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**New Union Mill, Grosvenor Street West, Birmingham
Historic Building Recording and Fabric Analysis 2005**

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Summary

Building recording and fabric analysis was undertaken at New Union Mill, Grosvenor Street West, Birmingham. The New Union Mill was built c. 1813, and the buildings were arranged around three sides of a quadrangular courtyard next to the canal. Much of the complex including the mill itself has been demolished, and the surviving structure, which was the focus of the recording exercise, comprises the SE range and part of the SW range. The SE range contained the main carriage entrance from Grosvenor Street West, and was largely given over to offices, though the NE end may have accommodated manufacturing or warehousing operations. The SW range appears to have contained domestic accommodation. The symmetrical SE front towards the street is a façade that does not reflect the internal layout, and was evidently intended to present an attractive public face. There has been a good deal of alteration, including the replacement of most of the windows with replicas, the reconstruction of large areas of brickwork to the rear of the SE range, and the disappearance of many internal features, such as fireplaces, doors and skirting boards. However, it is the early 19th-century character that prevails, and the building remains a significant piece of early industrial architecture.

1.0 Introduction

In June 2005 Birmingham Archaeology undertook building recording and fabric analysis of the surviving wing of the New Union Mill, a grade II listed building dating from c. 1813. Owing to the granting of planning permission for refurbishment of the listed building, conversion to residential use, and for the construction of two new rear wings, the archaeological work was necessary to ensure that the architectural or historic interest of the building was preserved. The project was carried out according to a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology, which was itself based on a brief issued by Birmingham City Council. The archaeological work also adhered to the *Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999) and *Recording Historic Buildings: A Descriptive Specification* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1996).

2.0 Site Location (Figs 1 and 2)

The New Union Mill building is situated on the northwest side of Grosvenor Street West, Birmingham (NGR SP 0579 8650), facing the street.

3.0 Objectives

To obtain an analytical archaeological record of the building in order to identify architecturally or historically significant features and details.

4.0 Methods

Written Record

An analytical written record was compiled in the field on *pro forma* building and room record sheets.

Photographic Record

Photography was by 35mm camera using black and white and colour print film.

Measured Survey

The measured survey was compiled at a scale of 1:50 using architectural drawings as a basis from which to produce phased drawings including elevations floor plans and cross-sections.

5.0 Historical Background

The subject of the current survey once formed the entrance block to the now demolished New Union Mill industrial complex, which lay to the northwest, adjacent to the Birmingham-Fazeley Canal. An archaeological assessment of this block of land was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (now Birmingham Archaeology) in 2003 (Litherland and Nichol 2003). This assessment summarised the documentary evidence for the development of the mill.

The New Union Mill was established in 1813 by the Birmingham Flour and Bread Company, a charitable venture intended to supply cheap, good quality bread to the working classes (Litherland and Nichol 2003, 2). The earliest depiction of the mill is on a map of 1824-5, where a roughly rectangular complex is shown to be grouped around a quadrangle, the northern angle of the arrangement being hard up against the loop of the Birmingham-Fazeley Canal formed by the driving through of a more direct line (Litherland and Nichol 2003, 3).

Piggot Smith's Board of Health map of c. 1855 shows the site in more detail (Fig.3). The mill itself lay on the NW side of the courtyard, there was a narrow range on the SW side and a wider range on the NE side. The SE range, which still exists, fronted the street; to the NE of the carriage entrance a small wing or enclosure projected from the NW side.

The mill complex remained in operation until 1927; subsequently the mill itself, the NE range and the greater part of the SW range were demolished. The remaining ancillary buildings were converted into small-scale workshops (Litherland and Nichol 2003, 5). During the late 20th-century, a new block of buildings was erected on the site of the NE range, and the SE range and remaining (SE) portion of the SW range underwent a programme of refurbishment.

