube Company were still in occupation and the solicitors had expanded to include other partners called Tange and Atkinson. There followed a protracted period of continuity until the Second World War when the solicitors left and the property was only listed as being occupied by Eveson, the Staffordshire Tube Company and Creswell and Bowden, another coal merchants. By 1950 the occupancy list of 134/5 Edmund Street read like the cover premises used by Harry Palmer in a Len Deighton thriller about the machinations of the British Secret Service. In addition to Eveson, Staffordshire Tube and Cressell’s, the other companies included the Albion Pulversing Company (specialists in clay and whiting manufacture) and the strangely named Sementex Limited – who were, apparently, flooring specialists. By 1963 only Eveson, the Albion Pulversing Company and the Rubber Manufacturing Employers Association were in occupation, but by 1973, the last year of the Kelly’s Directory in Birmingham Central Library, Michael Prior and Company, solicitors, the Leeds and Holbeck Building Society and the Drawing Office Equipment Company were left in occupancy.

6.0 Building survey

The following description is a summary based upon data gathered by the building survey and subsequent watching brief. Each building is described in turn proceeding in a logical manner around the flow of the structure.

6.1 134/5 Edmund Street (Figs 11, 12-14 & 16-18 and Plates 1 & 6)

This building comprises three storeys, an attic and a basement and three bays. The materials used in the frontage include thin red-facing brick, buff terracotta and distinctive diminishing courses of green-grey slate on the roof, with common red brick elsewhere. The style is Arts and Crafts Gothic incorporating rich horizontal bands of terracotta foilage that prevent the building seeming too tall or too narrow (Fig. 12). Unfortunately, a modern shop front has completely removed the original ground-floor design. This consisted of a central doorway with an oval light over, flanked by shallow brick arches on either side defining recessed windows. The first floor has a central rectangular window and two canted-bay windows with ogee heads to the centre lights and detached scrolly members, some of which are missing or damaged. The second-floor windows are similar but surmounted by blank terracotta arcading and both sets of windows have leaded top lights. The central bay of the attic has a polygonal cupola with two flat-headed casement windows on either side, although the dormer roof is different to the original design having a flat head. The rear elevation is much altered. Nothing is left at ground-floor level, which originally was lower at roughly half of what is now the basement floor, apart from a door into what is now a light well and a section of plaster cornice in the location of the iron or steel-framed rear extension (Plate 6). The size and shape of the surviving window openings is consistent with the original design, although all of the windows have been replaced on the first and second floors, and the attic dormers have been much enlarged.

The original building style is also traditional, consisting of solid brick walling, but does incorporate more modern elements such as portland cement mortar, much lighter timber detailing exclusively in sawn deal - including the roof assembly, which is simple and light where it survives - and electric rather than gas lighting. Heating remained based around open fires in most rooms although one room in the basement is called a heating chamber and may have contained a solid fuel boiler for hot water and may be even central heating. Taken together these characteristics give the building a much more Edwardian rather than Victorian character.

The basic plan of the building consists of two sets of rooms, arranged front and rear around the central entrance at ground floor and the slightly off centred staircase to the floors above. The position of the staircase meant that the right-hand side rear room was always the smallest, but in balance the front right-hand room was the largest. At ground-floor level these rooms were a combination of offices, waiting rooms and consulting chambers in the main building, and an iron or steel-framed rear extension labelled the clerks office. At first-floor level all four rooms were used as offices. Toilets were provided at basement and second-floor level and there was a scullery in the attic.

Survival is only partial in the basement where several later walls were added to the original structure in order to strengthen the building when the ground floor was gutted and replaced by RSJs supporting the walls above. Some original features survive in the floors above and include the simple original lines of the staircase, sections of skirting - which gets smaller as one progresses up the building, reflecting the social scale of the

occupants - and chimney stacks, if not original fireplaces. The plan is essentially unaltered apart from the obvious insertion of some doors between offices and the subdivision of the toilets to include male and female facilities.

Therefore, in conclusion, the building is essentially a straightforward traditional design that incorporates stylistic and constructional detail that we have come to characterise as Edwardian, although the design was made some four years before the end of Victoria's reign. It also forms part of an important class of terracotta building in central Birmingham that is representative of a particular school of architecture that was exciting and original in colour and profile and was particularly prevalent between 1880 and 1910.

6.2 136/8 Edmund Street (Figs 12 -18 and Plates 2, & 7-15)

In contrast, this building is stylistically rooted in the solid secular Venetian Gothic values of mid-to-late-Victorian Britain. The building exudes mass and robustness, as well as a certain muted grandeur, compared with its younger, more playful, and relatively lightweight neighbour. The materials used in the frontage comprise typically 1870/80s finely-finished pale red bricks in English Bond with very thin mortar jointing. There are also moulded and gauged brickwork details that are very fresh, together with plaster details in bands, and a terracotta arcade of twelve narrow windows with bar tracery and a richly decorated, thinly-bracketed cornice to the upper storey. The building is of four storeys with two basements and five bays. The ground floor is painted, the outer entrances are slightly broader and have an enriched sexfoil in the tympanum when compared to the simpler set of three central arched openings. The right-hand entrance to the Flower's offices behind is emphasised by an extra gable that appears to be an afterthought, but may merely have been an addition to the original design to highlight the ownership of the building because the terracotta tiles are similar to those used on the upper storey. On the first floor the outer windows have trefoil-headed sash windows beneath pointed arches with floral hoodstops, and, on the second floor, beneath a gable. The three inner bays each have two sash windows within a single tall lancet with hood mould and floral headstops, and in the spandrels there is diaper work. The roof is shallow in pitch and of regular welsh slates.

Like 134/5 Edmund Street the building technology is very representative of its time, but this is a slightly earlier period. The choice of materials and design also reflects the building's mixed commercial and distributive functions. The basements and ground-floor level are supported on cast-iron columns linked with heavily bolted I-sections that in the basements support brick barrel-vaulting (Plate 7), and at first-floor level support a wooden floor. The rest of the structure is comprised of traditional mass brick walling and there is a mixture of king-post and queen-post roof assemblies that incorporate iron fixings and ties. The lighting, and possibly some heating was originally piped gas, 1878 being too early for commercially available electricity, although there are also a number of fireplaces. Detailing, such as the Maw and Company tiles used to decorate the long corridor to the Flowers office, and even the scale of rooms, is very much status orientated, and each storey diminishes in size and status as you progress up the building. Despite, or possibly because of, the fact that the building has been empty for thirty years

the survival of interior fittings inside this structure is fairly good compared with that of its neighbour.

As the historical research has highlighted, the building has something of a split personality, and it makes sense to deal with both aspects separately. Taking the part occupied by the Flower distribution facility first, we have already seen how the entrance from Edmund Street is emphasised in the original design. The long corridor (GF 1) ran the length of the building to provide direct access to the office (GF 4) behind, although its passage has since been interrupted by the insertion of a lift (Fig. 13). The Maw tile floor is complemented by a very deep plaster skirting, some 12 inches deep, and elaborate plaster cornice and picture rail. The colour regime is old, but may even be original, consisting of dark brown oil paint on the skirting, dark green oil above separated by a thin brown line at waist height from old cream above. The office was imposing. It was a tall, well-lit room dominated by a fireplace at the gable furthest from the entrance off the corridor. Four windows overlook the distribution yard, the fenestration consisting of a large central balanced four-light sash window with a smaller pair of windows on either side in the centre, and four-light sashes to the sides (Plate 8). Parts of a very decorative cornice and a ceiling rose have survived along with gas fittings including decorated ventilation covers and some piping. The floor was wooden over the barrel-vaulting of the basement underneath. A cloakroom and toilet were *en suite* and the staircase providing access to the basement appears to be original, with a second adjacent fireplace in the corner to take the chill off any draughts from the basement. This was clearly the 'boss's' office, visually controlling everything happening in the yard below, but it would also have been sufficiently impressive - if you imagine a roaring fire blazing in the main fireplace and padded leather seats on either side together with a large polished boardroom table reflecting the light from a glass chandelier in the middle of the roof - to entertain prospective customers for Flowers India Pale Ale. Indeed, the advertising slogan 'reassuringly expensive' springs to mind about the kind of statement this comfortable Victorian room was making.

Naturally, life upstairs and downstairs was just as far apart in Victorian, as opposed to Edwardian, England. The basements are stark and functional open spaces and the barrel-vaulting runs in three continuous lines from the front to the back of the building broken only by regularly-spaced iron tie-bars (Fig. 14, Plate 9). The cast-iron columns supporting the vaulting are squat and the space appears low and cramped in comparison with the high ceilings of the ground-floor rooms above. The only ventilation was provided by a set of sky-lights to the front and the central doorway and left-hand window onto the yard at the rear (Plate 10). The right-hand opening was a doorway into a building behind. This arrangement would have been cool in summer, which would have helped to maintain the condition of the beer. The upper-basement floor has been relaid with some form of polished concrete floor containing small ash or stone inclusions and the infilled path of two drainage channels can be made out running down either flanking bay. The brick floor of the lower basement was covered with a thin asphalt skim that has worn through in places, but the cellar is essentially similar in design to the one above (Fig. 15, Plate 11). The key question concerning the lower basement is one of access. It seems likely that the insertion of the lift and later brickwork around the stairwell may have

destroyed any previous access arrangement. But, given the weight of the products being stored here, some sort of cellar chute or lift and hoist are likely to have been used, rather than just a staircase. The Goad Fire Insurance Map of 1889 indicates that this access may have been from the yard into the lower basement (Fig.8), although there is no indication of what type it may have been. None of the original storage features have survived. Instead, any fittings, including a communication chute (Plate 11) and the lift relate to the post-war occupation of the block by the Griffin Foundry or even by Osborne, Garell and Company, the hairdressers and sundriesmen. The foundations of the lower basement are cut well into the sandstone geology. The columns are seated on stone slabs set over brick stanchions, while the wall foundations are corbelled out and are four courses deep.

The arrangement of the yard is best seen on the Goad Fire Insurance Map of 1889. Essentially, an open yard was flanked by narrow two-storey buildings on either side that must have included stables, dray-cart sheds, feed storage and tack shops – in fact all the kit needed to keep a team of dray horses busy. The yard was accessed through an arched entrance off Cornwall Street, above this was a row of three-storied structures indicated as having stables below and living accommodation for the dray men, above. The section outline of some of these buildings can be traced in the concrete work of the adjacent building which indicates that they were still standing into the 1960s or 1970s (Plate 3).

Access to 136 Edmund Street was via the left-hand entrance. This led into a small entrance lobby that gave access to the upper floors. It seems likely on balance that the entrance to the rest of the ground floor was directly off the street, as this housed a jewellers, then Twyfords and later an auctioneers' all of whom would have required direct access to the street for business purposes. Unfortunately, for health and safety reasons, both the staircase and lobby (GF 3) were out of bounds. The remaining ground-floor room (GF 2) is very large and tall, running from the frontage to Flowers offices behind, while the floor above is supported on cast-iron columns. It is easy to see this space making a good auctioneers' sales room or even a sanitary fitting show room, but it has been gutted in terms of internal fittings.

The first floor is not as deep as the ground floor because it does not include the office premises to the rear (Fig.16). There are four rooms accessed from the staircase, which continues up to the floors above in a rear wing extension to the main building. The main right-hand room (FF 1) occupies the front three bays of the building and is served by a fireplace next to which a safe has inserted together with communication chutes to other parts of the building. This would imply that it was the accounts department of the Griffin Foundry or the hairdressers and sundriesmen. Also, it is not directly accessed from the staircase, and was probably always an office. The other front room (FF 2) was probably a heated secretary's annexe controlling access to the main office FF 1. The staircase (FF 3) was out of bounds. The largest room lay behind the frontage. It was open to a hipped roof with three large queen-post truss roof supports with iron strengthening. The glass partition between FF 1 and FF 4 may be original. This arrangement would certainly work as a printer's with the presses housed in FF 4. It would also work as a school room, a Theosophical Society meeting room or an area for donors of blood. The rear stair access

to GF 2 is a later insert as are the alterations to the three window openings to the back of the room and the lift that terminates here (Plate 13).

