

29 Church Street
Ribchester, Lancashire:
Historic Building Assessment



October 2009

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Photographs

SUMMARY

No. 29 Church Street forms one of a pair of adjoining houses built in 1745 in the centre of Ribchester, and contains much good, original joinery, as well as a largely unaltered frontage, and is listed (grade 2). This report provides some historical background information and an assessment of the building's development, character and features, intended to inform proposals for alterations and refurbishment to be drawn up by IWA Architects, at the request of the present owner, Mr Russell Milnes.

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29 CHURCH STREET, RIBCHESTER, LANCASHIRE: HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an historic building assessment at 29 Church Street, Ribchester, in Lancashire. The work was commissioned by the owner Mr Russell Milnes via his architects IWA Architects Ltd, to assist with the preparation of a scheme for alterations and extension to the house, which is listed (grade 2) and lies within the Ribchester conservation area.
- 1.2 The property forms part of a town house or pair of houses, dated 1745, of which the south part (no 28) is now separately owned. It is a building of some quality which is reputed to have served as a public house at some time although it is thought not to have been built for this purpose.

2 Location of the site

- 2.1 Church Street forms one of the principal roads within the village of Ribchester, which lies on the north bank of the River Ribble, mid-way between Preston and Clitheroe, within Ribble Valley Borough (Figure 1). The street leads towards Longridge, and No 29 stands its west side, near the north end of the historic core (NGR: SD 649354). To the rear of the house is a large garden or croft, on which stand various outbuildings or their remains, including a two storey stone barn or stable, and the remains of other, minor historic structures. Two later cottages on the north side of the house, Nos 30 and 31, were until recently in the same ownership, but are not included in this study (Figure 2).

3 Background to and aims of the study

- 3.1 The brief for this work was provided by IWA Architects. Its purpose is to inform on the priorities for conservation of existing fabric at the property, and also to identify areas might be considered less important or even detrimental to the character of the house, and so might be removed or replaced, in order to improve the historic and architectural qualities of the building.

4 Historical background

- 4.1 Ribchester's origins lie in the Roman period when there was a fort and a sizeable civilian settlement near a ford across the Ribble, but its status during the medieval and early post-medieval period was much reduced, when it comprised

only a small village, very rural in character and lacking a market. Commentators in the 16th and 17th centuries noted its poverty, although by 1700 flax spinning and weaving on a domestic scale were significant economic activities in the village, which otherwise was very much dominated by farming. From the mid 18th century an increasing number of inhabitants took up cotton weaving within their homes, bringing greater prosperity, and this trend continued into the mid 19th century, when the development of the power-loom led to cotton textile production moving out of the domestic environment and into factories, mostly in towns. Ribchester's location, away from principal communication routes, can be partly blamed for its failure to grow into an industrial town, and the village's population fell after around 1850, as hand-loom weaving rapidly declined.

- 4.2 In early post-medieval times the village centre appears to have been located towards the south end of the present Church Street, near its junction with Water Street, and the form of building plots suggests that the settlement was unplanned in the medieval period. There are a few dated 17th century houses in this area, but these streets are more generally dominated by late 18th and early 19th century houses, many of which were built or adapted to accommodate weaving.
- 4.3 Relatively little information has been found relating to 29 Church Street itself, during a rapid study of the readily available historical information. The house is dated to 1745 by the rainwater hoppers at each end of the front elevation (shared with no 28), which also bear the initials "EEI", an individual or couple whose identity has not so far been established. The numbering of houses along Church Street is clearly a relatively modern phenomenon, and the house is not documented as having borne any name, but there is a local tradition that it was once a public house known as the King's Arms¹. However only a single reference to a pub of that name has been found, in an 1880 document concerning the lease of a farm at Preston, which names a farmer called Richard Thomas Dewhurst, of the Old King's Arms, Ribchester². Accounts of the village's pubs and inns have not noted an establishment called the King's Arms³, and a directory of 1854 lists only the Black Bull, Red Lion, White Bull and White Cross in Ribchester⁴, so it was probably a minor beer-house rather than a more substantial enterprise, which was adapted to this purpose rather than built with that use in mind. Because the 19th century census returns for Church Street do not identify individual properties by name or number, this potential source of information does not bear fruit in this regard.

¹ Mr Milnes, the present owner, recalls this tradition

² LRO DDX 1368/8

³ Lancashire County Council and Egerton Lea Consultancy, 2006 *Ribchester: Historic Town Assessment Report*; The Conservation Studio, 2005 *Ribchester Conservation Area Appraisal*