6.0 Building Description (Figs 4-10)

Exterior

SE Elevation (Fig. 6, Plate 1)

The existing building dates from *circa* 1813. It is constructed in red brick laid in Flemish bond, and has a hipped slate roof with oversailing eaves. The principal range is aligned NE-SW facing SE, and the SW range NW-SE facing NE towards the courtyard. It is a two-storey structure, the 11-bay front (SE) elevation being articulated by a central pedimented entrance bay, breaking forward from the main line of the elevation (Plate 2). A segmental-arched carriage entrance occupies the ground storey of the central bay. All other openings on this front are 16-pane glazing bar sash windows with horns, painted stone sills, shallow segmental arches and brick wedge lintels (Plate 3). The principal alterations to this front are the 20th-century reconstructions of the arches over the main entrance and one of the ground floor windows (Fig. 6)

NW Elevation (Fig. 7, Plate 4)

Whereas the front (SE) elevation displays a high degree of symmetry, the rear (NW) elevation is rather more irregular, and reproduces more faithfully the internal layout. To the right (SW) of the carriage entrance is a 2-storey canted bay window with hipped roof, and, immediately right (SW) of the bay, an early 19th-century 6-panelled door with plain fanlight, and panelled and pilastered doorcase with open-base pediment (Plate 5). To the right of this doorway is a 20th-century doorway, probably a conversion of a window, of which the segmental arch survives. To the left of the carriageway is a series of three 20th-century entrances with double doors, all of which have resulted in some reconstruction of the brickwork. The left-hand (NE) and centre ones are insertions, but the right-hand (SW) one may occupy the site of an original opening. To the right of the left hand (NE) doorway is a 20th-century 6-pane sash window, which partially occupies a blocked doorway. Between the centre and right-hand doorways are a vertical line of stitching between the brickwork (NE), and a vertical wall scar (SW), above which, at first floor level, a large area of the wall has been rebuilt. There is another area of rebuilding at this level over the gateway.

NE Elevation (Fig. 8)

At the left-hand (SE) end of this elevation, attached to the SE range, is a 2-storey, 2-bay house front. To the left (SE) is a 6-panelled door with plain fanlight and pilastered and pedimented doorcase. To the right (NW) is a 20th-century french window with segmental arch, possibly original. At first-floor level is a pair of 16-pane sash windows with painted stone sills and segmental arches. The eaves are decorated with a brick dentilled band. Attached to the right-hand (NW) side of this structure is an early 20th-century single-storey brick structure with flat roof, not of special interest. A recessed porch and window have concrete lintels. Behind this, and extending the full length of the site is a brick-built boundary wall, which incorporates a series of pilaster buttresses (Plate 6).

Interior (Figs 4 and 5)

G1

Gate passage. Irregular cobbled carriageway, probably early 19th century, with late 20th century concrete pavements to each side (Plate 7). Two inserted openings in the SW wall:

G2

20th-century concrete floor. Late 20th-century skirting boards. Doorway to G3 in the S corner with 20th-century surround. 20th-century double door from G1 in NE wall. Chimney breast in the centre of the SW wall. Bay window in NW wall with early 19th-century sashes. Sash window in SE wall. In the E corner a 20th-century gas meter cupboard accessible only from the gate passage (G1). The ceiling is supported on boxed RSJs.

G3

Hall and staircase. 20th-century concrete floor probably overlying 19th-century quarry tiles, which survive in the cupboard under the stairs. Late 20th-century skirting boards except for the staircase itself, which retains its original boards with simple beaded design (Plate 8). 19th-century panelled staircase with carved tread ends to the bottom two steps, but the rest of the string has been modified or covered over, and the balustrade boxed in. A pendant is visible at ceiling level.

G4

Reception room. 20th-century concrete floor. Late 20th-century skirting boards. Chimney breast in NW wall. Two sash windows in the SE wall, the one to the SW partially covered by the SW wall. Inserted 20th-century opening in SW wall through to G5, also in this wall a doorway with late 20th century architrave and door through to G6. 20th-century double door in NW wall from the courtyard. 20th-century ceiling of artexed plasterboard.

