

# **Archaeological Building Recording**

**25 Kathleen Street**

**Hartlepool**



**TA09/10**

**OASIS ID: 72331**



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P. Rowe and K. Horsley

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*Tees Archaeology, Sir William Gray House, Clarence Road, Hartlepool, TS24 8BT  
Tel: 01429 523455 Fax: 01429 523477 email: [tees-archaeology@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:tees-archaeology@hartlepool.gov.uk)*



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## Archaeological Building Recording at 25 Kathleen Street, Hartlepool

Grid Ref NZ 5098 3110

Site Code HSG09

### 1. Summary

*The proposed demolition (H/2009/0490) and development of a range of post-World War II prefabricated, or BISF, buildings prompted the building recording of a sample unit of housing. Two members from Tees Archaeology carried out the survey during October 2009. Many buildings of similar type were quickly erected throughout the region during the years immediately after the war. Many of these structures have since been lost to development, and those in particular around the Belle Vue area are some of the last surviving in Hartlepool, and as such are archaeologically relevant.*

### 2. Introduction

2.1 On the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2009 Tees Archaeology undertook a photographic recording of a sample unit of housing in a small part of the Belle Vue area, Hartlepool, undergoing demolition. The survey was conducted by Peter Rowe and assisted by Kevin Horsley. Due to unforeseen circumstances the building recording only lasted half the day, during which time a full set of digital and black and white photographs of the interior and exterior were taken, with a brief written description of each room. The cameras used were a digital Pentax K200D DA 18-55mm lens, F3.5-5.6 AL II, captured as 10mp jpegs, and a Pentax M2M Sigma UC Zoom 28-70mm using 35mm black and white film.

2.2 The site code is Hartlepool Scawfell Grove 2009, the street name pertaining to the central road within the demolition zone.

2.3 Upon reaching the 'Demolition Zone' between the Belle Vue Way (A689) to the east and Patterdale Street to the west (See Figure 3 for map of demolition footprint); approximately half of the demolitions had taken place, and continued during the survey. For this reason and because of the severe dilapidation of the house surveyed, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including hard hats, safety boots and high visibility clothing were worn for the projects entirety.

### 3. Location and Historical Background

3.1 The Belle Vue area forms a suburb of what used to be known as West Hartlepool (Figure 2), and the Scawfell Grove development of houses was built upon a small field within a zone of early 20<sup>th</sup> century terrace houses. In the 1970s the A689 was constructed through Hartlepool, running just to the east of Scawfell Grove, and up towards the town centre. The semi-detached houses sparsely arranged in a cul-de-sac present a striking modern divergence of housing construction from the Victorian grid-lined terraces built fifty years earlier.

3.2 The houses themselves were sponsored by the British Iron and Steel Federation (BISF) on a design by architect Sir Frederick Gibberd, and produced by British Steel Homes, as a solution for permanent steel housing. Approximately 36,000 BISF were built in Britain after the designs were approved in 1944. Although similar to the Howard House, designed by Gibberd also, the BISF is unique with differing cladding to external upper and lower storeys. It is essentially a traditional-looking house constructed of mostly non-traditional elements, nevertheless proving the most popular prefabricated design in post-war Britain (Davies 2005, 64).

3.3 No definitive construction date is known, but upon comparison of post-war aerial photographs, they were certainly built between November 1946 (R.A.F. CPE/UK1835) and May 1948 (R.A.F. 541/23) (Plate 1).





*Plate 1 – Aerial photograph of Hartlepool, R.A.F. 541/23 No. 4011, taken on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1948. The prefab buildings (circled) are clearly visible in the centre of the photograph with their bright white roofs.*

3.4            Their first appearance on the 5<sup>th</sup> Edition OS map (1952) (Figure 1) shows how new the estate was, as it appears to be the only area of revision to the 1950s OS maps in that area of Hartlepool.