⁴ Mannex & Co 1854 *History, Topography & Directory of Mid Lancashire* p370

Map evidence

- 4.4 The earliest map which shows the site is the tithe map of 1838, at an unusually large scale for this type of document⁵ (Figure 3). The house is numbered 88 on this map, the dotted line separating it from 87 suggesting a subdivision of a formerly single property. This map, along with later maps, appears to show that the main part of the surviving single storey back kitchen was extant by this time. As well as this, the house in 1838 had a building attached at the rear, no longer extant, which was possibly that demolished by Mr Milnes' father in around 1970: a photograph shows this as having been a two storey rubble structure, probably of early 19th century date, with a forking hole in its south-west gable (Figure 4). However, the tithe map may not be wholly accurate, so it is doubtful that this is a precise depiction of the building still standing in the 1960s. On the tithe map the croft to the rear is numbered 89, therefore associated with the present nos 30 and 31 Church Street, and contains the still standing barn or stable, and a small building at the south-west boundary, perhaps a privy.
- 4.5 The tithe apportionment which accompanies the map lists "88" as the property of John Waterworth's heirs (who also owned 87 and 89). The occupiers of 88 and 89 were described as "in hand", the former comprising a "house", the latter "warehouse outbuilding yard and croft". No.87 on the other hand, which formed "house and yard" was occupied by Alice Walton. It is not clear exactly who John Waterworth's heirs were, but there may have been some association with a charity established in 1842 by Mrs Betty Dewhurst, known commonly as "Waterworth's Dole", which distributed the interest on a £1300 benefaction among the "poor, indigent and well deserving individuals" of Ribchester⁶.
- 4.6 The Ordnance Survey's first edition 6" to the mile map, surveyed in 1844 (Figure 5), appears to show a similar arrangement at the site, but is of too small a scale to be a reliable indicator of the buildings' outlines. Later maps are of more use however, the 1:2500 map surveyed in 1892 showing a much larger building to the rear of 29 Church Street than was present in 1838, along with a number of other more minor new structures (Figure 6). There was a similar arrangement recorded in 1910 (Figure 7), but the 1930 revision omits most of the outbuildings, which was probably for reasons of clarity and economy, rather than indicating their demolition (Figure 8). The 1967 edition of the OS map appears to show that the main outbuilding at the rear of no. 29 had by then been demolished (Figure 9).

⁵ LRO PR2905/4/4

⁶ Smith, TC 1890 *The History of the Parish of Ribchester* p221

Listed building description

- 4.7 The house is listed as one of a pair with no 28 Church Street, under number 183026, with the following description:

Pair of houses, 1745. Brick with sandstone dressings and slate roof. 2 storeys. Plinth, string course, chamfered quoins and moulded cornice gutter all of stone. No. 29, to the right, of 3 bays with central door. No. 28, to the left, of one bay with the door to the right. The windows have architraves, those on the ground floor having raised and fielded panels carved on aprons. The windows to No. 29 are sashed with glazing bars. Those to No. 28 are modern. Both doorways have architraves and cornices, that to No. 29 having a raised and fielded panel carved on its frieze. The right-hand gable has a stone chimney cap, the left-hand gable a modern cap. Between the houses is a brick cap, set forward of the ridge. At each end of the facade is a lead downspout with 'EEI 1745' cast on each hopper.

5 Account of the building

- 5.1 The house fronts directly onto Church Street and this elevation is distinguished by the use of Flemish bond brickwork with sandstone dressings, an unusual use of brick in a district where stone was readily obtained in the mid 18th century. The style is classical and accomplished, and there appear to have been almost no changes to this front, apart from the replacement of the window frames, those to 29 being modern sashes only a few years old, and believed to closely replicate those they replaced (Photo 1). The front door itself is original as is some of its furniture, which includes massive L-hinges primitively hung on pintles (Photos 2, 3). It is not clear whether the presence of two doorways in this front indicates that 28 and 29 were originally two houses, and internal arrangements suggest otherwise, so an alternative explanation for the dual entrances should be sought. No 30 abuts the north gable of the house, so very little of this side of it is visible; the blue slate roof covering is no doubt a replacement of earlier stone slates.
- 5.2 The house is fully double-depth, and its ground floor is arranged in an essentially symmetrical manner characteristic of Georgian houses, with a centralised circulation, based on an entrance hall leading to dog-leg stairs within the rear portion. A moulded timber arch flanked by fluted pilasters separates the front part of this hall from the rear (Photo 4), and forms part of a large amount of surviving early joinery in the house, very likely to be original to the 1745 building, and of a quality which suggests the house was built by someone of means and aspiration, and with knowledge of architectural fashion. Most of the doors have six raised and fielded panels and matching reveals and broad moulded

architraves (Photo 5), and the front windows also have raised and fielded panels to the interior (Photo 6).

- 5.3 To the south of the hallway there appears to have been a passage linking the interior with no. 28, now blocked off and partly within the adjacent house, with the remainder now forming the present small pantry, the entrance to which has a fan-light over the door, implying that it was a significant division within the building (Photo 8). Possible explanations for this arrangement include the use of the present no 28 as the dwelling of a dependent relative. A dog-leg arrangement in the east side of the pantry thus created is thought by Mr Milnes to have once contained a serving hatch from the time when the building was a pub, the adjacent front room then having been a bar area. Such an arrangement is not thought to have been in keeping with the house of 1745 however, so if this was the case it is likely to have been a later alteration.
- 5.4 The rooms to the north of the hall have also been altered, with the wall dividing the front room from the kitchen to the rear having been taken down and then partly rebuilt, incorporating the present wide doorway, in the late 20th century (Photo 7). None of these rooms contain their original fireplaces, although the present lintel to the kitchen fireplace is believed to be original. At the rear of the kitchen the framed plank door is probably of 1742, but the adjacent window has been much enlarged in the 20th century. The back kitchen beyond comprises two rooms. The larger part, which is central to the house, appears to be relatively early, and is shown on 19th century maps. This has thick walls and a stone slate roof, which cuts across the lower stair window. To the north-west of this is a smaller addition with flat roof, believed to have been built by Mr Milnes' father and of poorer quality. Despite the difference in dates, neither of these additions enhances the appearance of the rear elevation, which is cluttered and irregular (Photos 9 & 10). It is a much plainer elevation than the front however, being of coursed stone and lacking dressings.
- 5.5 The rooms at the south-west corner of the house are at different levels from the others, and that on the ground floor serves as a half-cellar, which accords with the suggestion that the adjacent front room was the public room of a beer-house. A room (the present bathroom) has been contrived as a mezzanine floor above this.
- 5.6 The staircase is another very significant element of the house, having an open string, with the turned balusters being in pairs, one plain and one fluted baluster per tread (Photo 11), although above the first floor there is only one (fluted) baluster per tread, and the balustrade is partly boxed in. Two windows light the half-landings on the stairs, one between ground and first floor and one between