G5

Reception room. 20th-century concrete floor. Late 20th-century skirting boards. Chimney breast on SW wall. In the SW wall a sash window and the edge of a second window, which is partly covered by the NE wall. Late 20th-century opening in NE wall and doorway with late 20th-century architrave and door in NE wall. Artexed plasterboard ceiling.

G6 & G7

A pair of small featureless rooms, possibly part of G8 originally, but now partitioned from it. 20th-century concrete floor. 20th-century skirting boards. The partition wall between G6 and G7 may also be a later insertion. Doorways with late 20th-century

architraves in the NE and SE walls of G6. Sash window in the NE wall. Late 20th-century chipboard ceiling onto wooden joists.

G8

Hall and staircase. 20th-century concrete floor with plywood over. Late 20th-century skirting boards. Late 20th-century dog-leg staircase but in the position of the original stair judging from the original skirting board, which survives, although some has been replaced with boarding of a different design (Plate 9). Other elements of the 19th-century staircase that remain are a newel post at the turn (Plate 10), and some panelling in a cupboard under the stairs (Plate 11). This cupboard under the stairs appears to have been the access to a now filled in cellar; the segmental arch of the entrance can be seen in the SE wall. Late 20th-century plasterboard ceiling over G8 fixed to wooden joists.

G9

Reception room. 20th-century concrete floor. Late 20th-century skirting, plasterboarded walls. Door to G8 in the SE wall with late 20th-century architrave. 20th-century french windows in the NE wall. No chimneybreast, but the NW wall is of unusual thickness and probably incorporates a flue. Suspended late 20th-century ceiling c. 1m below 20th-century wooden joists.

G10

20th-century sealed concrete floor. Painted brick wall to SE, otherwise the walls are plastered. The room has been divided by late 20th-century partitioning to form a passage on the NW side. Two sash windows in the SE wall, the SW one has a 20th-century brick frame built around it to support one of two boxed RSJs, which support the upper floor. A straight staircase in the N corner, which leads to the first floor (F9) is probably early 20th century.

G11

20th-century sealed concrete floor. Painted brick walls, the SW wall clad in 20th-century plasterboard. 20th-century large double-door entry in NW wall with concrete lintel leading from the courtyard. Two sash windows in SE wall partially obscured by low ceiling. Large inserted entrance in SW wall to G10. Large opening in NE wall to G12, possibly inserted, but, if so, the structural evidence has been obscured. The ceiling, which is plasterboarded, is carried on a boxed (20th-century) early 19th-century chamfered spine beam strengthened by an RSJ.

G12

20th-century sealed concrete floor. Painted brick walls, except the NE, which is plasterboarded. Sash window in SE wall partly obscured by low ceiling. Inserted 20th-century two-leaf door in NW wall adjacent to a sash window converted from a doorway;

continuous 20th-century concrete lintel over both. Boxed (20th-century) early 19th-century chamfered spine beam.

F1

Now divided into several rooms with 20th-century partitioning. 20th-century wooden board floor. 20th-century skirting boards and plastered walls. Chimney breast on NE wall. Sash windows to SE and NW. Reset 19th-century door in one of the 20th-century partition walls. 20th-century plasterboarded ceiling.

F2

(?) Boardroom. Now divided by 20th-century partitioning. Floor largely 20th-century boards. Mainly 19th-century skirting with beaded partitioning, some of which is reset onto one of the partition walls. Sash window in SE wall. Canted bay window with sashes in NW wall. Reset 19th-century/early 20th-century doorway in partition wall with moulded architrave and 4-panel door. Blocked doorway at SE end of NE wall, and larger blocked opening in the centre. Plastered ceiling.

F3

Landing, now divided by 20th-century partitioning. Floor of 20th-century boards. 20th-century skirting boards, except the stair (SW) and the SE wall, which is original. Sash window in SE wall partially obscured by NE wall. All doorways are 20th century in date. At the NW end of the NE wall is an early 20th-century water closet with cast iron cistern (chain replaced) embossed with the legend 'EDWARDIAN/A.PEERS & CO. LTD/SANITARY ENGINEERS/WHEELLEYS ROAD, BIRMINGHAM' (Plate 12). Late 20th-century artexed plasterboard ceiling.