The second floor consists of the front bays only, with the staircase wing attached behind (Fig. 17). There is just one large front room (SF 1), heated at either end by fireplaces with segmental arches, though the original fittings have long since been removed (plate 14). The chimney plasterwork includes round wooden dowels at the corners, a feature that seems to have been popular in this period. The cornice plasterwork is more decorative than that in the storey above, but is of a relatively simple design. In addition there are two cast-iron vents in the ceiling towards the front of the building, presumably to ventilate gas lamps (Plate 15). There is no trace of a fireplace in the rear wall, although the former location of one here is strongly implied by the presence of a chimney corbelled out from first-floor ceiling level that is visible from the back of the property (Plate 3). The rear wall of this room is also blind, but this is explicable because of the proximity of the roof over FF 4 behind – and it is possible that the gas vents were inserted to cope with this potential ventilation problem.

The third floor resembles the plan of the first floor (Fig.18), with a main office, TF 1, accessed from an annexe (TF 2) controlling access off the staircase (TF 3). Both front rooms were heated and these may have been the offices of the second publisher here in the 1900s, possibly with a reading or reference room on the second floor, below. Again, there is no evidence for a fireplace in the rear wall of TF 1, and here it would appear that the chimney has partially blocked a smaller window opening to its left. Therefore, another possibility arises that it was installed to ventilate a free-standing stove in any of the rooms, including FF 4, below. Other original features that have survived in the uppermost floor include the four-light balanced sashes to the rear, four-panel doors and X-bracing between the floor joists. The roof was a king-post design and there was a simple cornice to the ceiling throughout.

In general, although empty for a greater number of years, survival of original features is better in 136/8 Edmund Street than its younger neighbour. The basements were substantially intact, although detailing such as external access to the lower basement had been destroyed or covered over. Although the other rooms had been variously stripped or altered during the lifetime of the building, features such as skirting and ceiling cornices had survived even if fittings such as fireplaces had been removed. In particular, parts of the original gas fittings had survived to be recorded by the photographic survey. It was further apparent that the original structure was substantially intact, and that the existing room arrangements were readily understandable in terms of their former historic functions. In this respect the obvious lack of toilet facilities in 136 Edmund Street is of particular note.

7.0 Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, while both 134/5 and 136/8 Edmund Street have been recognised to be of special merit, mainly for the quality of the architecture of their frontages, this study has also demonstrated the historical importance of both buildings in terms of the story that

they tell about the development of Birmingham's Central Business District. In this respect the buildings are very representative of the different types of redevelopment that were taking place between 1878 and 1897 in Edmund Street. The immediate catalyst for this change was the end of the 120 year leases on the Newhall Estate land here from 1870 onwards. However, thereafter various local, regional, national, and even international factors came to bear upon the development of the street, all of which reflect the growing importance of Birmingham as a provincial centre. The basic story is one of rags to riches – a quick comparison of the occupants of Edmund Street in 1869 and 1899 more than bears this out – people living in inner city back-to-backs and lawyers or surgeons stand at opposite ends of the Victorian social spectrum.

The redevelopment of Edmund Street should therefore be firmly set within the broader story of the attempt to transform late-Victorian Birmingham into a respectable, rational, and gentrified town - at least within the centre, if not everywhere else. In practice the application of this process was not entirely straightforward. Even Chamberlain's 'improvement' of Corporation Street did not go entirely to plan, and that was with the juggernaut of a municipal corporation buoyed up by the profits of the gas and water utilities pushing through change. In the far looser, *laissez-faire*, development of Edmund Street one can discern a definite tension between competing commercial and professional interests. Initially, development was largely sponsored by the municipal corporation at one end of Edmund Street and a mixture of commercial interests, most of which were manufacturing or service-based, at the other. Thereafter, and particularly in the period 1890-1910, professional interests established themselves along the street. Architecture became an expression of this change, with solid Gothic commercial structures existing cheek-by-jowl with terracotta-clad Arts and Crafts chambers or consulting rooms and offices. Commercial interests began to recolonise the street after the First World War, but these were of a different and much lower status and character to those behind the earlier redevelopment of Edmund Street. Thereafter, Edmund Street has acted as a kind of barometer of the vitality of the Central Business District, with new offices for professional concerns being built in good times, but properties even left vacant in bad. Perhaps, this change can best be understood against the general shift in British manufacturing that was occurring in late-Victorian Britain away from the family firm and towards the limited liability company. The declining fortunes of Flowers brewery are probably a very good illustration of that process.

Because of their listed status and architectural interest the maintenance and even refurbishment of the frontages is particularly important. Moreover, it may be argued that this should not merely be confined to the exteriors of the buildings but also be applied internally to emphasise the different technological and functional character of each structure. The retention and even refitting of internal features is important in this respect. The precise details of any refurbishment work would have to be agreed with Richard Hudson and the Conservation Group of Birmingham City Council, but it is hoped that this report has demonstrated the reasons why this work should be actively considered.

8.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to KUC Properties for commissioning this project and Duncan Prosser of Atkins, Faithful and Gould for managing it on their behalf. Richard Hudson of the Conservation Department of Birmingham City Council monitored the project on their behalf and offered useful advice and information concerning the buildings. Thanks are also owed to the staff of Birmingham City Library Local Studies and Archives Departments and those of the Shakespeare Heritage Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon. This project was managed for BUFAU by Steve Litherland, who also carried out the building inspection, undertook the documentary survey and compiled the report. Dr Malcolm Hislop edited the report and the illustrations were prepared by John Halsted. The photographic survey was undertaken by Edward Newton.

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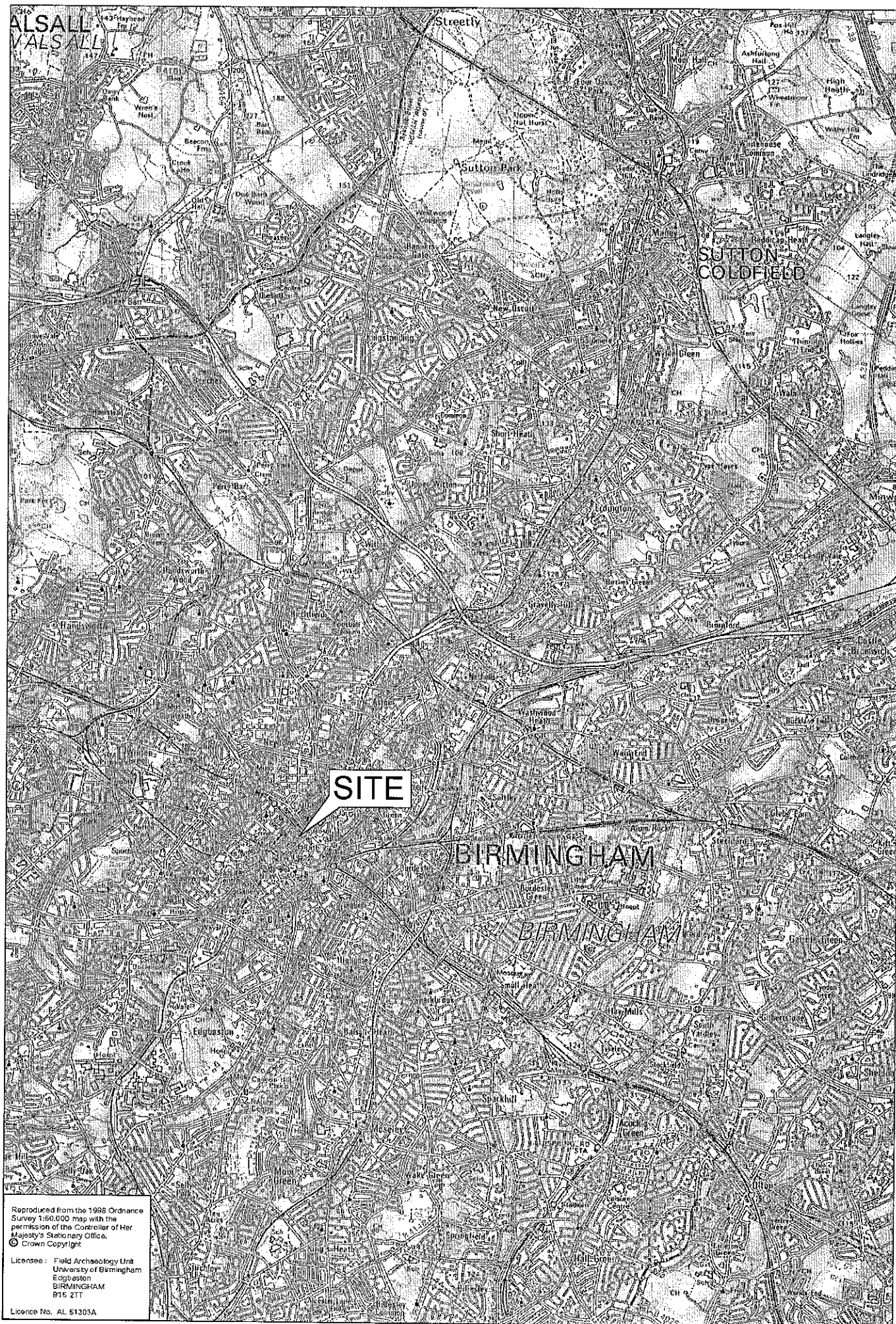
1848 Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge (SPUK) map of Birmingham

1875 Chamberlain Improvement map

1887 Ordnance Survey 1:500

1905 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1937 Ordnance Survey 1:2500