first floor and attic, but both are partly blocked, the lower one by the present kitchen extension, the upper one for no obvious reason, except perhaps as a means of connecting the overhead electricity cable.

5.7 On the first floor the house's symmetrical arrangement is more clearly laid out and there are two heated rooms and three unheated: of the latter, one is in the centre of the front, and the other two are the rear rooms, of which that at the south-west corner is reached up a modern set of stairs within a passage, which may be another former means of communication with the adjacent property. Anomalies in wall thickness and the fact that the room divisions do not match the structural timbers above do raise the possibility that the rest of the arrangement is not original, although the majority of the doors and the front windows on this floor are of the same style as on the ground floor (albeit the doors to the rear rooms are four panel rather than six), and there is a similarly worked moulded timber arch to the division between front and rear, over the landing (Photo 12). An original fireplace with cyma moulded stone surround survives in the south-east first floor room (Photo 13), and there is a plainer stone fireplace in the other front room, thought to be 19th century (Photo 14).

5.8 The stairs continue to the attic with the same decorative features, but this floor of the house does not appear to have been intended for permanent habitation, other than perhaps by servants. There is an irregular arrangement of support for the roof, with a brick cross-wall on the north side of the stairs and a roof truss to the south, and masonry walls at the ends, including that to the south which divides 28 from 29: a connecting doorway between the two has been bricked up. The truss itself is of some interest as it is very much rooted in the vernacular, being of oak, with the principal rafters halved at the ridge, and the tie-beam itself below the level of the attic floor. The span of the roof is greater than would have been attempted in a vernacular dwelling, which before the mid 18th century were normally only one or one and a half rooms deep, but here the desire to create a double depth house must have posed something of a challenge to the joiner when roofing the building without the imported Baltic softwood which was available to later craftsmen. The structure of the roof truss is not fully visible, but has a sloping tie beam with angled struts running up to the feet of the principals, in an awkward manner. Within the attic the truss is infilled with riven lath and plaster to form a partition.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 The house at 29 Church Street forms part of a formerly larger property, the origins of which remain obscure, although the date of 1745 is a reliable indicator of when it was built. It seems to have formed a pair of houses internally, perhaps

intended for occupation by relatives who maintained separate households, and the character of the facade suggests it was not built as a public house, although it may have been adapted to one in later years, a scenario supported by the paucity of historical documentation in this respect. It may therefore have been the property of a modest local professional, merchant, or individual who derived their income from rents, for example, rather than a farmer or craftsman.

- 6.2 While the house's facade survives largely unaltered, the rear elevation (which was never afforded the same generous treatment) has suffered from alterations over the years, and the present single storey extension here is detrimental to the building's character, and means that the stair window is partly blocked, thereby restricting daylight to the stairs and entrance hall. Its removal or replacement by an improved arrangement would enhance not only the rear elevation but also the natural lighting within, and might allow the restoration of the damaged window to the rear of the original kitchen.

- 6.3 The interior of the house retains much of its early if not original plan, and has numerous fixtures and fittings of some quality which should be conserved. One area of concern which might be addressed, to enhance the historic character of the house, is the restoration of the wall dividing the original kitchen from the north front room. Another would be the re-opening up of the two stair windows to their original sizes, and the exposing of the upper part of the stair, where presently hidden by modern boarding.

The author would welcome any relevant additional information or notice of inaccuracy in this report.