F4

Office. Now divided by 20th-century partitioning. Floor of 20th-century wooden boards. 20th-century skirting boards throughout. 20th-century door in SW wall. Chimney breast on NE wall. One sash window and small 20th-century lavatory window in NW wall. 20th-century door and architrave in NE wall from F3. Late 20th-century artexed plasterboard ceiling.

F5

Situated at the SW end of the main (SE) range, this room is now divided into a room (SW) and corridor (NE) by a late 20th-century partition. 20th-century floorboards and skirting boards. Plastered walls, chimneybreast to the SW, sash window to the SE, doorway with 20th-century architrave to the NW (to F6).

F6

Staircase landing, now divided by late 20th-century partitions. Late 20th-century staircase, balustrade. Boarded floor covered in plywood. Late 20th-century skirting boards. Sash window with moulded surround to the NE, directly opposite the staircase. Doorway to the NW with 19th-century moulded architrave and 20th-century half-glazed door. Late 20th-century plasterboard ceiling.

F7

Bedroom at the NW end of the SW wing. Floor of wooden boards, some 19th century, but mostly 20th-century replacements. Late 20th-century skirting boards. Chimneybreast to the NW; sash window with moulded surround to the NE; two fragments of a low picture rail to the SW, probably 20th-century. Plastered and artexed ceiling.

F8

Immediately NE of F1, this room has been divided by a late 20th-century partition. It is floored with wooden boards of different dates, but mostly 20th century. Steps coming up from the NE protrude into the N corner and are screened by late 20th-century partitions. 19th-century skirting with single bead moulding to the NW and against the 20th-century partition, more elaborately moulded skirting to the NE, SE and SW walls and against the stair partition. None of this looks entirely convincing in its present position, and it may all be reset. Two sashes both to NW and SE. No original doorways. Boxed transverse beam across the centre of the room. 20th-century plasterboard ceiling.

F9

Situated at the NE end of the main range, F9 is at a lower level than the rest of the rest of the range (Plate 13). It is now divided by late 20th-century partitioning. The floor is covered in plywood but there appear to be 19th-century boards beneath. 20th-century skirting boards throughout. Painted brick walls. Narrow chimneybreast in the NE wall, but no fireplace, Three sash windows high up in the SE wall, and three at normal height in the NW wall.

7.0 Interpretation and Significance

Interpretation

In essence, the existing L-shaped block fronting Grosvenor Street West is part of the New Union Mill erected c.1813. Nevertheless, there have been substantial alterations, not least the rebuilding of large areas of brickwork to the rear (NW), the replacement of most of the internal fittings, windows, and much of the flooring, and the partitioning of rooms, though the latter does not seem to have done any structural damage. However, in spite of these alterations, the general purport of the plan can be made out, and several of the rooms identified.

It is clear that the front elevation of the main range was intended as a prestigious advertisement for the company, and that considerable trouble was taken to achieve symmetry, to the extent that the front is in fact a façade that doesn't reflect the internal plan. This is clear from the two transverse walls that encroach on the SE windows in rooms G3, G4, F3 and F4, from the SE windows, which are placed high up above the floor level of F9, from the low ceilings in G11 and G12, which cut across the SE windows, and from the fact that the rear (NW) elevation is more irregular and better reflects the disposition of the interior.

Only at the SW end of the range does the front (SE) elevation display a slight anomaly, that is to say, where the sill of the end ground-floor window is slightly higher than all the others. This does seem to be a reflection of function, and appears to relate to the fact that the SW bay of the main range was part of a three-cell house that also occupied the SW wing. This comprised, at ground level, a central entrance hall and staircase (G8), reception rooms to the NW (G9) and SE (G5) ends, and a lobby (G6/7) between the hall, the main range (G4), and the SE reception room (G5). At first floor level were a staircase landing (F6), from which there may have been access to the main range (F4) and bedrooms to the NW (F7) and SE (F5).