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Fig.1

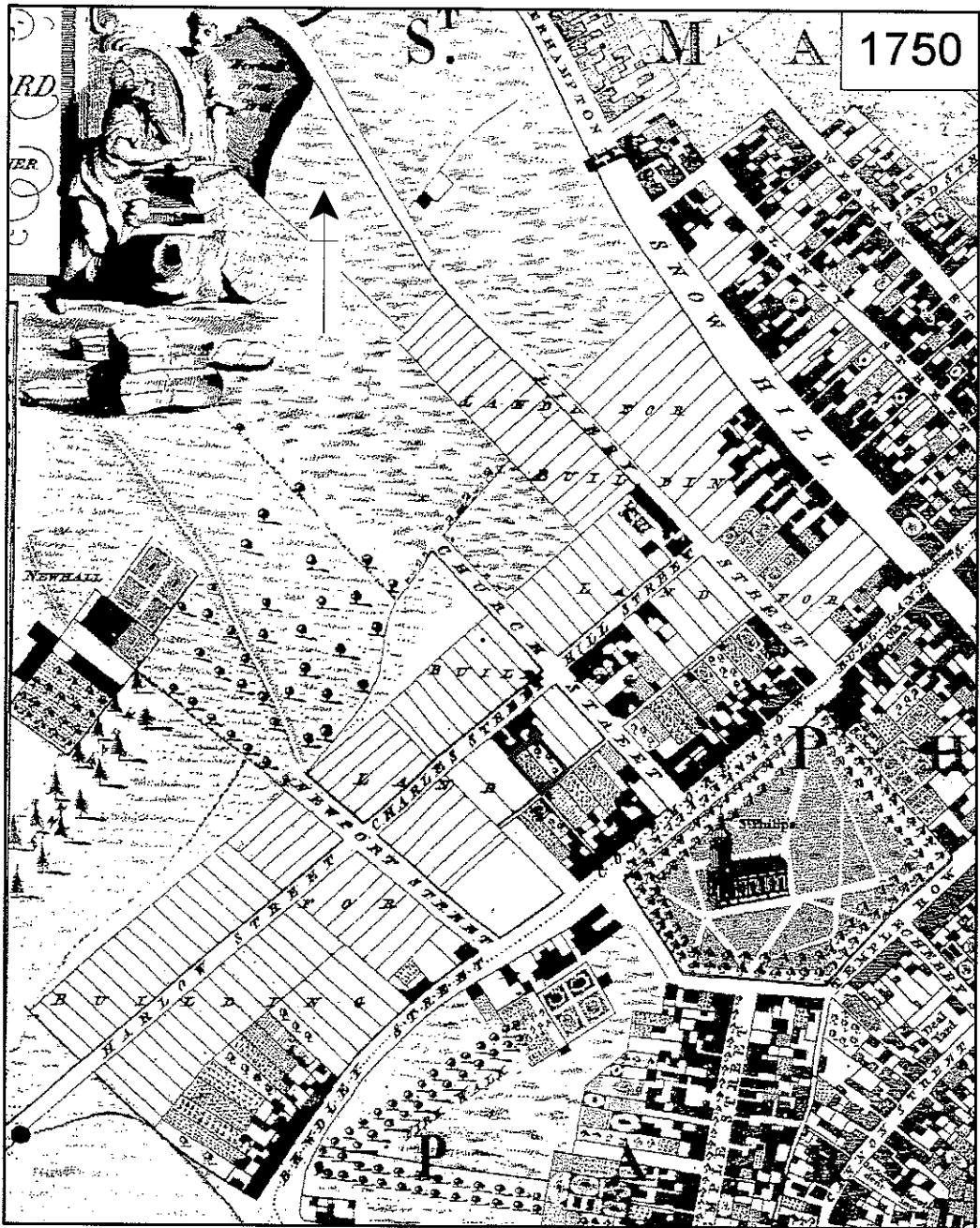


Fig.3

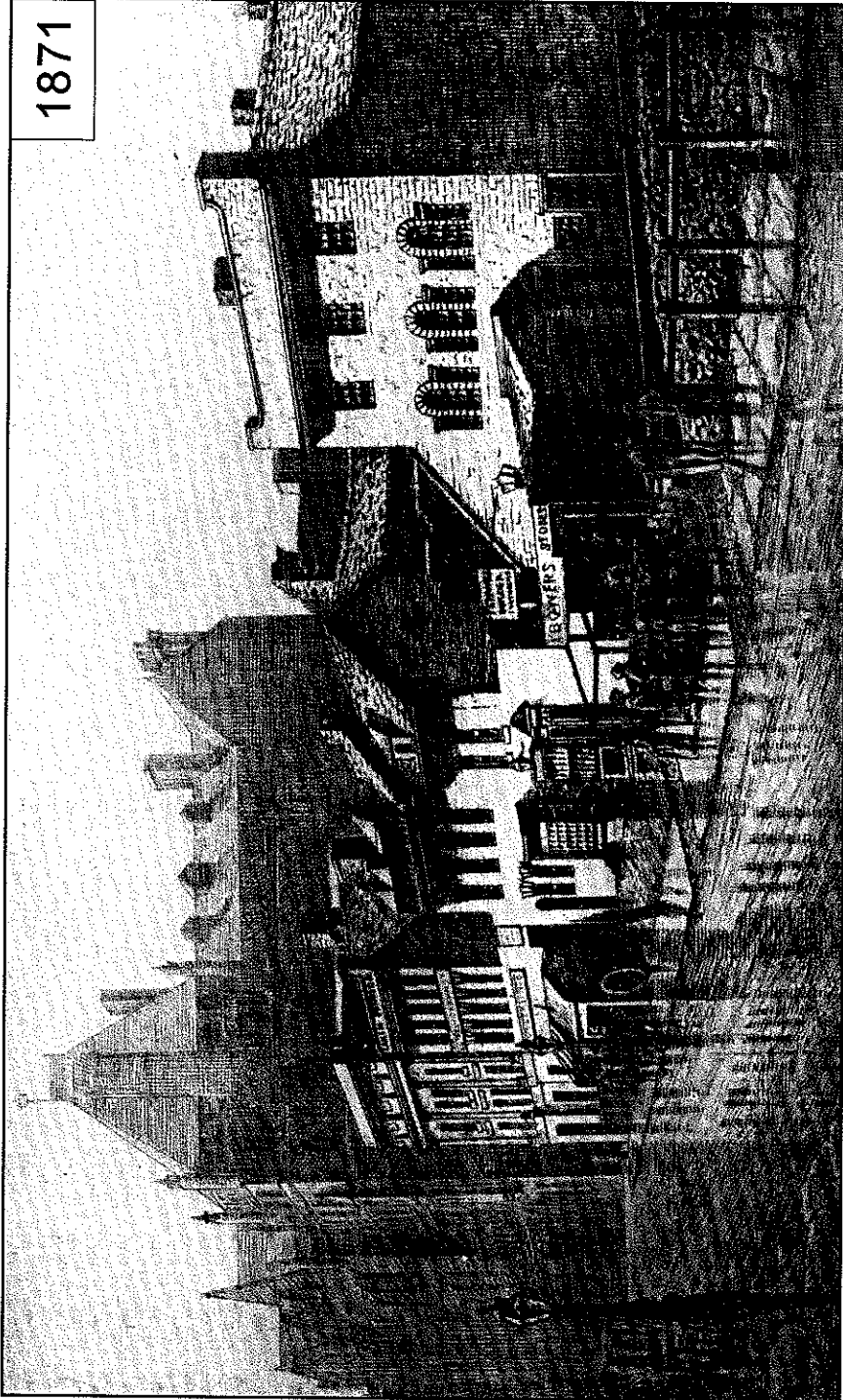


Fig. 5

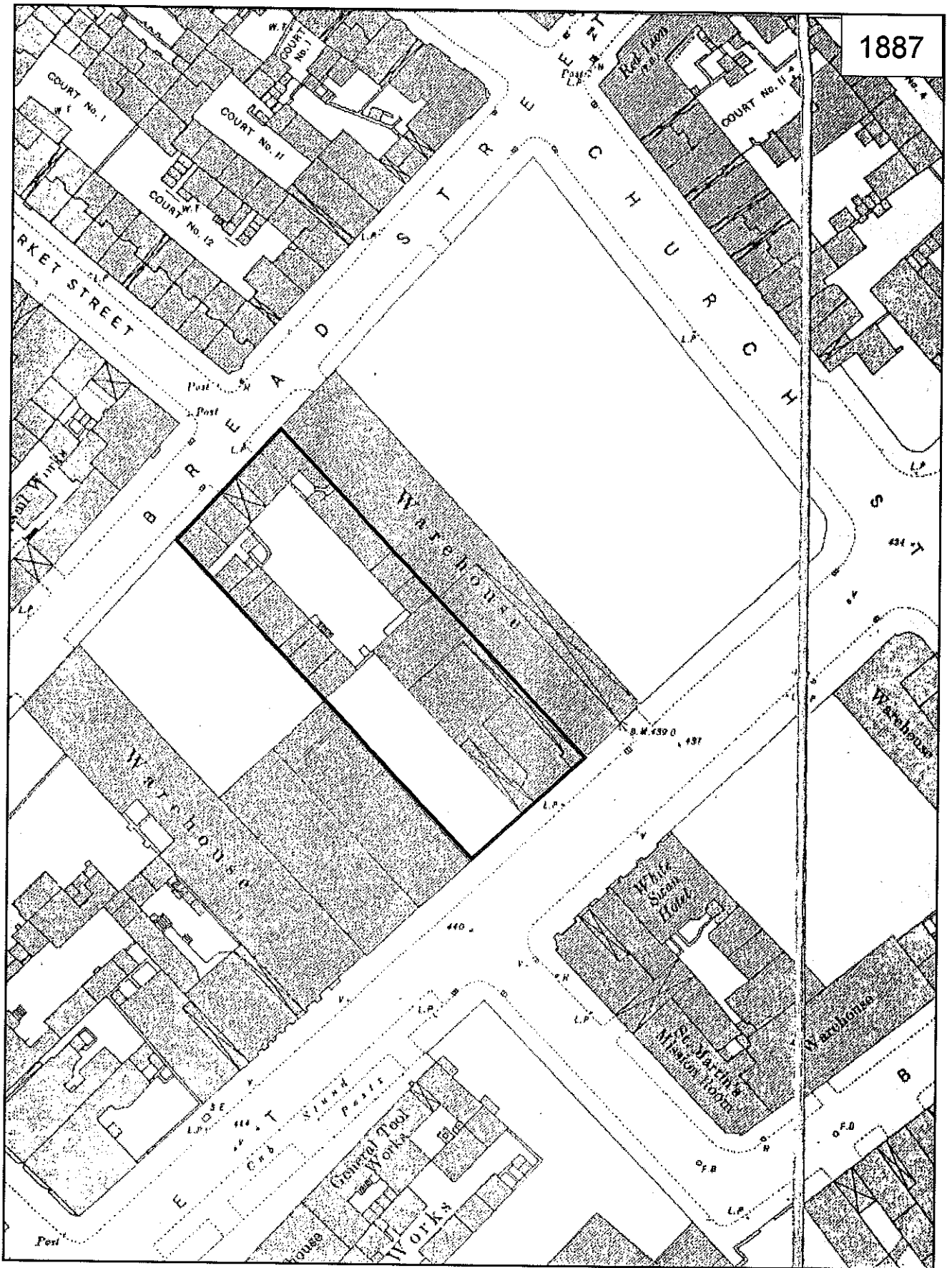


Fig.7