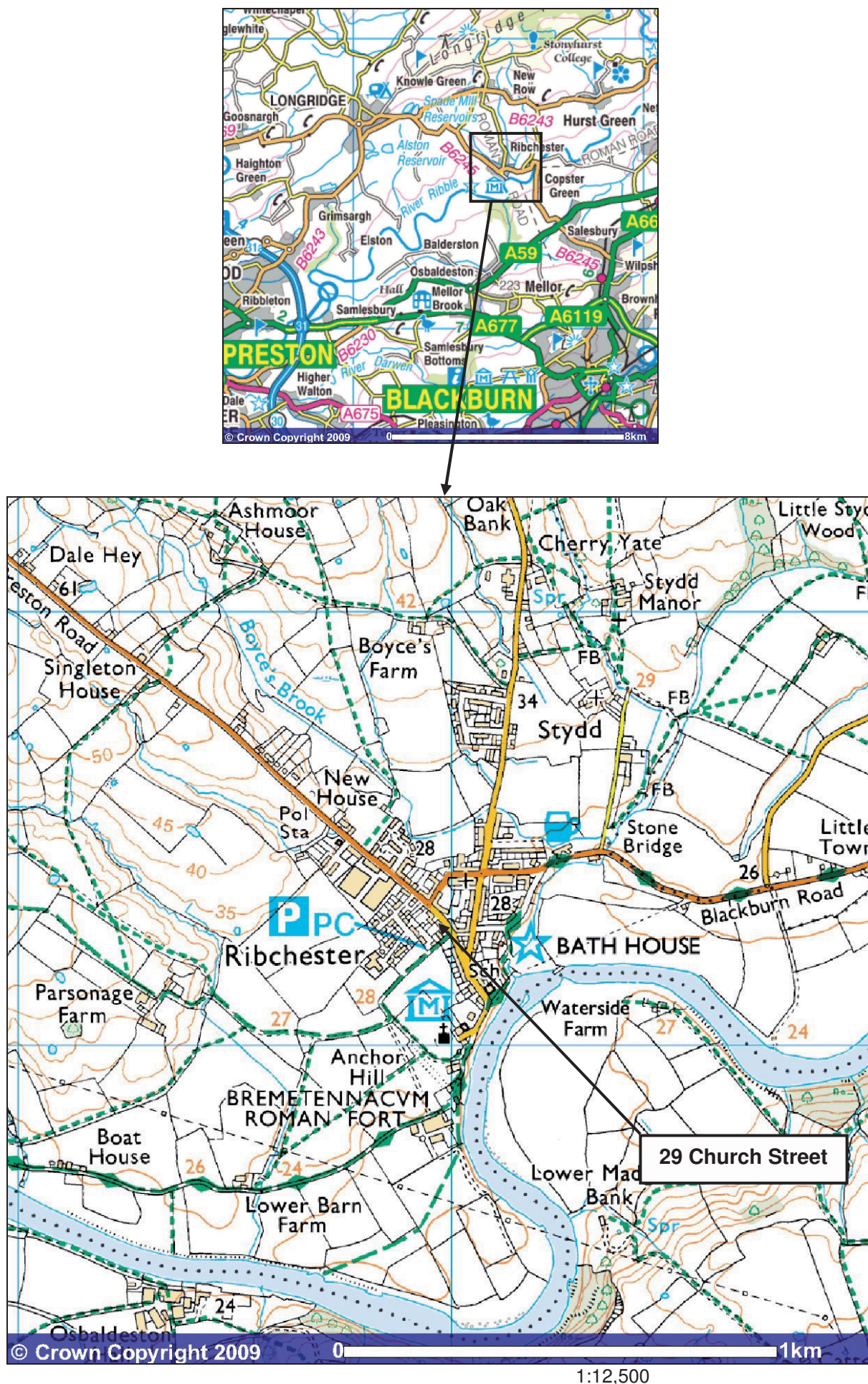


Figure 1: Location maps

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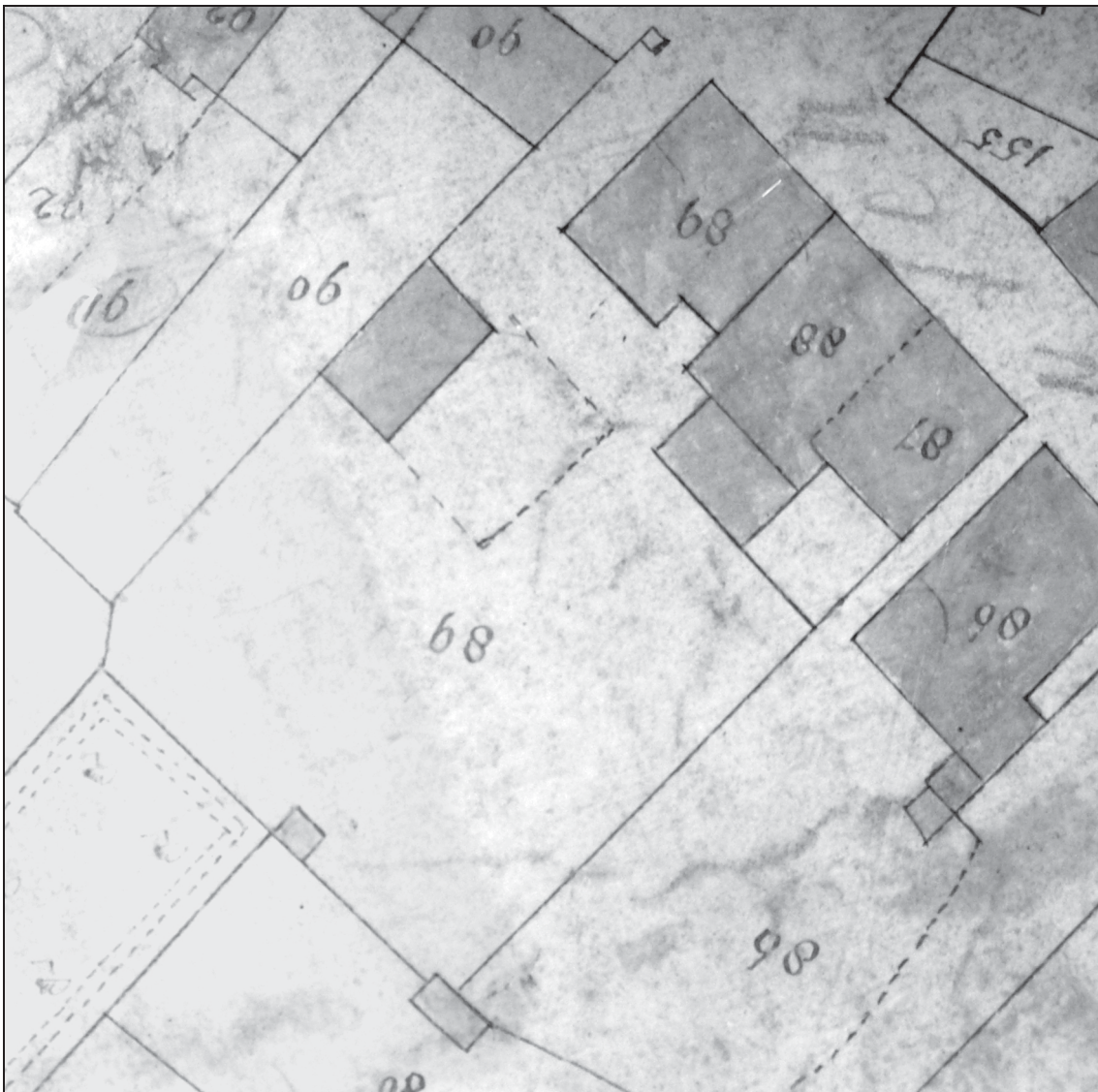