In the main (SE) range there seems to be a definite difference in function between the rooms at the SW end and those at the NE end. The former, including F1 over the central gate passage, were evidently heated, whereas the latter were not. The former are likely to have been offices, with the board room and manager's office and clerks' room perhaps being accommodated in F1, F2 and F4. The NE rooms almost certainly had a different kind of function, and were probably given over to warehousing like the formerly adjacent, but now demolished NE range.

Significance

The significant aspects of the building are mostly those that belong to or evoke its earliest phase. The character of the exterior is dominated by the fenestration of small-pane sash windows. It is likely that most of these have been replaced, indeed the only original examples appear to be the three unhorned windows that occupy the ground storey of the canted bay on the NW front, and which light room G2. However, even if the sashes themselves have been replaced, elements of some of the surrounding frames are certainly original, notably the moulded architraves in the SW wing. Further, even though most of the existing sashes may not replicate their 19th-century predecessors exactly, nevertheless, they probably reflect the original fenestration pattern of the building fairly effectively, and make a major contribution to its historic character.

Internally, it is the surviving aspects of the original plan that form the interest of this structure. The 19th-century walls, the chimney breasts, which give clues to function, the structural anomalies that show the main elevation to have been a functionally unjustifiable contrivance, and the remaining 19th-century details that contribute to the

architectural personality of New Union Mill. In this last respect, specific features that contribute to the significance of the building are as follows:

G1

- Cobbled roadway through the gate passage

G3

- Staircase, including panelled sides, ceiling pendant, skirting board, and any other original elements that are hidden by later cladding.
- Door and surround to cupboard under the stairs
- Quarry tiles in cupboard under the stairs

G8

- Remnants of original stair including panelling in cupboard under the stairs, newel post at the turn of the stairs, and the skirting board.

G11

- Chamfered spine beam

G12

- Chamfered spine beam

F2

- 19th-century skirting

F3

- 19th-century skirting

F8

- 19th-century skirting

F9

- 19th-century floorboards

While industrial buildings from the mid and late 19th century are common, those from the early years of the century are much rarer. The early date of this structure, coupled with its reasonably high architectural quality, are the reasons for its grade II listed status. Although the mill itself has gone, the survival of the entrance block, the second most significant aspect of the complex, provides some compensation and has ensured that the integrity of the site, and the historic character of the area have in some measure survived. This is an important building for Birmingham's history and architecture, and for the industrial archaeology of the region.

8.0 Acknowledgements

The project was carried out for Birmingham Archaeology by Malcolm Hislop. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are owed to Richard Hudson for providing copies of historic maps and a copy of the *Birmingham Magazine* article.

9.0 References

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Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3