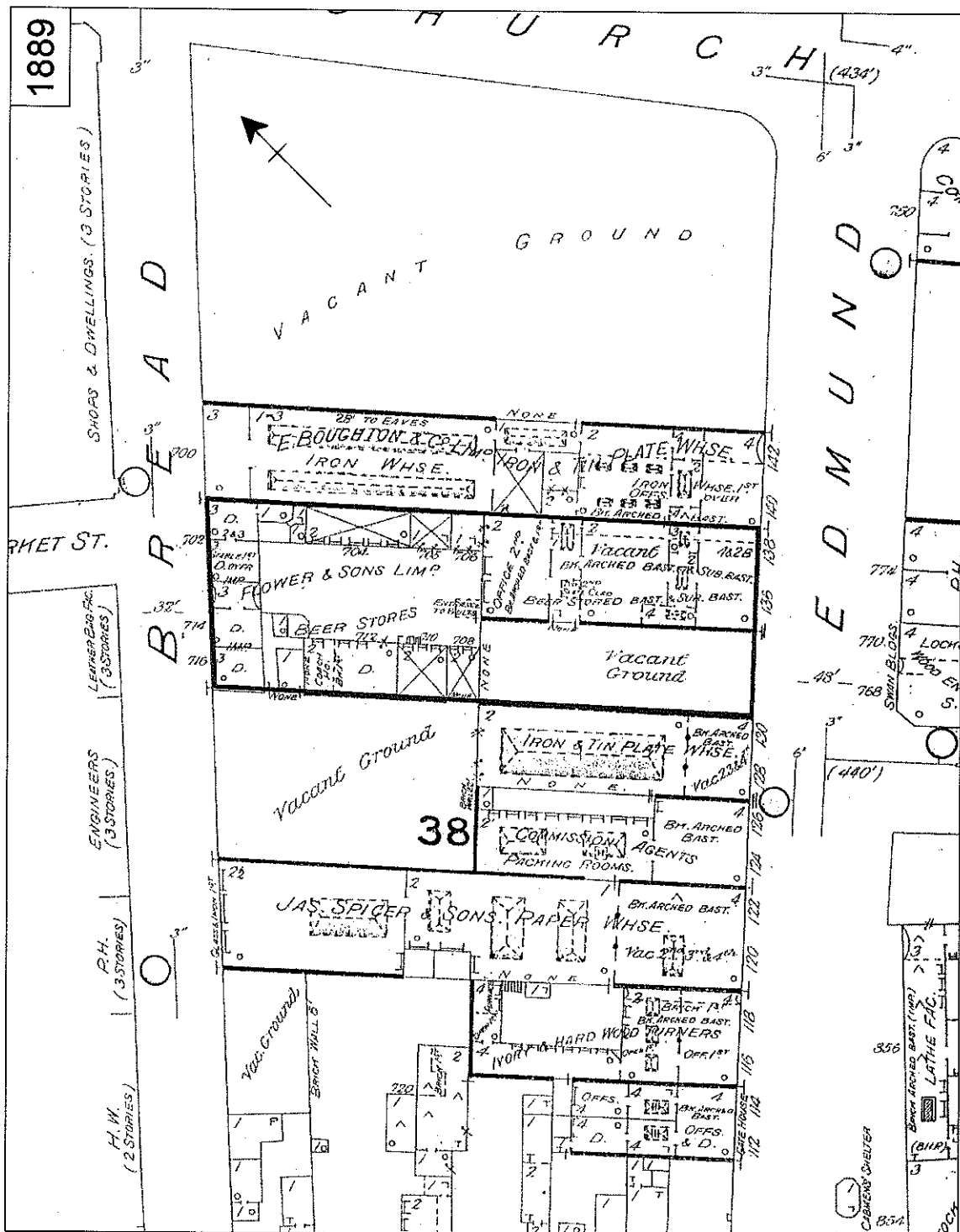


Fig. 8

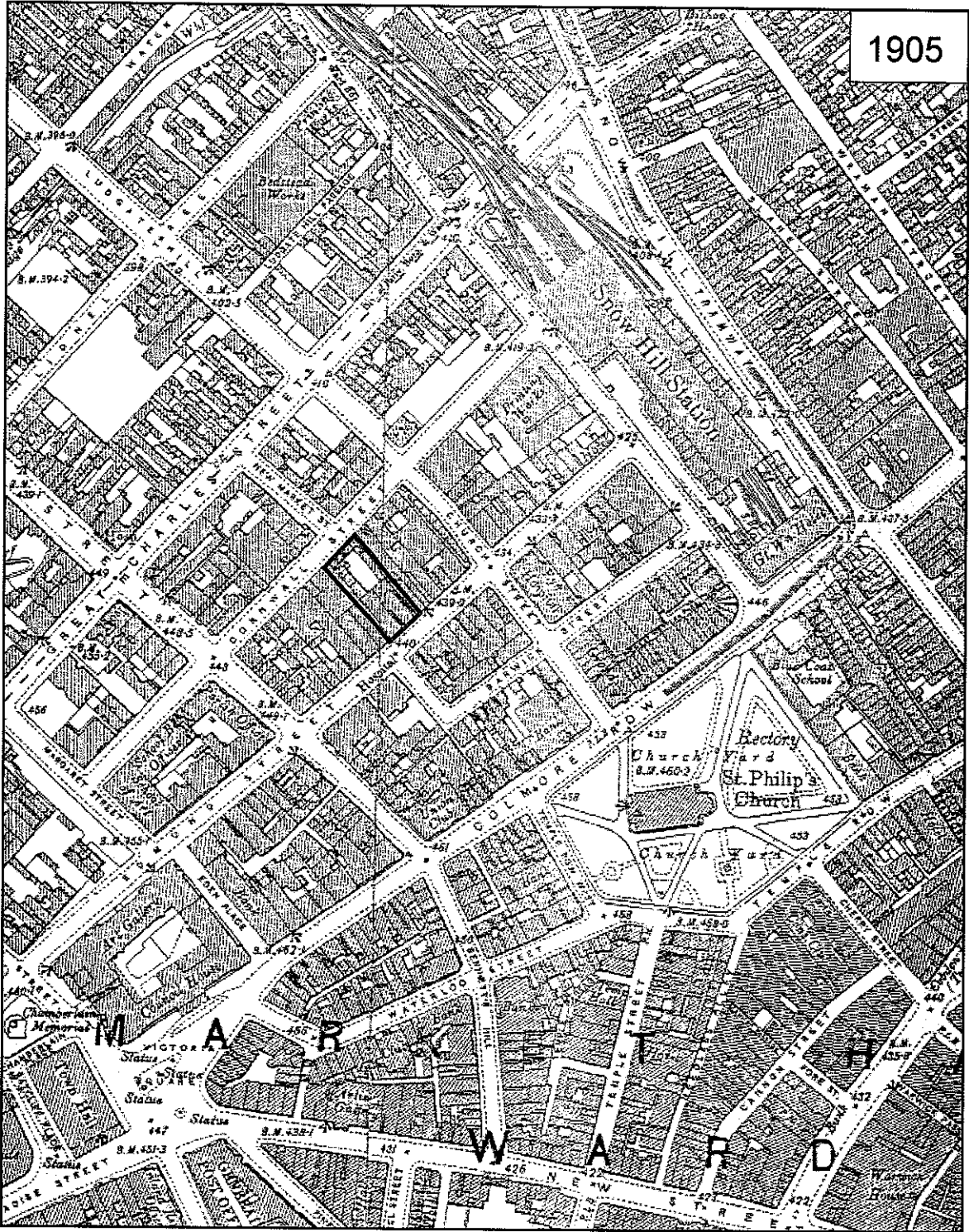


Fig.9

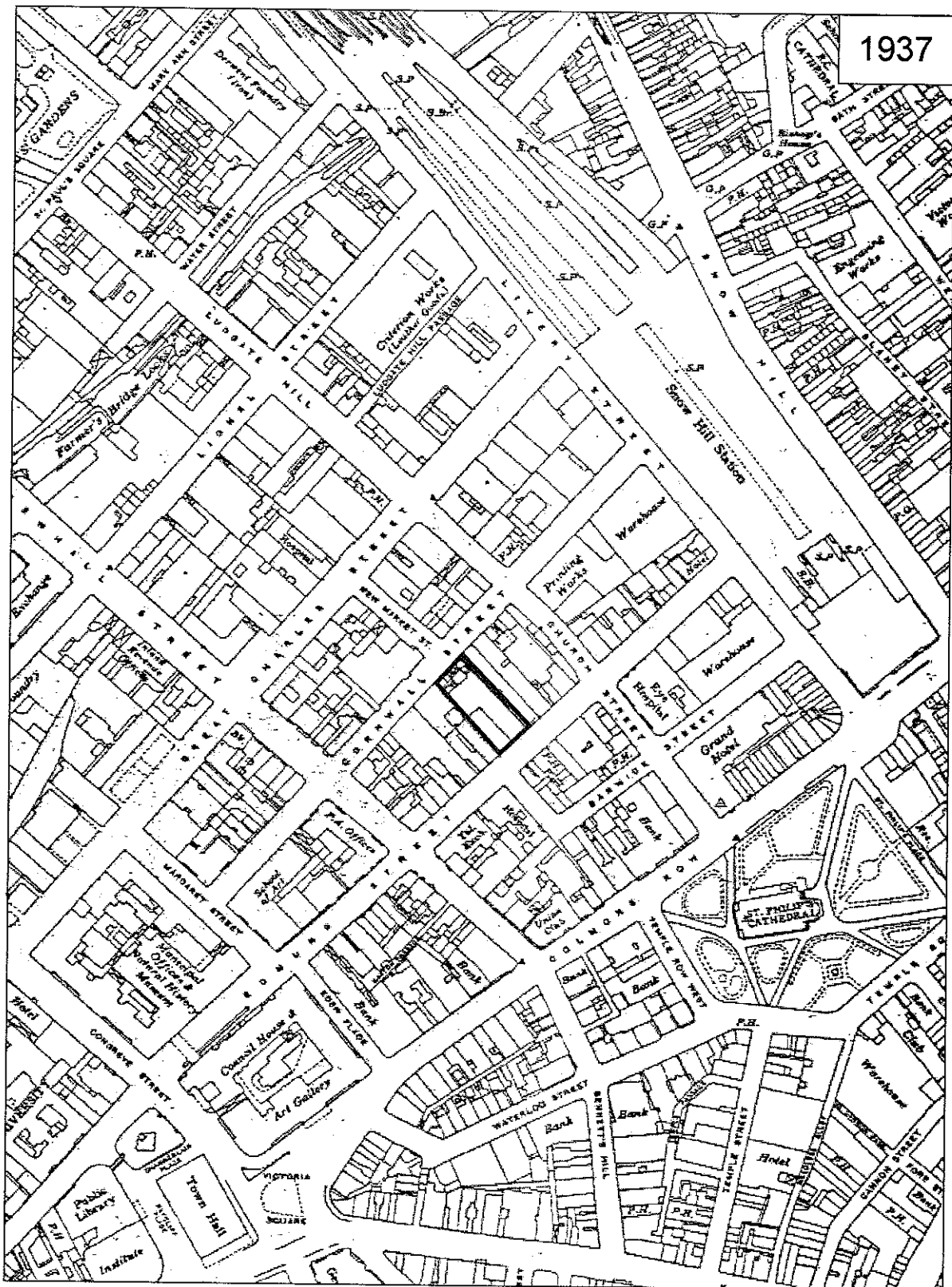


Fig.10

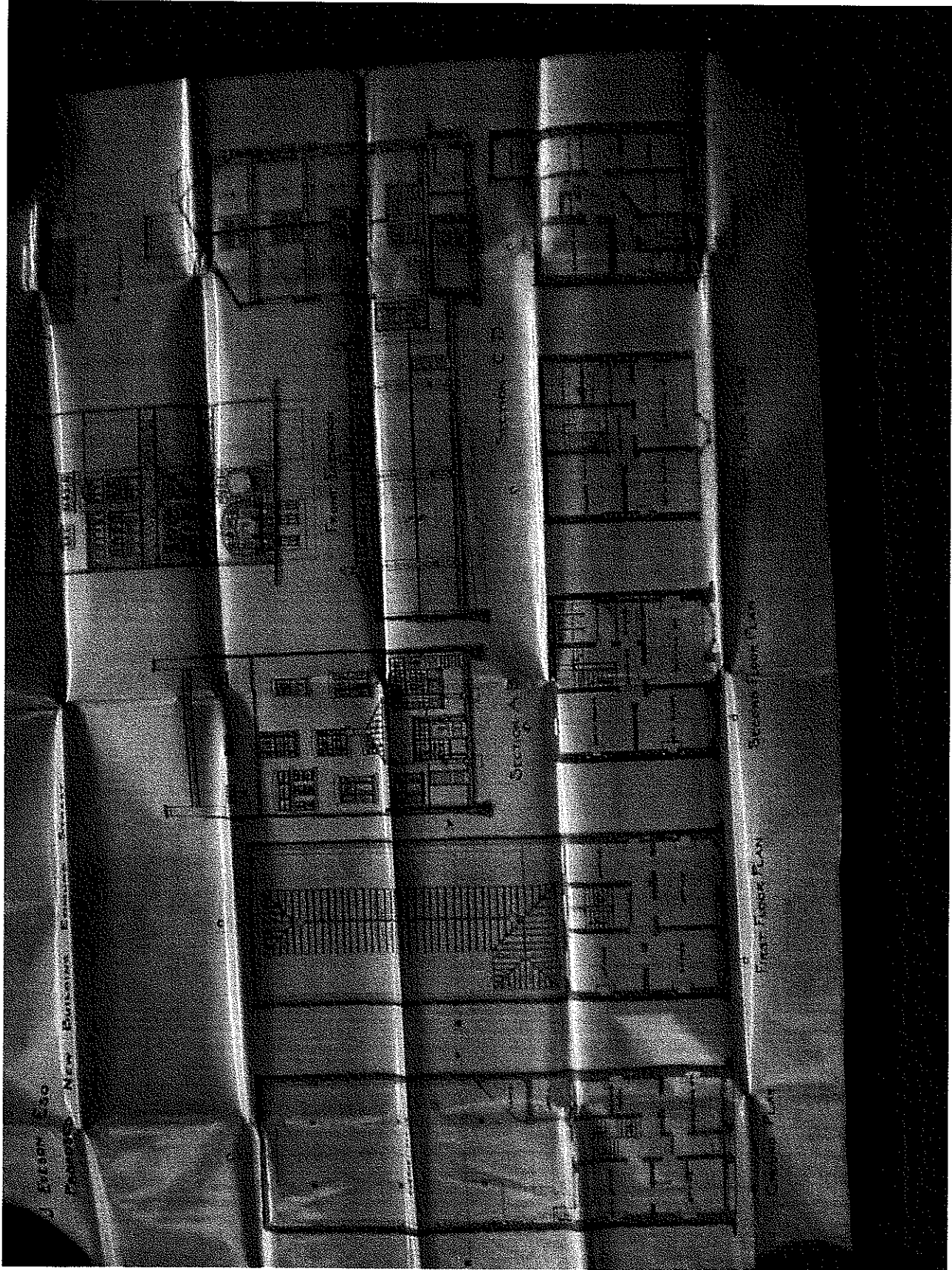


Fig.11

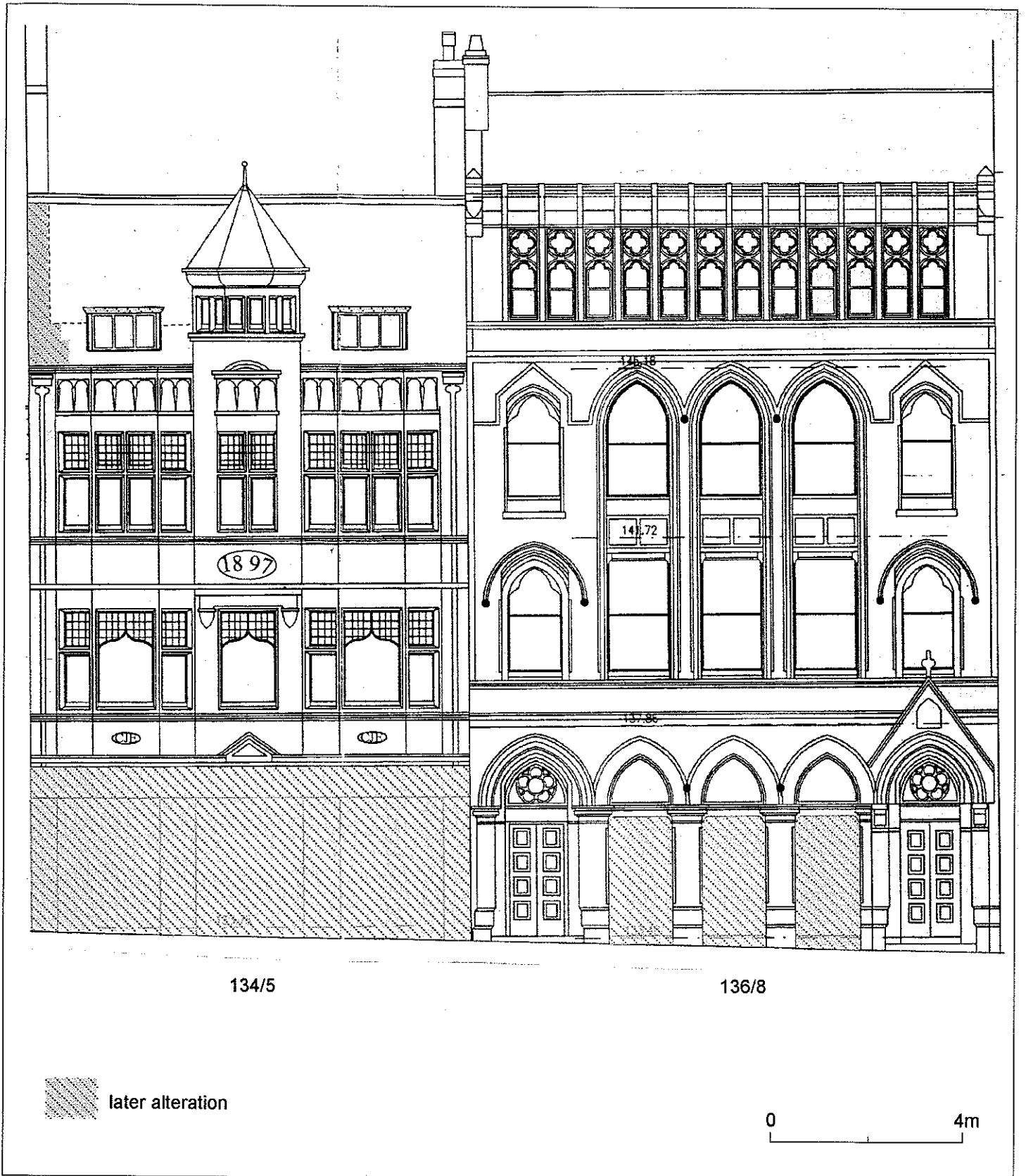