Figure 3: 1838 tithe map (rotated, so as to have north at the top – the numbers appear upside down)
(*A Plan of the Town of Ribchester in the County of Lancaster 1838 LRO PR2905/4/4*)



Figure 4: Photograph of the rear in the 1960s, showing the building which then adjoined the house, which was demolished shortly afterwards

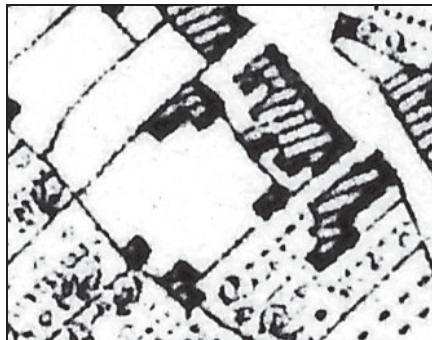


Figure 5: OS 6" to the mile map, surveyed 1844 (Lancashire, sheet 54, published 1847)
Here much enlarged, but the original scale is too small to allow accurate analysis



Figure 6: OS 1:2500 map, surveyed 1892 (Lancashire, sheet 54.14, published 1893)
Appears to show a larger building standing to the rear of the house

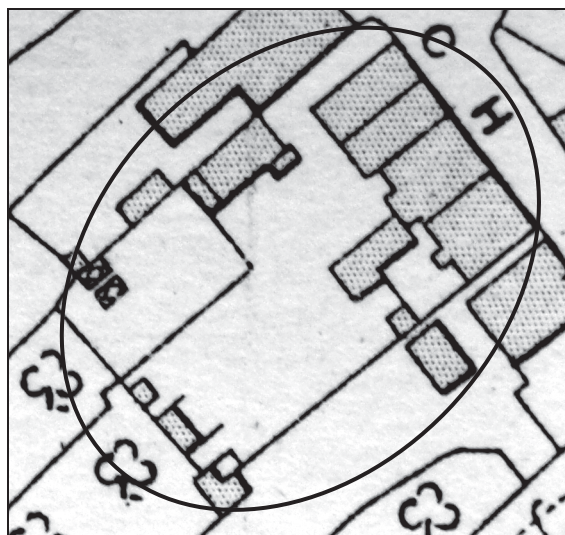


Figure 7: OS 1:2500 map, revised 1910 (Lancashire, sheet 54.14, published 1912)
Shows a similar arrangement

NB: maps not at original scales



Figure 8: OS 1:2500 map, revised 1930 (Lancashire, sheet 54.14, published 1932)
Shows a more simple arrangement, the finer detail probably omitted