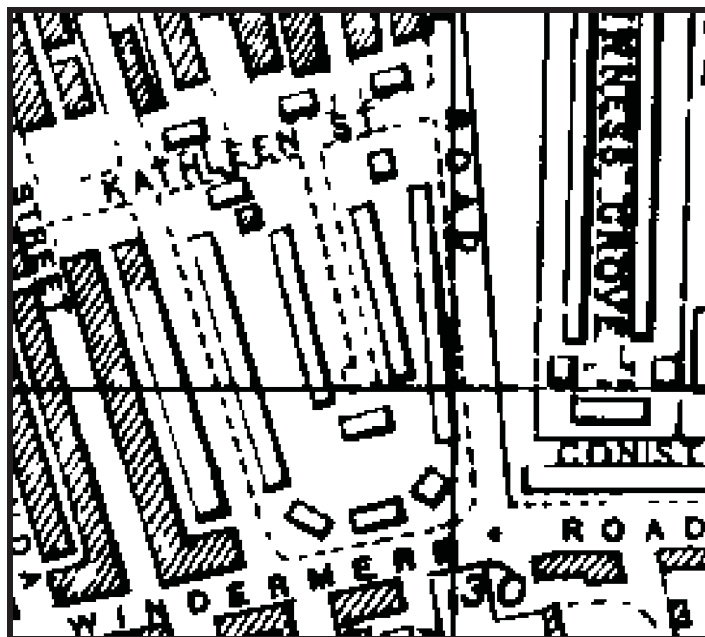


Figure 1 – Extract from 1952 5<sup>th</sup> Edition 10k National Grid OS Map, the earliest map showing all of the recently demolished area between Kathleen Street and Windermere Road.

3.5 According to Hartlepool Borough Electoral Registers between 1948 and 2009, there have only been two different families living in No. 25 Kathleen Street, with up to five members of the family living in the house at one time. For such a small prefabricated house this may indicate that the upstairs bathroom was a later addition into what may have been a fourth bedroom. Either this or the three rooms were shared. The downstairs toilet adjoining the kitchen would have been the original.

## 4. Description

4.1 The sample housing unit used in the survey was No. 25 Kathleen Street (Plate 2), which sat to the north of the demolition zone (since been demolished) on the corner of Kathleen Street and Kendal Road.

4.2 The zone featured 21 identical lots of two semi-detached prefabricated buildings, arranged in a 'U' shape comprising Patterdale Street, Windermere Road, Kendal Road and Scawfell Grove, with a further 5 lots along either side of Kathleen Street to the north. No. 10 & 12 Scawfell Grove had been demolished at an earlier stage, and No. 46 Kendal Road was a single detached unit. This description specifically details No. 25 Kathleen Street, but it is assumed that every structure was of similar construction with similar features.



*Plate 2 – No. 23 & 25 Kathleen Street (Photo no. 2)*

4.3 In context, the building was one of many BISF houses across Britain built in identical lots from mass produced sections that were created in factories and assembled quickly upon a simple over-site concrete ground floor slab. This method of construction allowed, what should have been temporary, housing for the homeless casualties of the war. Upon initial inspection, it was noted that damp had been spread throughout the house, making the first floor and staircase in particular dangerous to walk on. Many of the features discussed in the following description date from the original construction between 1946 and 1948, and as such, were in a state of disrepair.

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## **Exterior**

4.4 The **ground floor exterior** was clad in pebble-dashed render on metal lath, and the first floor exterior faced with corrugated metal, although the latter is a recent restoration of what may have been typically horizontal steel clad panels. The only element of the ground floor not to be pebble-dashed is a small section of white-painted wooden panelling beneath the living room window exterior. A single storey outhouse was attached to the east side of the house (Photo no. 5) comprising two doors and two small windows on the east face. The left hand entrance led into an external shed/outhouse, which was only accessible from the garden and was sealed up during this survey. The right hand entrance allowed access into the kitchen and a small downstairs toilet cubicle.

4.5 The **roof** was also corrugated metal, painted green, but is a recent update of the original roof, which was a lighter colour according to early aerial photographs (See plate 1), and may have been asbestos sheeting.