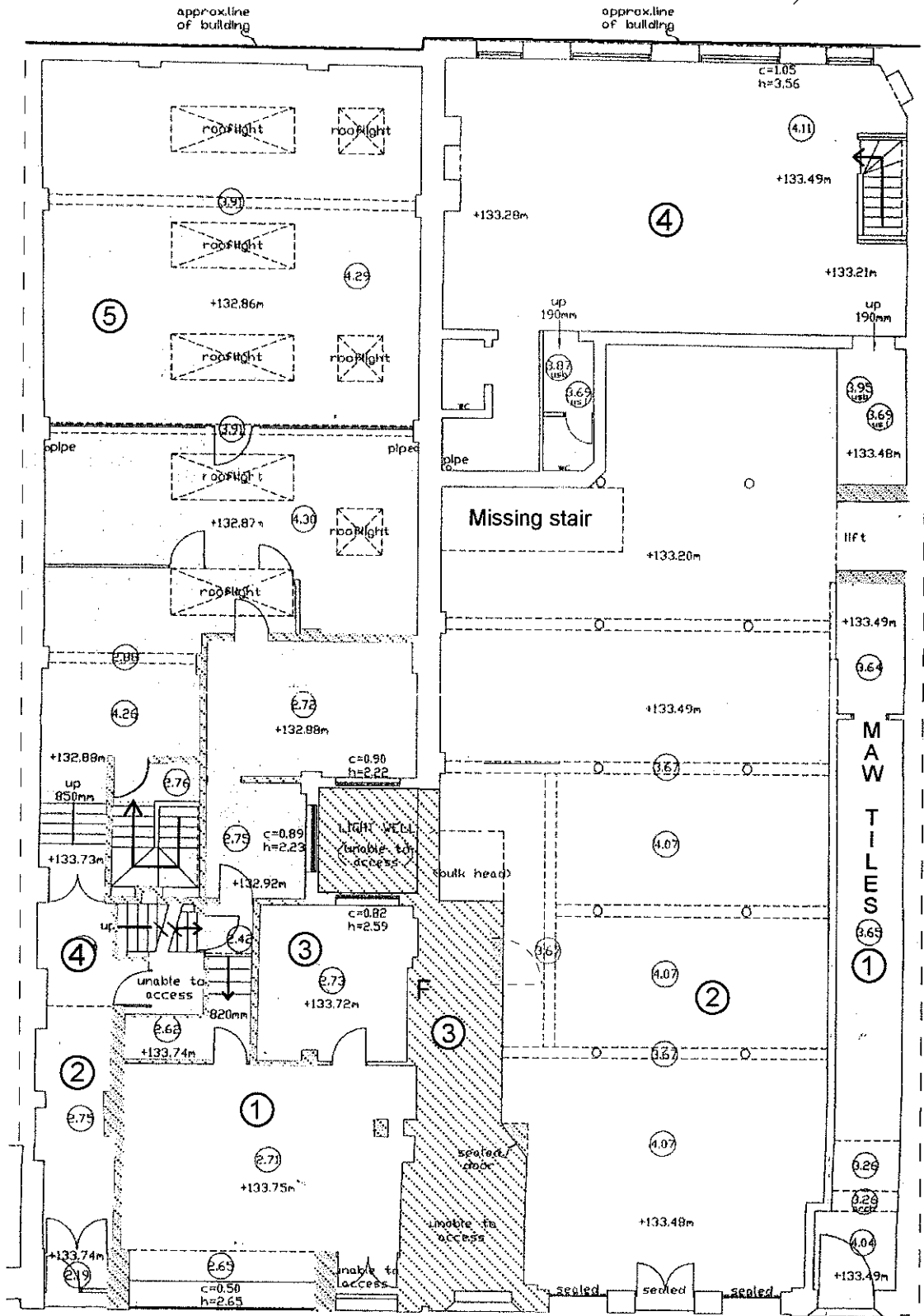


Fig.12

GROUND FLOOR (GF)



134/5

136/8

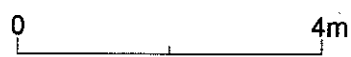


Fig.13

BASEMENT (B)

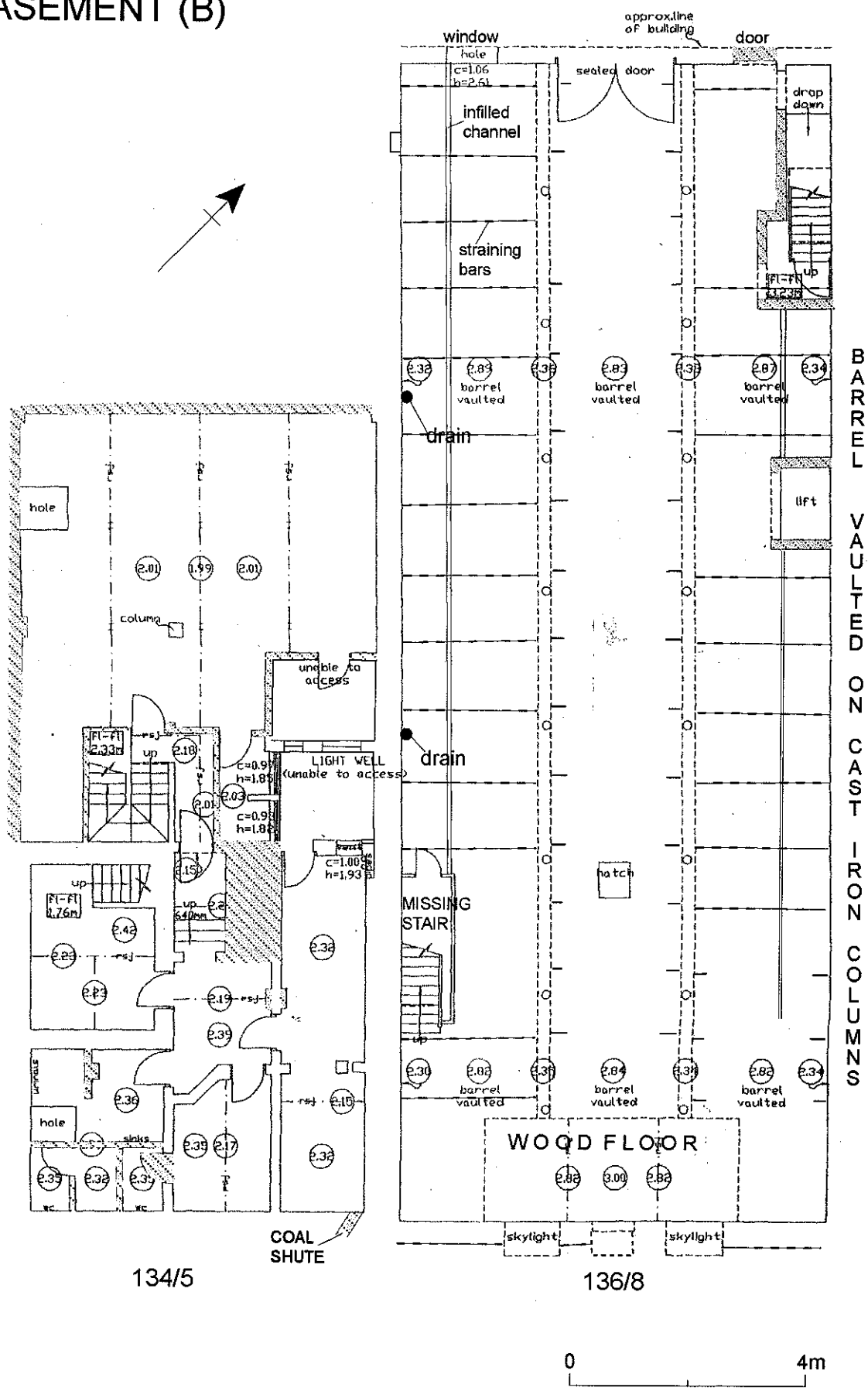


Fig.14

SUB-BASEMENT (SB)