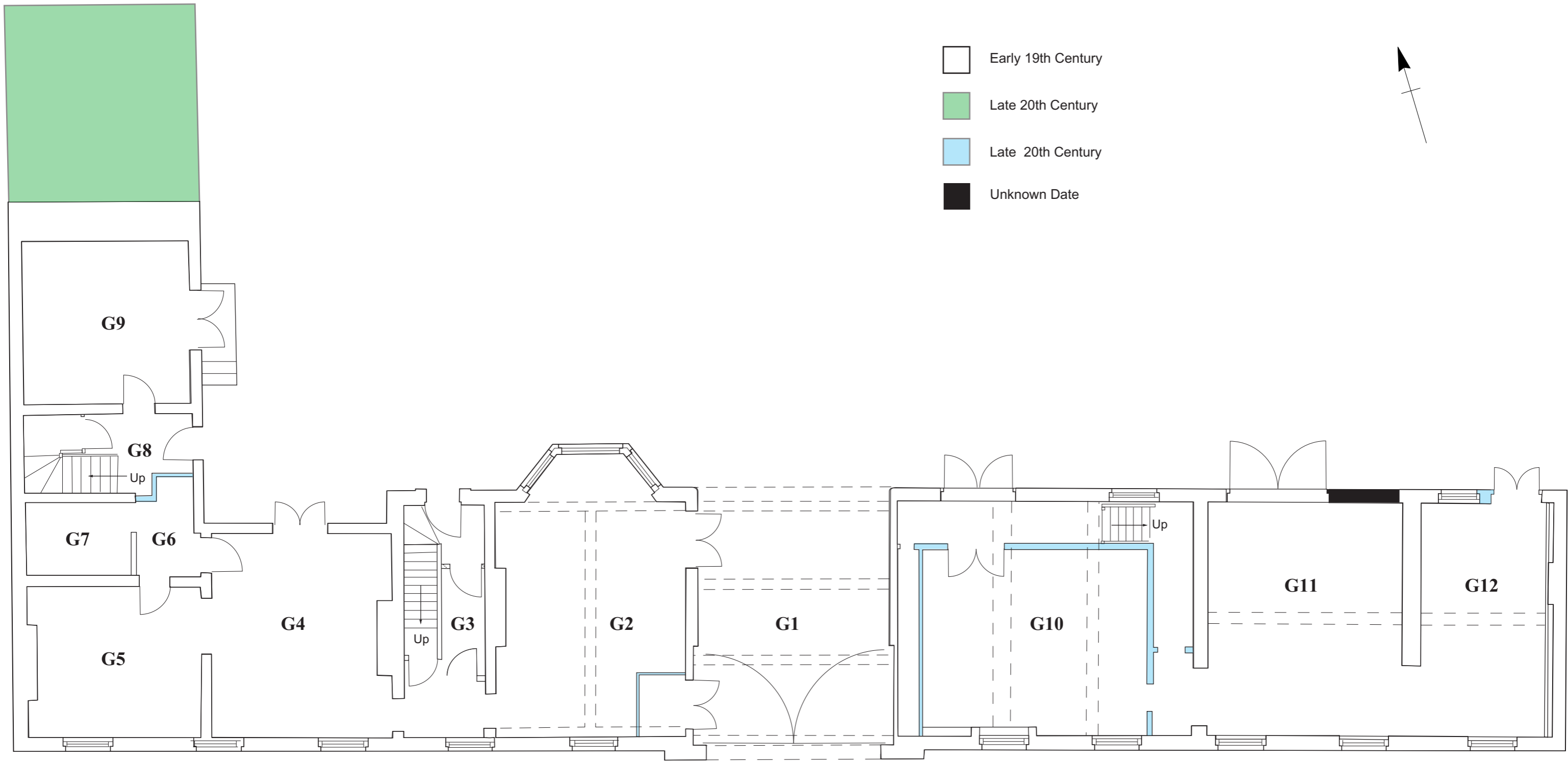


Fig.4 : Ground Floor Plan



Fig.5 : First Floor Plan