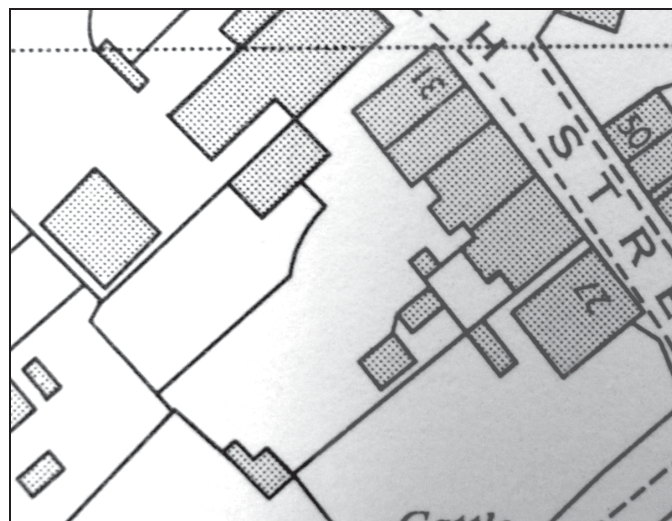
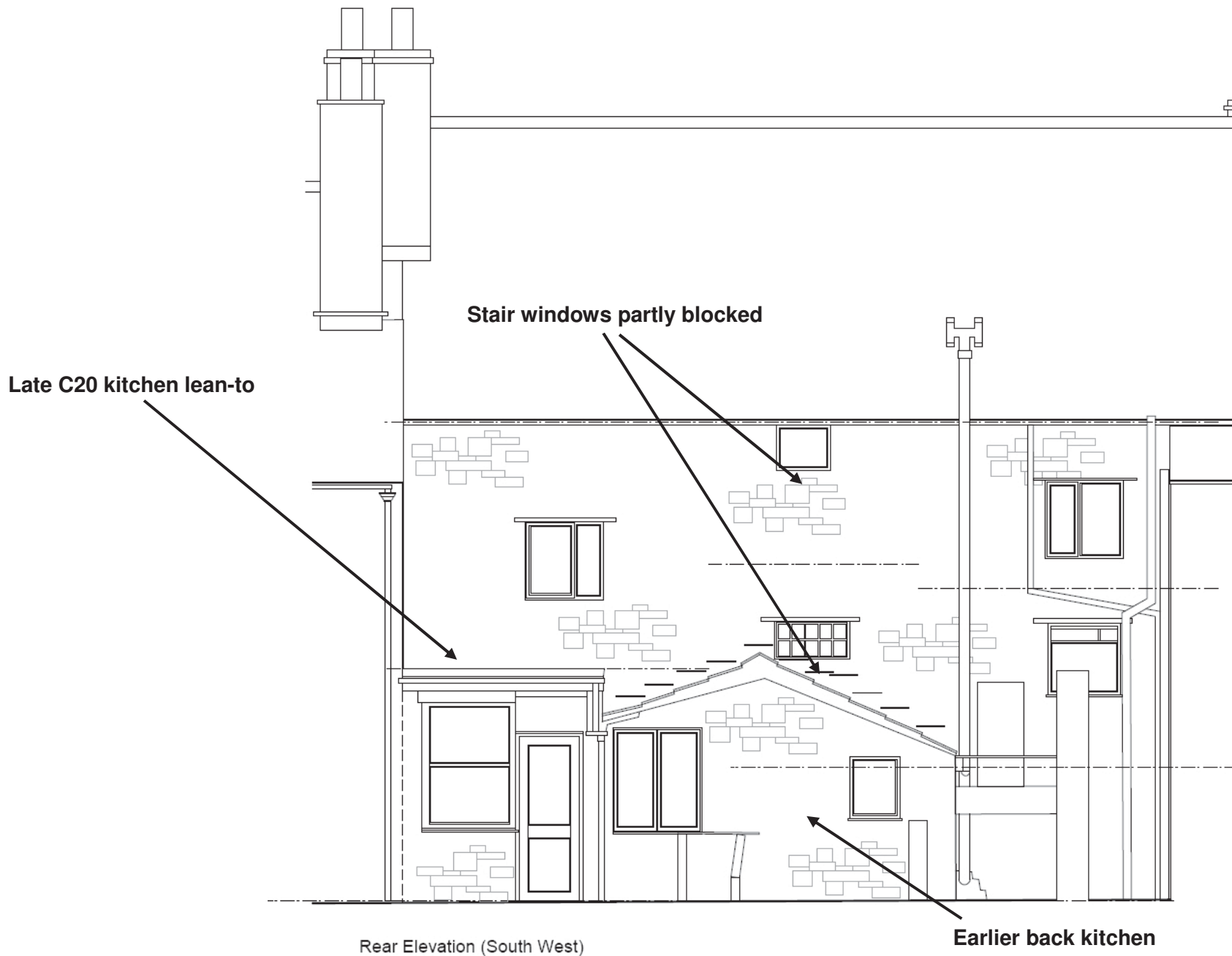


Figure 9: OS 1:2500 map, revised 1967 (SD 6435/6535, published 1932)
Shows the large building close to the rear of the house to have been demolished



Front Elevation (North East)

Figure 10: Front elevation (IWA Architects)



Rear Elevation (South West)

Earlier back kitchen

Figure 11: Rear elevation (IWA Architects)