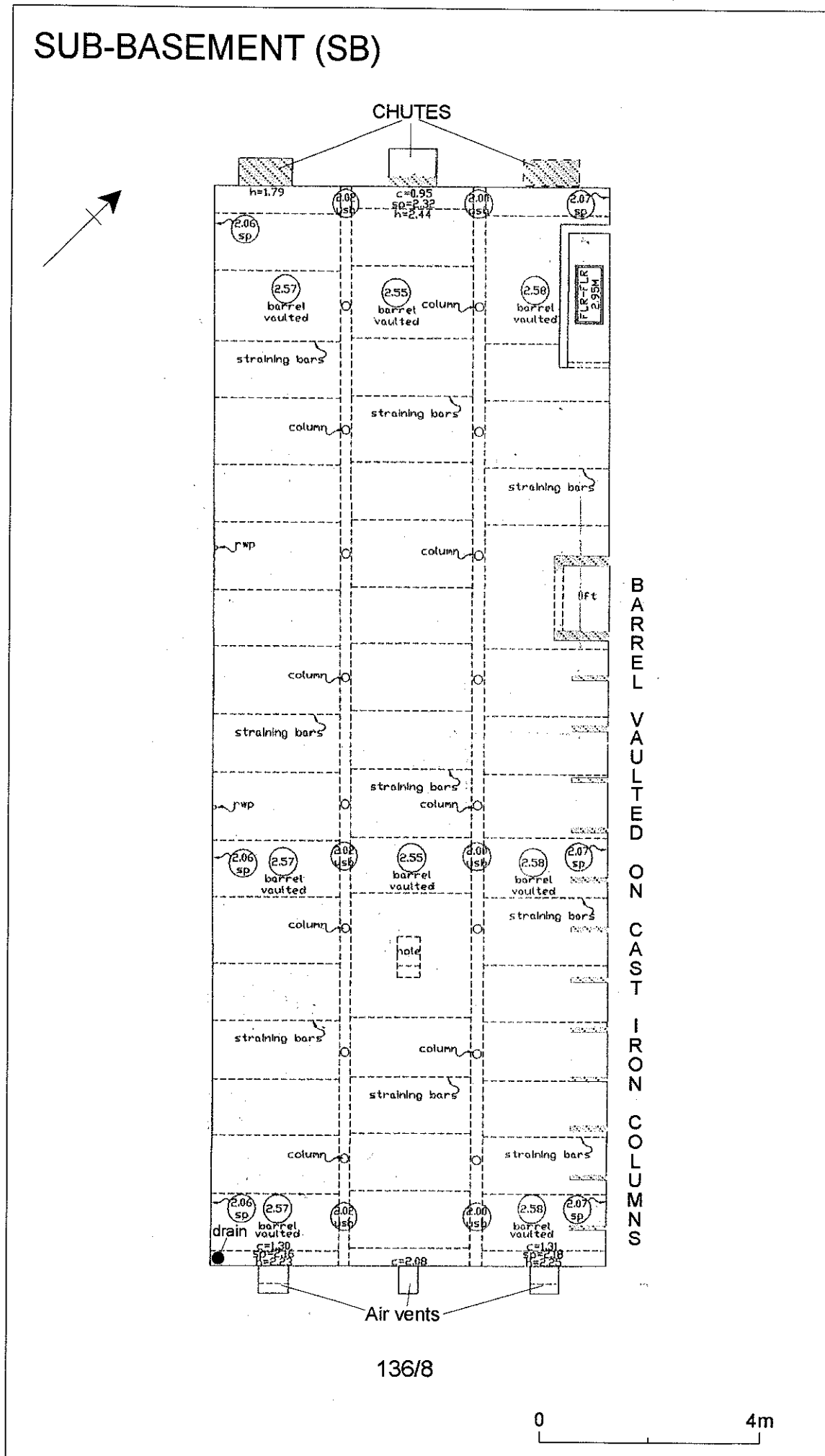
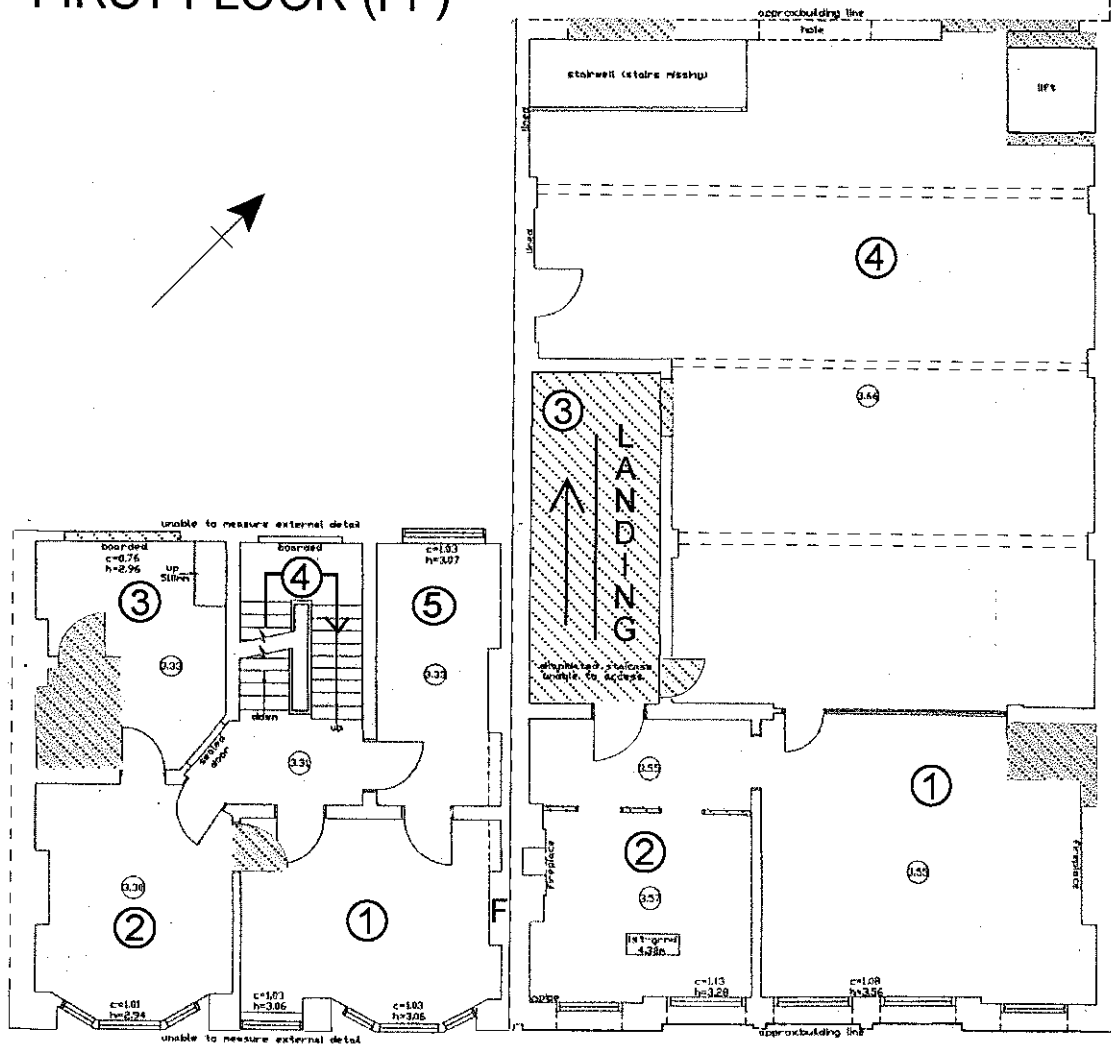


Fig.15

FIRST FLOOR (FF)



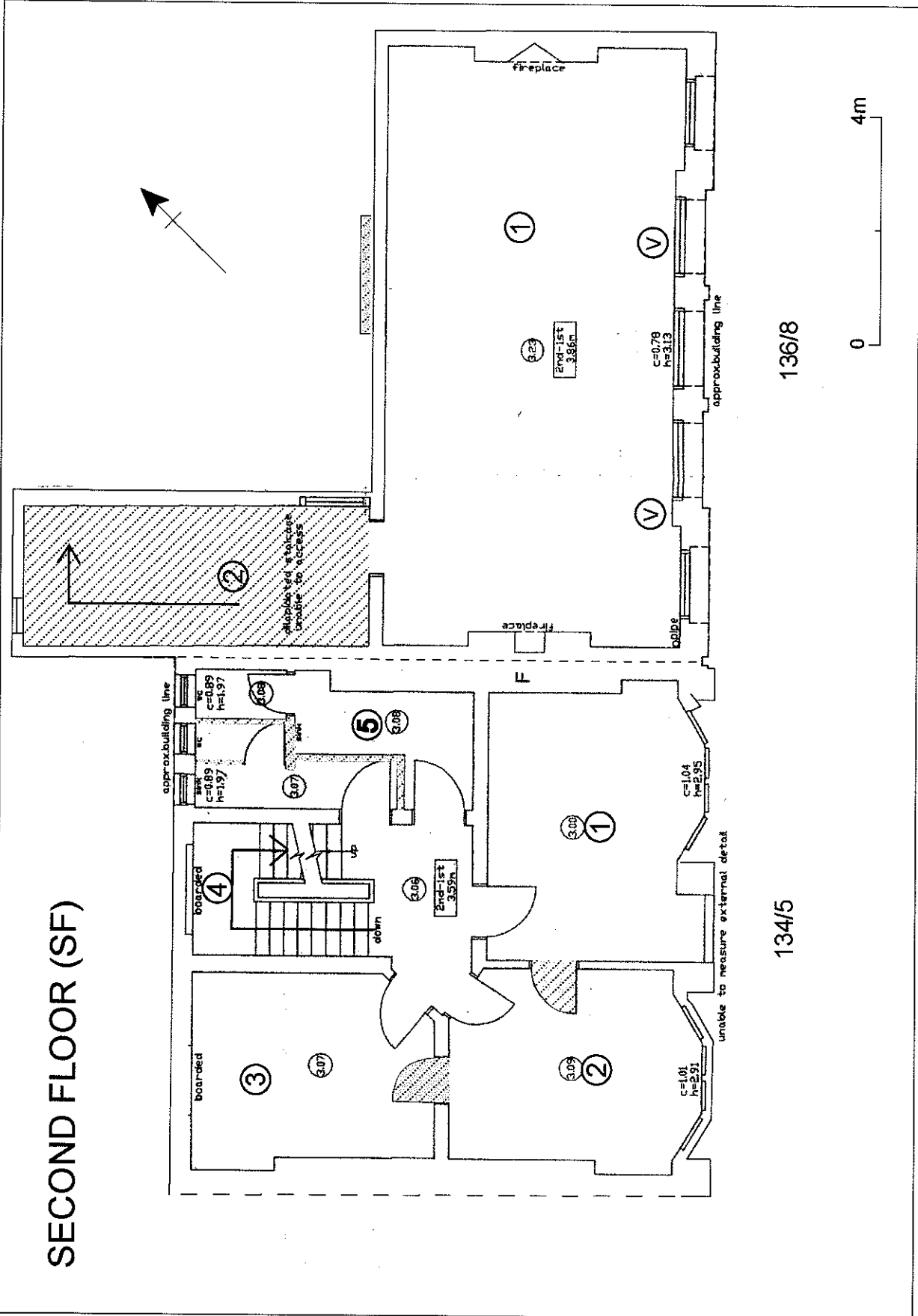
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Fig.16

SECOND FLOOR (SF)