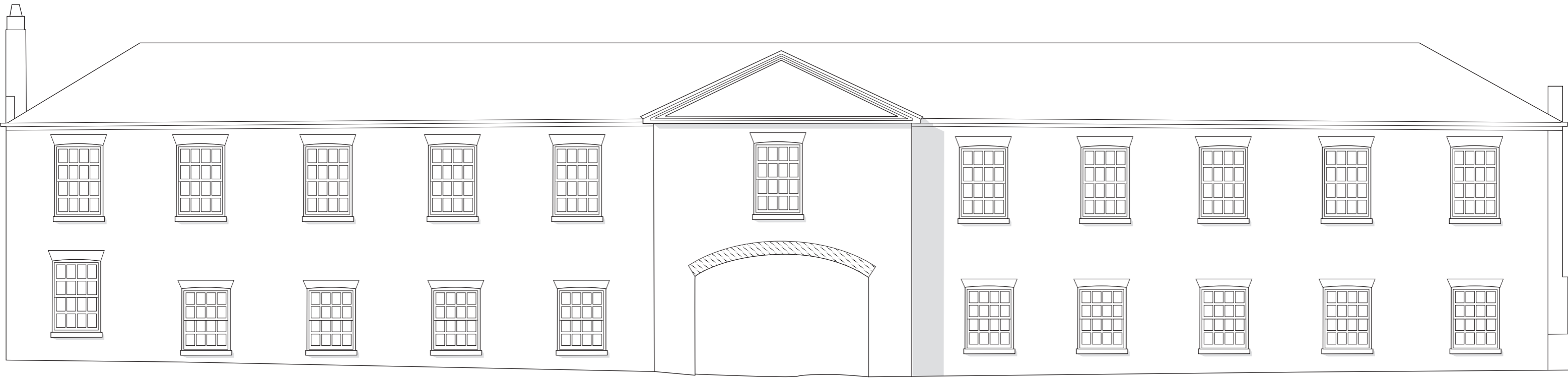
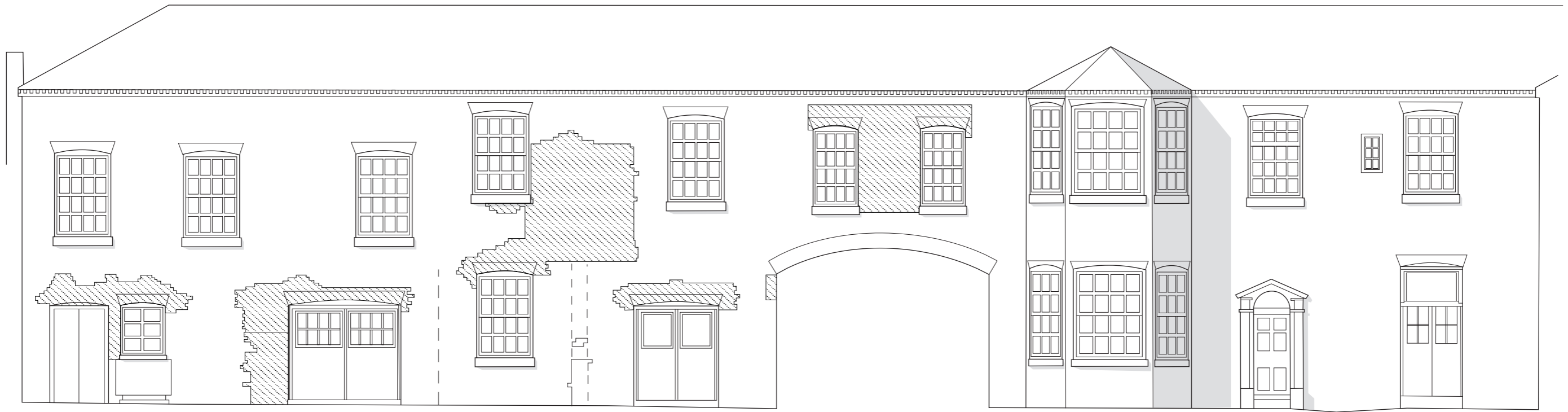