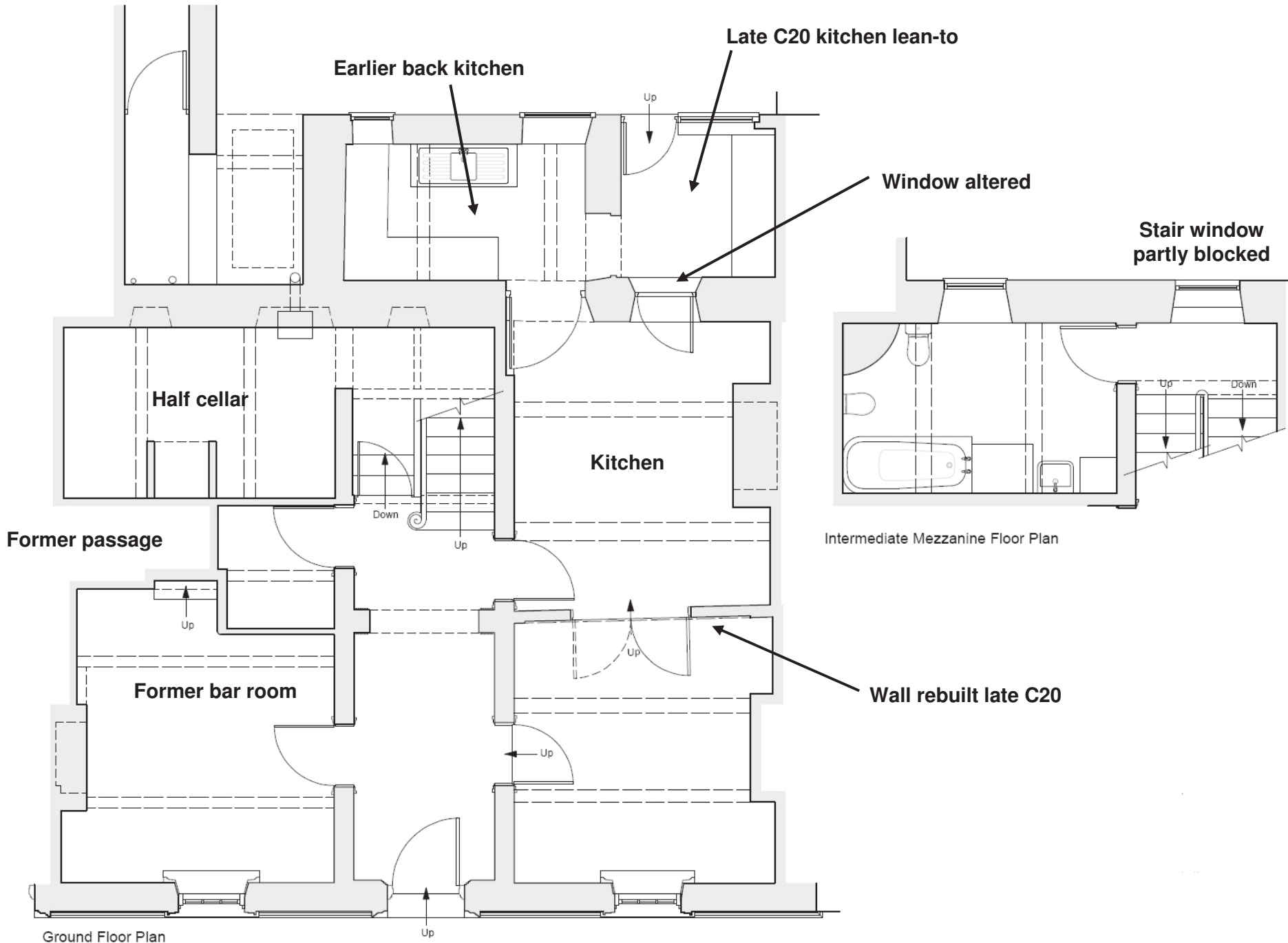


Figure 12: Ground floor plan (IWA Architects)