4.6 A **metal porch** (Photo no. 3 & 4) framed the front door with a projecting pitch and tubular supports, all of which had been painted white numerous times to cover the serious rusting of the metal. The supports and left-hand banister were embedded into a concrete plinth, an extension of the in-situ concrete foundations of the entire house, which stepped up to the front entrance. Terracotta tiles provided a decorative threshold.

4.7 Compared to the vast majority of properties in the area, almost all of which in the 40s were old Victorian terraced houses, the BISF properties had relatively large **gardens** associated with them. The surveyed house had gardens extending from the front to the east side of the building. A relatively new **garden wall** had been constructed around the properties on Kathleen Street, and in the case of No. 25 Kathleen Street, closing a former opening onto Kendal Road. The former path to this opening (Photo no. 7) still existed beneath dense foliage in the side garden. A green security fence had been installed during the occupation of the house into the brick wall surrounding the side garden.

## **Interior Ground Floor**

4.8 Upon entry into the house it was noted that almost all the interior features had been stripped for recycling before the survey began. The **entrance lobby** (Photo no. 8) contained the original wooden staircase (Photo no. 10) to the first floor which was fitted with a wooden-panelled banister running the length of the stairs. Beneath the staircase attached to the kitchen wall existed the meter box (Photo no. 9). The back wall of the meter box had been left unpainted showing the original wooden panelling used to construct all the internal walls of the house.

4.9 Many **internal features** had been removed for recycling prior to the

building survey. All skirting boards and carpet had been removed showing the cast concrete floors beneath, and all internal doors had also been removed from both floors, except for those leading in the outhouse and the upstairs cupboards.

4.10 The **front sitting room** (Photo no. 11 & 12), occupying the south side of the ground floor, contained a protruding brick chimney breast and fireplace which had been removed. To the left of the chimney breast an entrance originally lead into a back room – presumably used as a dining room. The ground floor chimney breast appeared to be the only feature of the house constructed of brick, which were frogged and stamped 'L.B.C.' or 'London Brick Company'.

4.11 The blocked double door between the front sitting room and the **back 'dining' room**, had been boarded up with chip-board, or some other similar material, probably not long after the house's first owners moved in, as many layers of wall paper had been pasted over it. The north face of this blocked opening (Photo no. 14) had not been manipulated; presumably a dresser or some other such large item of furniture had since covered it. Four wooden support beams had been nailed horizontally across the original door frame helping to support the thin 'improvised' wall. The permanent main entrance into this back room was via the kitchen.

4.12 The **kitchen** (Photo no. 15 & 16) had also been stripped of all its appliances, cupboards, benches and worktops, leaving only pipes to be removed at a later date. The floor had been tiled in a red and black 'chequerboard' style design. The kitchen had three doorways; one leading into the entrance lobby, one into the dining room, and another leading into an outhouse attached to the east side of the ground floor.

4.13 The floor tiles continued from the kitchen into the **outhouse** (Photo no. 17), whereupon a wooden 'farmhouse' door led out into the side garden. Another door to the left opened into a small downstairs toilet cubicle, and a small storage unit had been assembled within a small space to the right. These two wooden doors linked with the outhouse were still fitted during the survey and were determined to be original features.

### ***Interior First Floor***

4.14 The **staircase** in the entrance lobby led up to a small landing area (Photo no. 23 & 24), opening into a bathroom and three bedrooms; a small front box room, a front master bedroom and rear bedroom roughly in alignment with the front living room and rear 'dining' room. The staircase and the entire upstairs floor were constructed of wood beams and planks, and in areas were suffering from rot and water damage. The door frames into each room had small lights above the actual door, built into the frame. The glass in the box bedroom and bathroom door frames had been painted over.

4.15           The **front box bedroom** (Photo no. 18), probably last used as a small spare bedroom, had been made substantially smaller by a protruding box roof above the staircase.