Fig. 6 : South Facing Elevation

 Rebuild



0 5m

Fig. 7 : Northwest Facing Elevation

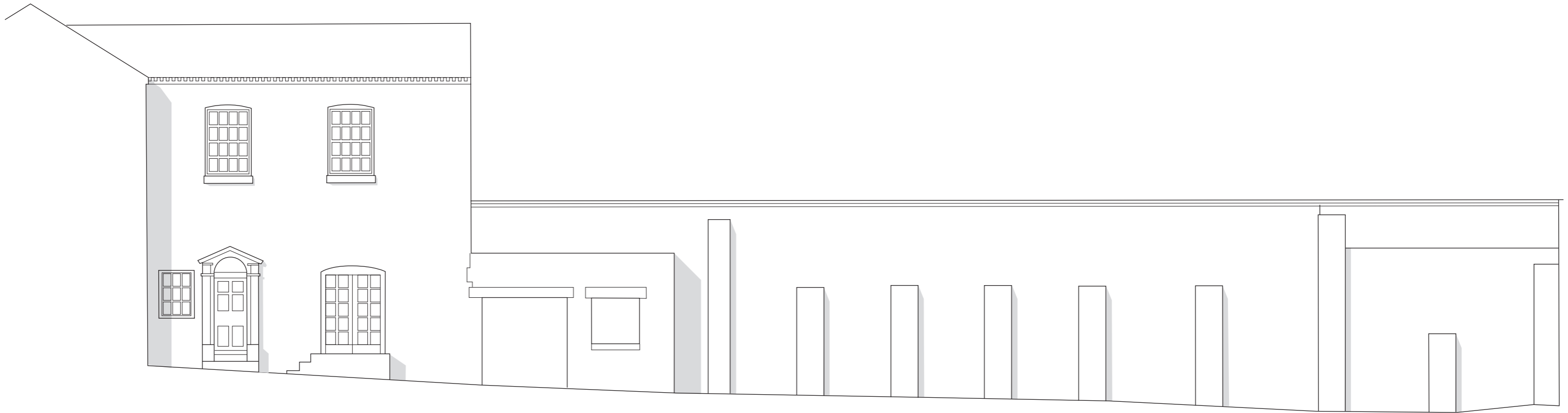


Fig. 8 : Northeast Facing Elevation



Fig. 9 : Section A



Fig. 10 : Section B

0 5m



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12

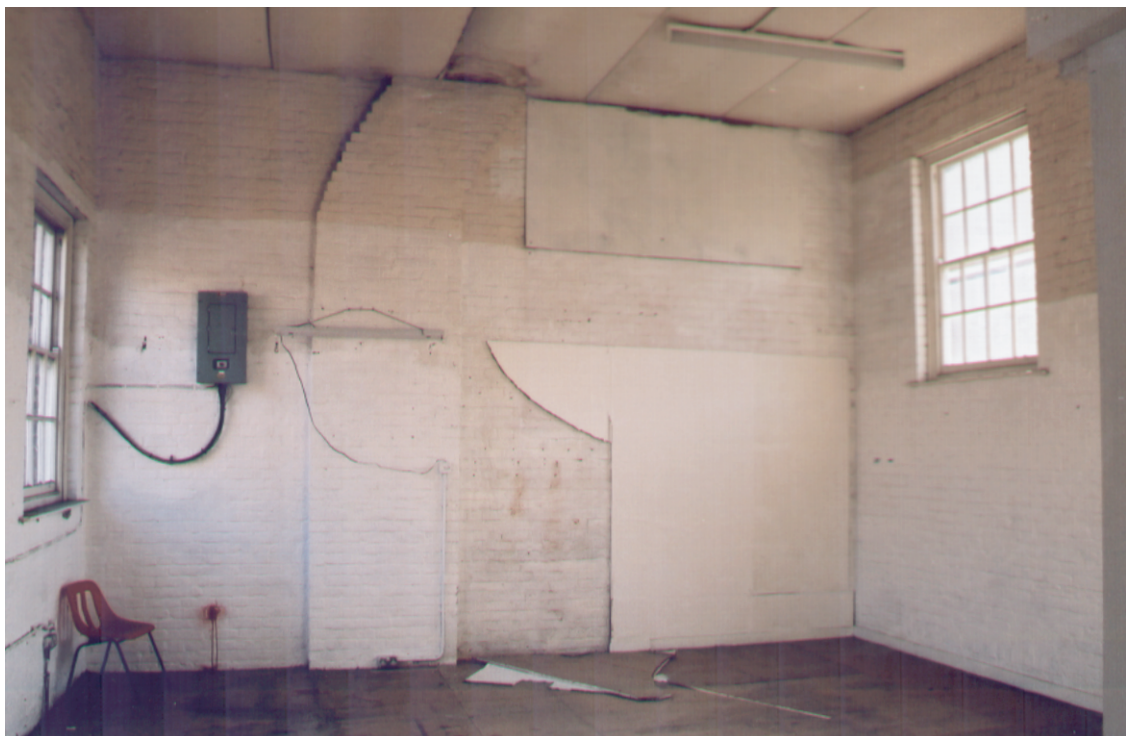


Plate 13