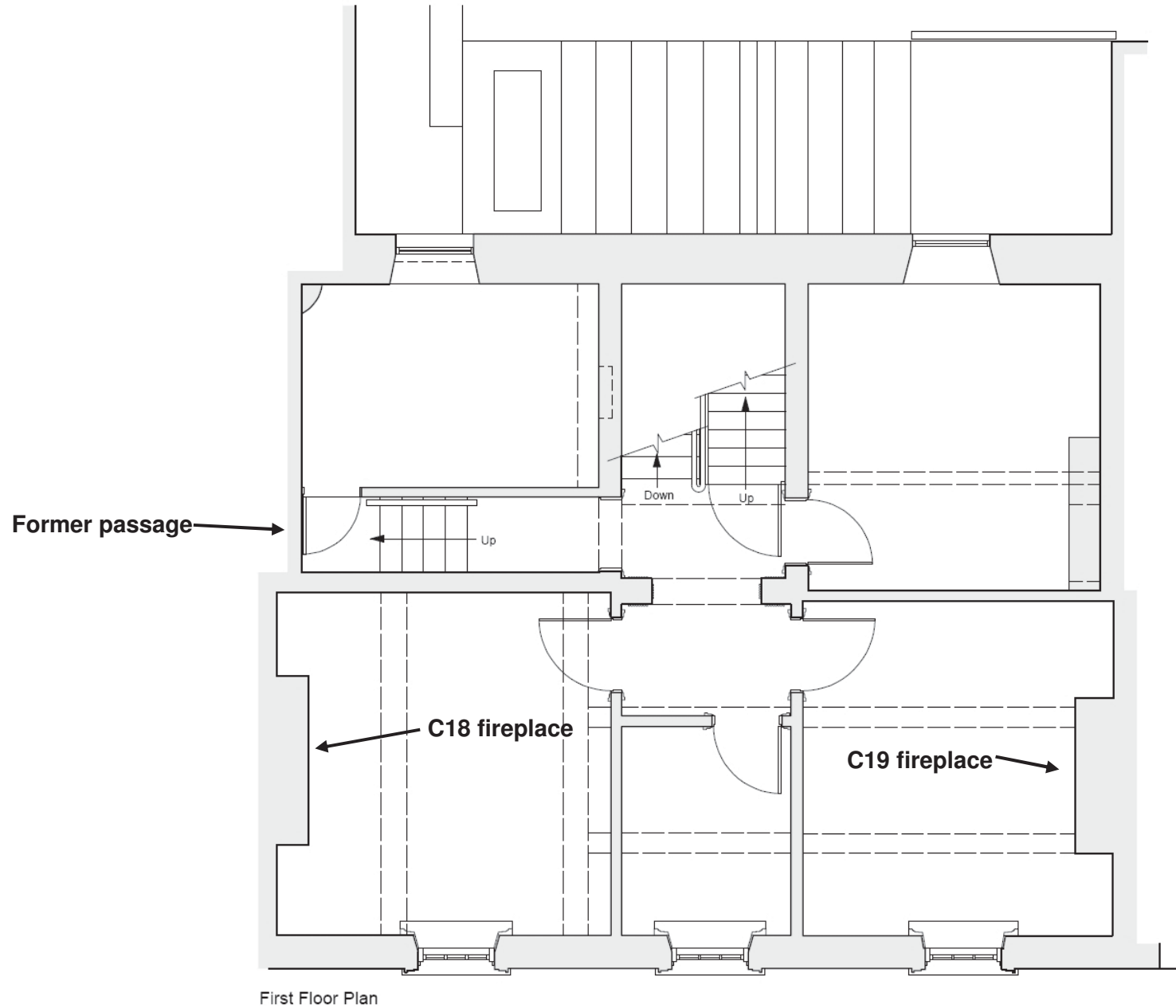
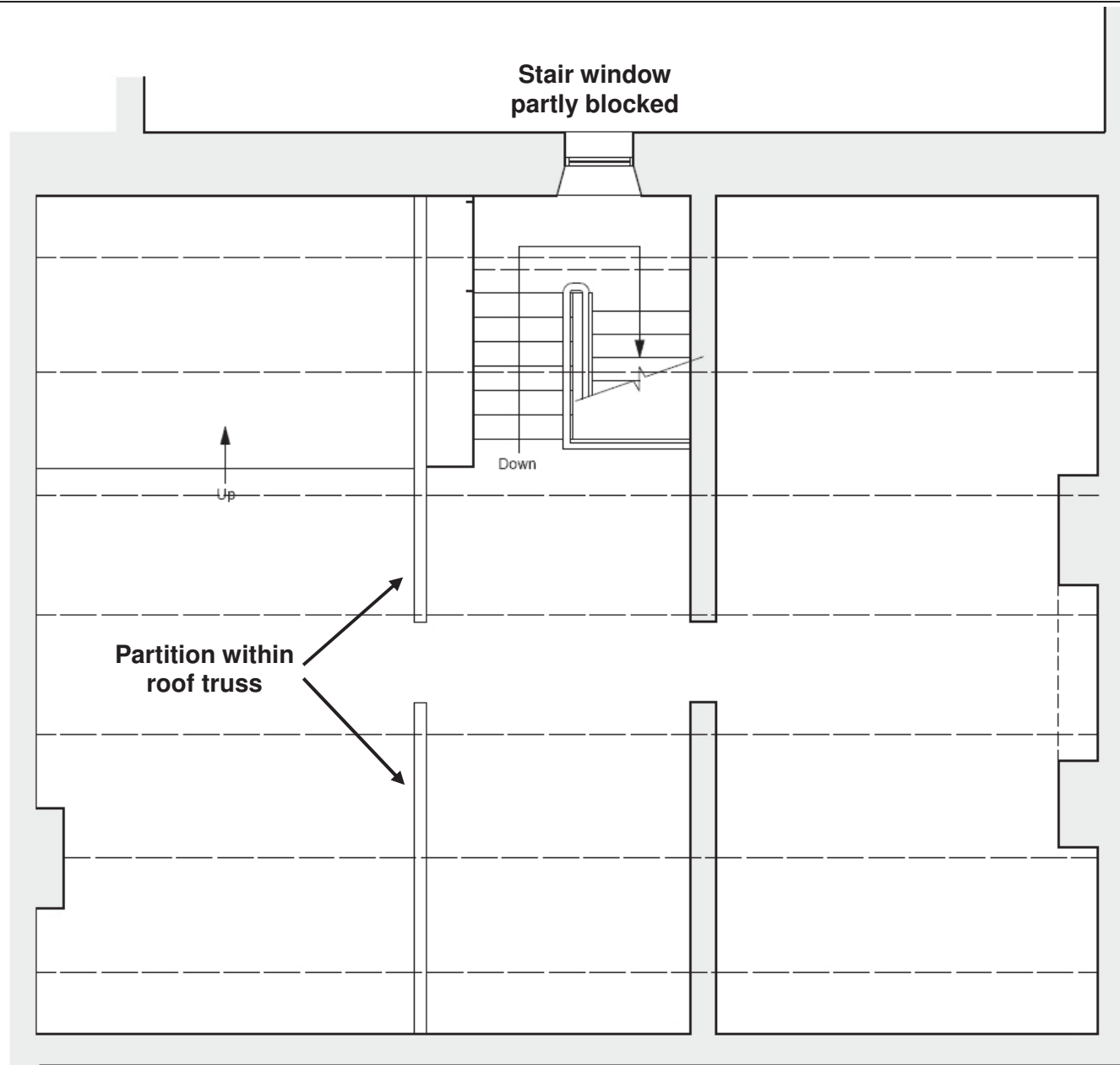


Figure 13: First floor plan (IWA Architects)



Second Floor Roofspace Plan

Figure 14: Second floor/attic plan (IWA Architects)