4.16           The **front master bedroom** (Photo no. 19 & 20) contained two in-built cupboards into the north wall of the bedroom between the chimney and the west wall. These cupboards, approximately 2m high, stood within the wall with another cupboard opening into the rear bedroom between the two in the master bedroom. The plasterboard casement surrounding the chimney had been partly removed to reveal the metal chimney flue following up from the brick breast in the living room.

4.17           As mentioned in section 4.16, the **rear bedroom** (Photo no. 22) also contained a cupboard built into its south wall, also retaining its door.

4.18           Like the kitchen, the **bathroom** (Photo no. 21) on the first floor had been stripped of all its features, but contained the typical set of bathtub, sink and toilet. The hot water boiler had also been removed, and was installed above the toilet. Only piping remained within the fabric of the wall. The bathtub had been removed revealing the construction of the floor beneath. Timber boards had been fixed across timber joists running 90° to steel floor beams.



## 5. Conclusion

5.1 The survey on the BISF prefabricated house at 25 Kathleen Street prior to demolition serves to describe a relatively modern and seldom addressed architectural phase in post-war Britain. Built in the immediate years after World War 2, its construction highlights Britain's need for cheap and quickly erected housing using non-traditional methods. In the context of long lengths of cramped, brick-built, Victorian terraces making up the majority of West Hartlepool's housing estates, this spacious semi-detached cul-de-sac exemplifies Britain's post war rejuvenation and move towards modernization. This survey and report reflects the growing interest in recording these prefabricated buildings.

5.2 Points of interest found in the survey were the differing cladding to both upper and lower storeys; a unique, lightweight feature of BISF houses, and also some of the remaining features. These included the brick fireplace incorporated as a central element to the steel frame-work and stock features such as the wooden staircase and metal porch as original elements incorporated into Gibberd's technically efficient design. A conventional aesthetic look was achieved by using simple techniques and affordable materials.

5.3 This building survey could have been improved if carried out before the building was stripped of its features in preparation for demolition, and the survey was further hampered by the condition of the building. Its severe dilapidation was undoubtedly due to its prolonged existence despite essentially being a temporary structure. Despite this, the survey has attained a good basis for future surveying of prefabricated structures.

5.4 The building recording and photographic archive are held by Tees Archaeology.

## 6. Sources

Davies, C. 2005. *The Prefabricated Home*. University of Chicago Press.

Hartlepool Borough Electoral Registers 1947 - 2009

[www.foursteelwalls.co.uk](http://www.foursteelwalls.co.uk)



## Appendix 1 – Photographic Register

Shot #	Description	Facing	Scale
1	25 Kathleen Street, front exterior	N	2 x 2m
2	23 & 25 Kathleen Street, front exteriors	NW	“
3	25 Kathleen Street front porch detail	N	2m+1m
4	“ “ “ front porch detail	W	“
5	“ “ “ east face exterior	W	2 x 2m
6	“ “ “ rear face exterior	SW	“
7	Former path from outhouse to Kendal Road	W	2m+1m
8	Entrance lobby	N	“
9	Detail of meter cupboard	N	2 x 1m
10	Detail of stair banister	E	1m
11	Ground floor living room including chimney	NW	2 x 1m
12	“ “ “ “ “ south window	S	2 x 2m
13	Ground floor back room	E	“
14	Back room including blocked door to living room	S	“
15	Kitchen door to outhouse	E	2m+1m
16	Kitchen window	N	“
17	Outhouse including door to ground floor toilet	E	“
18	First floor front box bedroom	S	2 x 2m
19	“ “ master bedroom inc. built-in cupboards	N	“
20	“ “ master bedroom inc. built-in cupboards open	N	“
21	“ “ bathroom	N	“
22	“ “ rear bedroom with built-in cupboard	S	“
23	“ “ landing and stairs	S	2m+1m
24	Landing to front bedrooms	S	“



## **Appendix 2 – Photographic Contact Sheet**



## **Appendix 3 - Maps**