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Fig.17

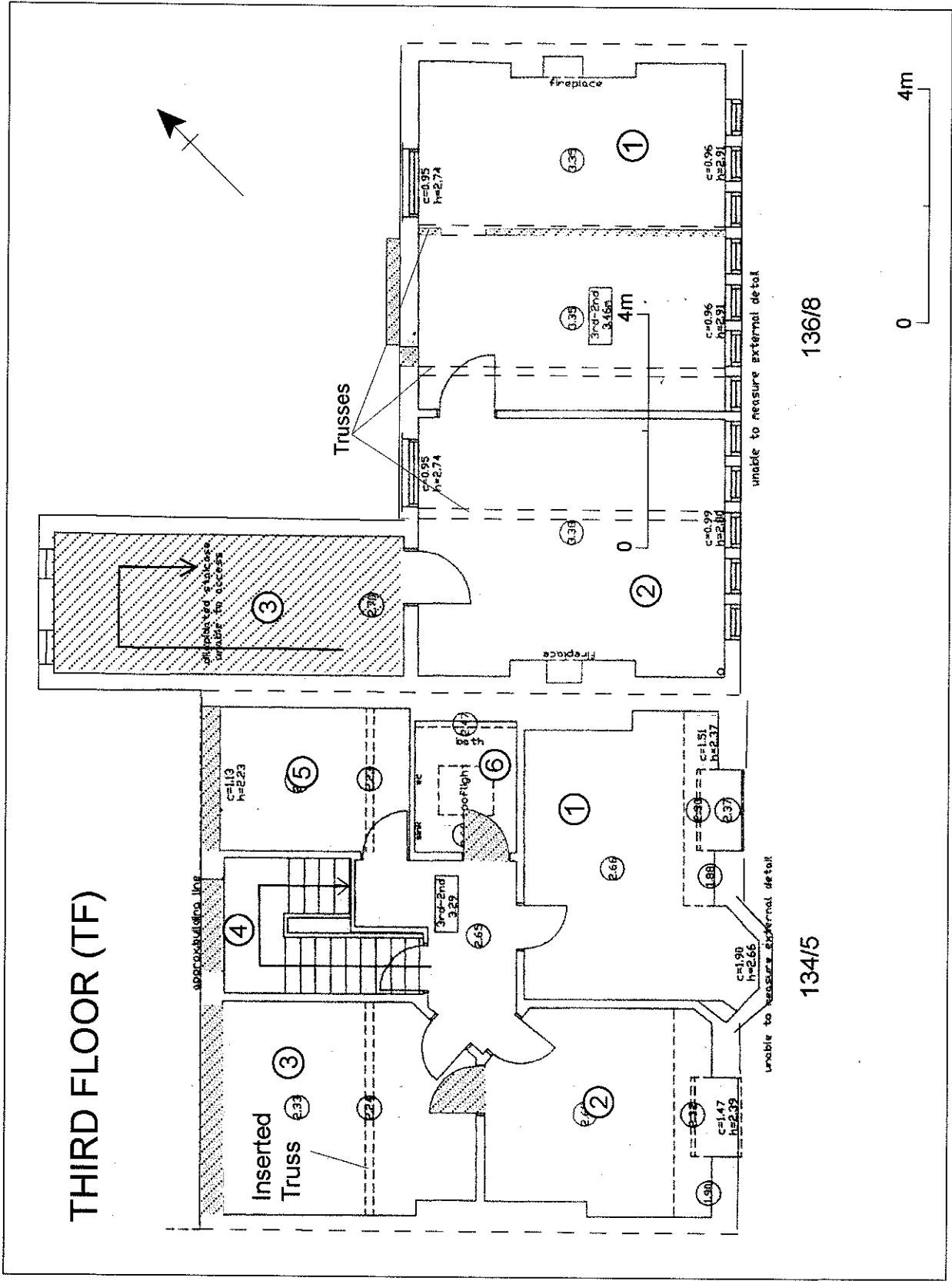


Fig. 18

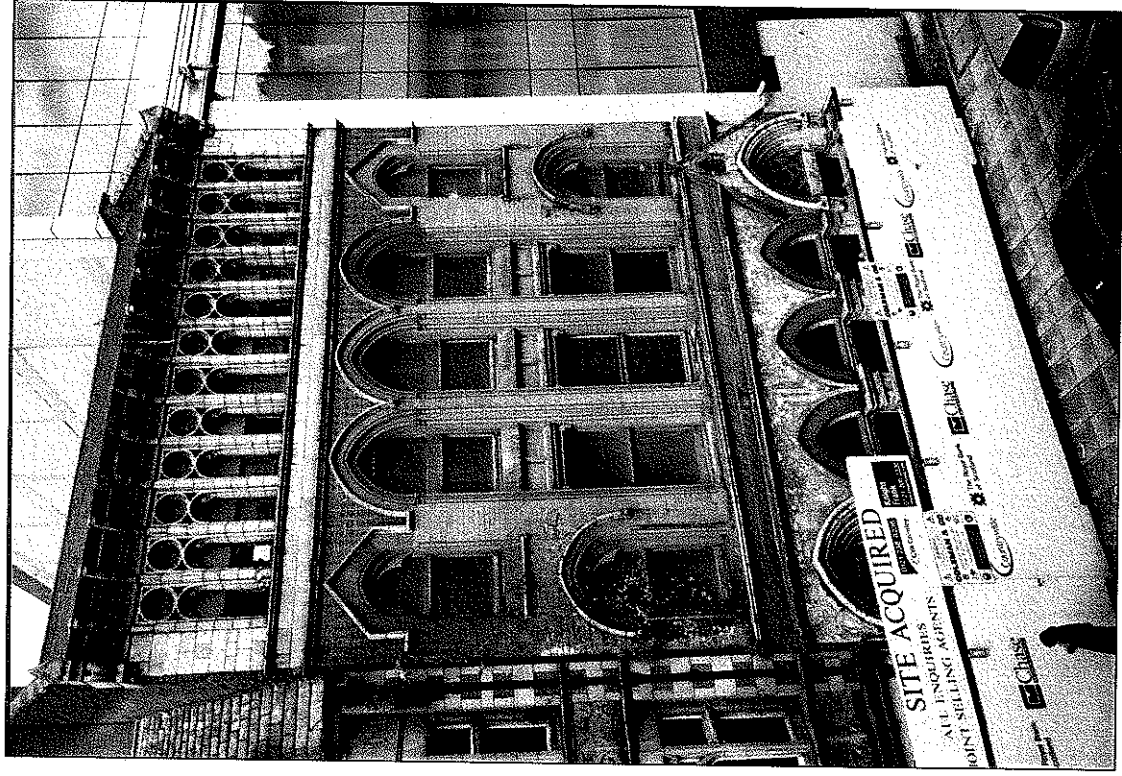


Plate 2

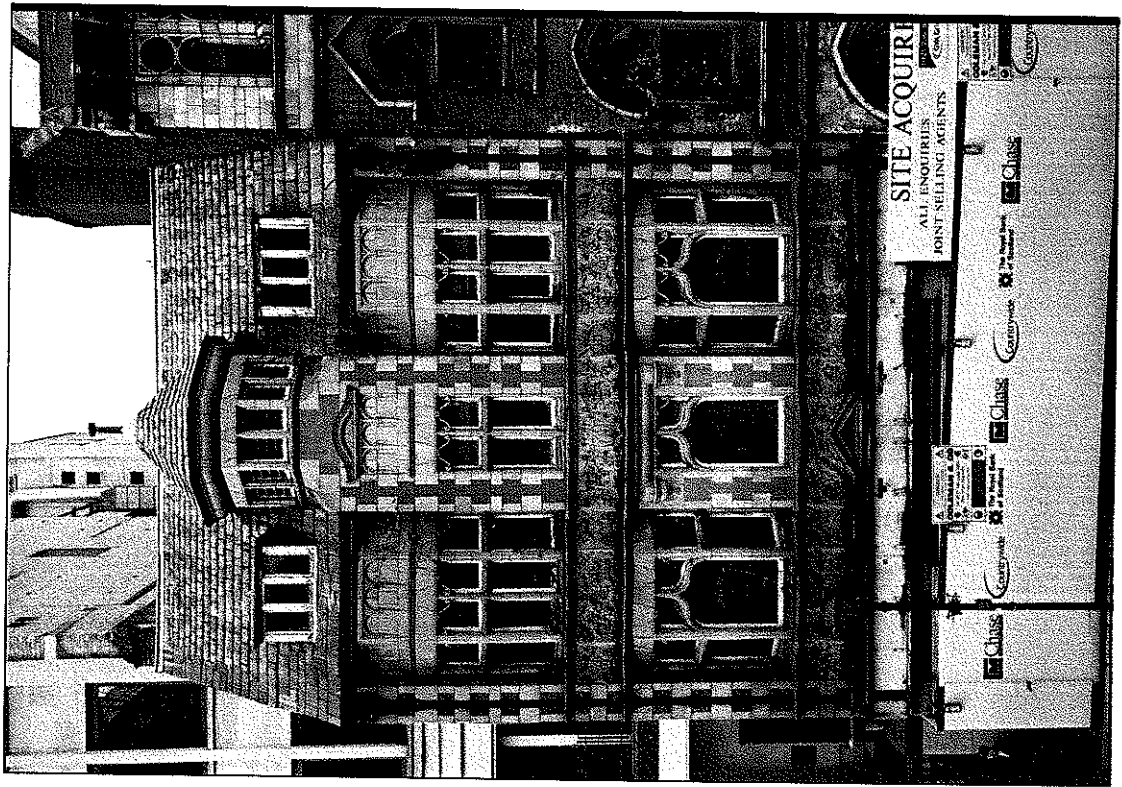


Plate 1

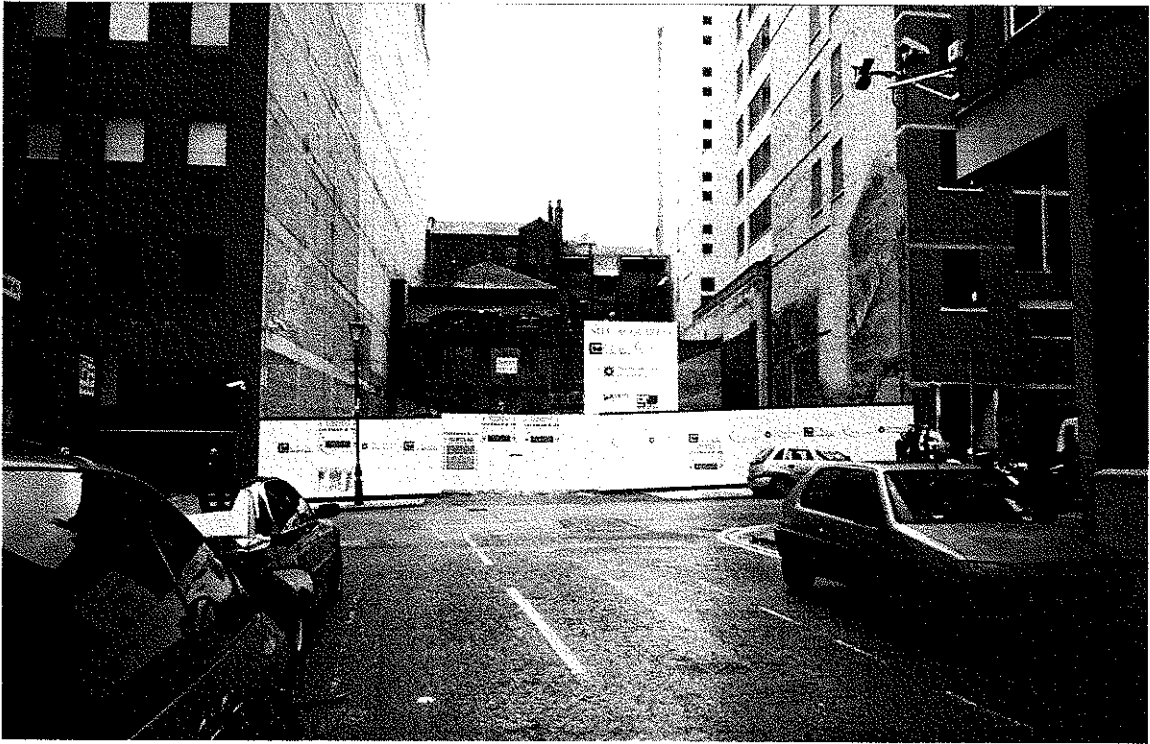


Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5

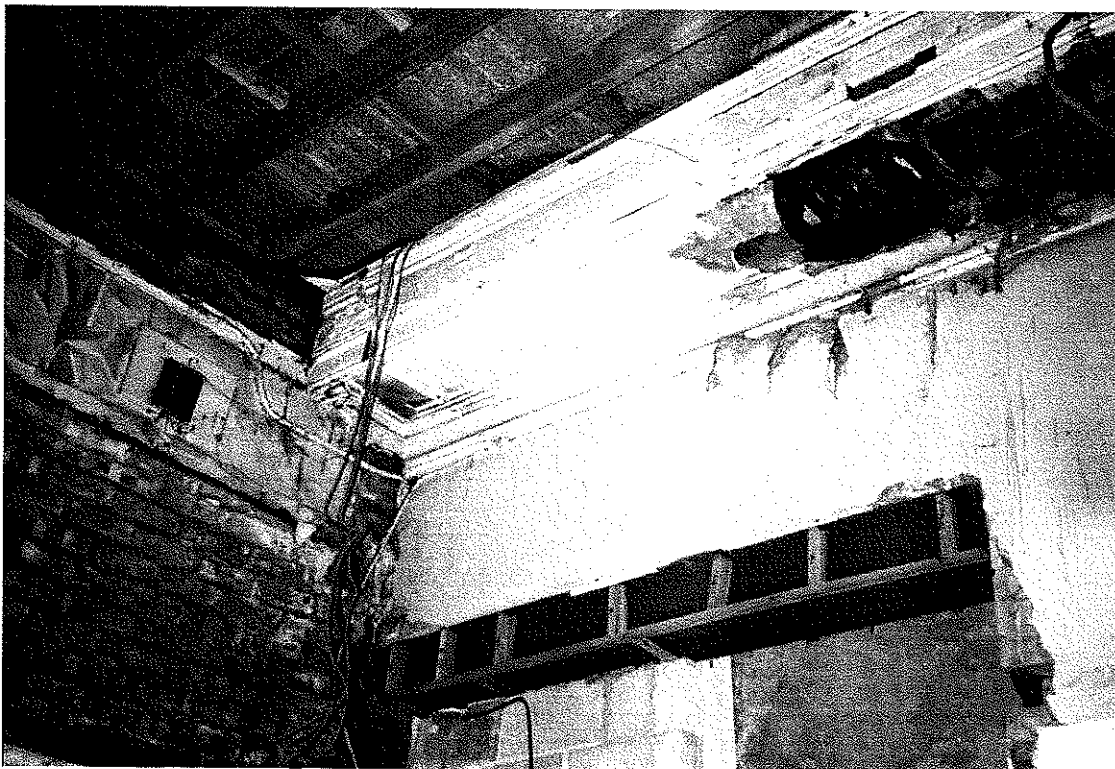


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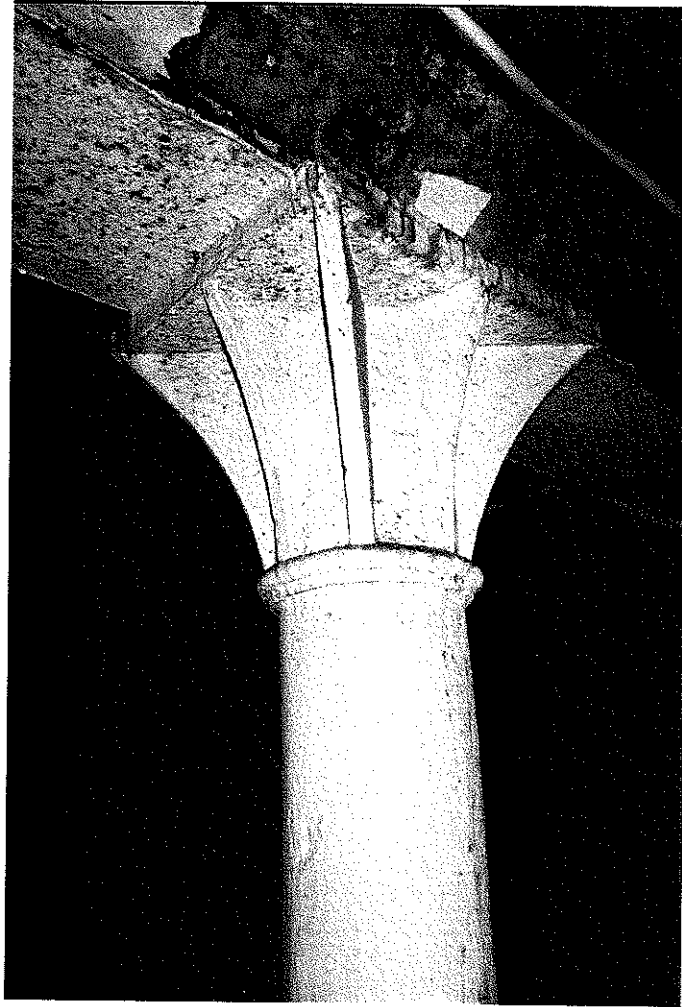


Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9

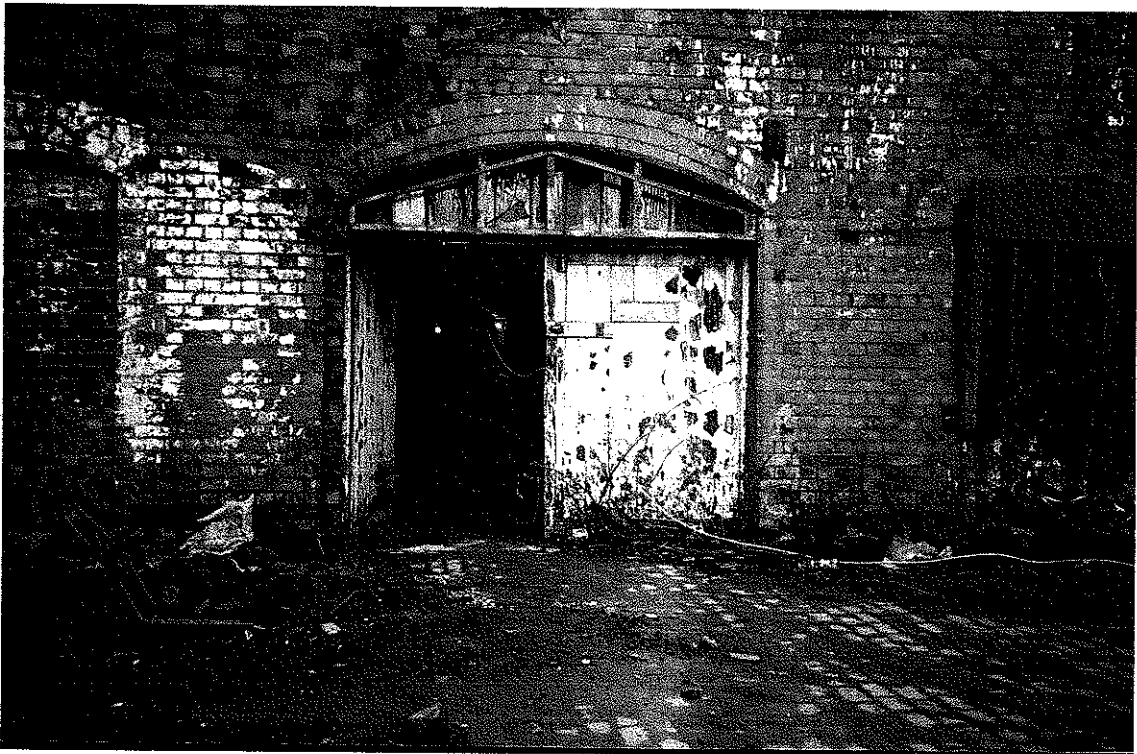


Plate 10

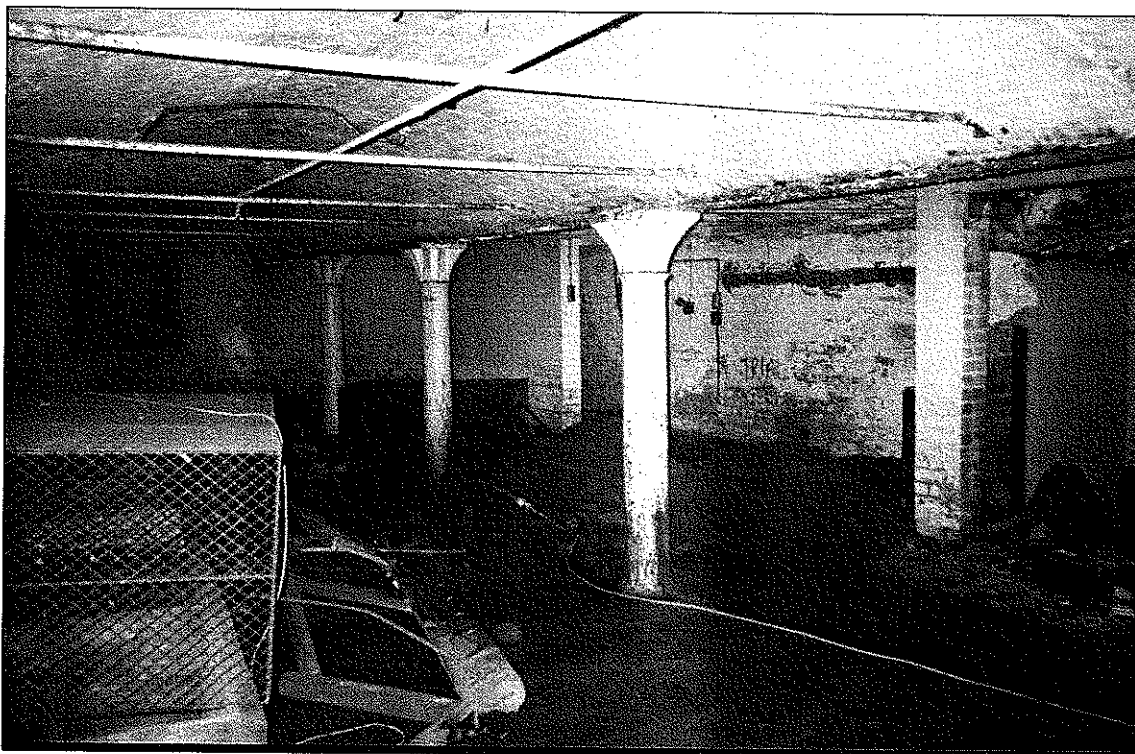


Plate 11



Plate 12



Plate 13

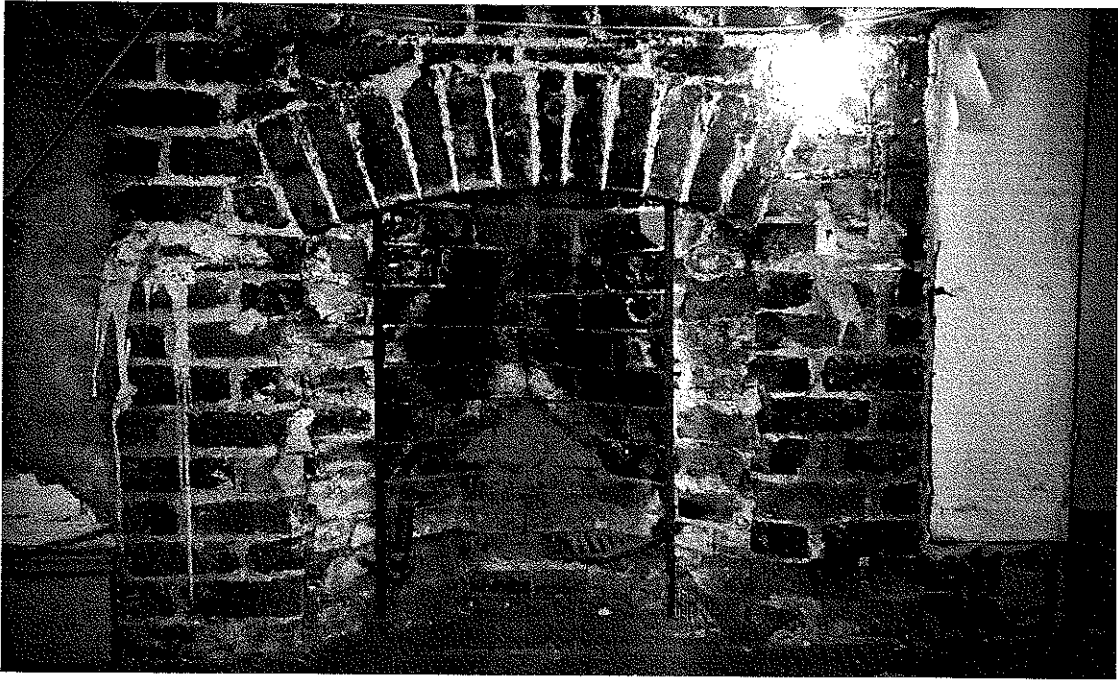


Plate 14

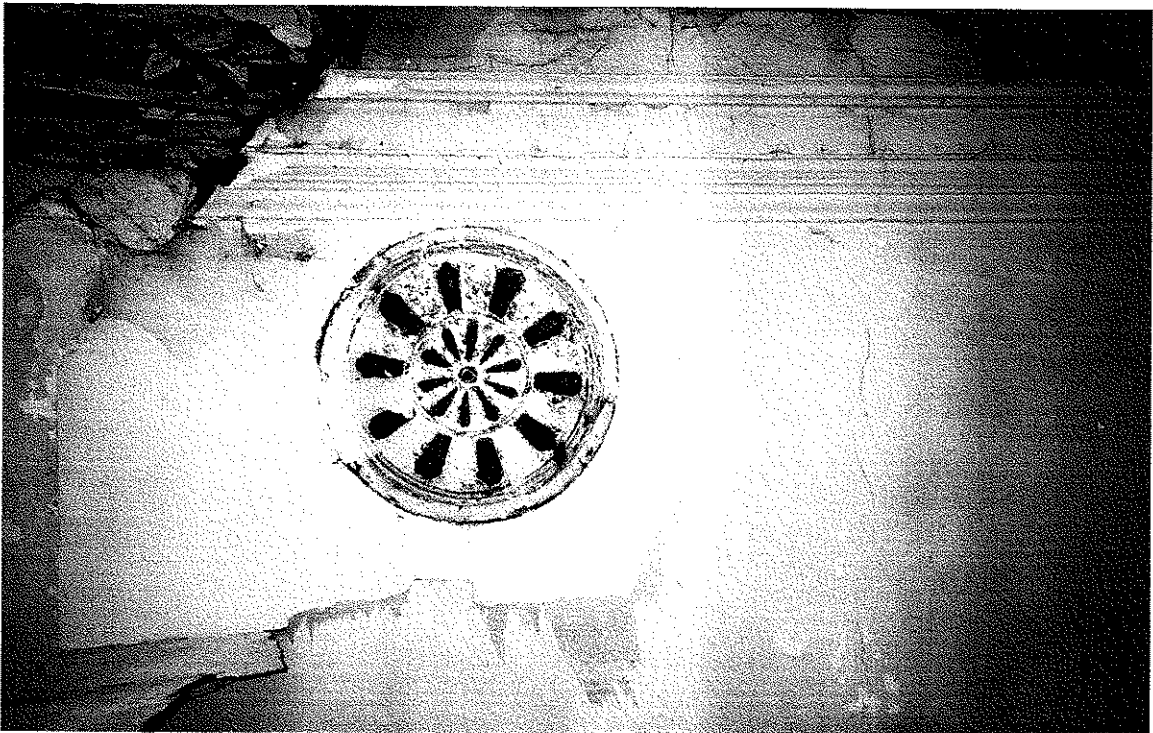


Plate 15

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