

MCBAINS BUSINESS UNITS, CLYST HONITON, DEVON

(NGR SY 01257 93410)

Results of historic building recording

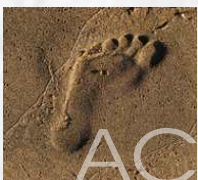
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on behalf of:
Velobrands Ltd

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archaeology

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The recording was commissioned by Velobrands Ltd, and managed on their behalf by Hannah Cameron of XL Planning Ltd, and for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The fieldwork was carried out by Stella De-Villiers and Andrew Passmore. The report, including illustrations, was prepared by Stella De-Villiers.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Summary

An historic building record of a pair of mid 20th-century buildings at the McBains Business Units, Westcott Road, Clyst Honiton, Devon (SY 01257 93410) was prepared by AC archaeology in September 2020 prior to their demolition.

McBains Business Units are located within the former Dispersed Site 2 associated with the use of Exeter Airport during the Second World War by the Royal Air Force. One recorded building is the surviving west range of the institute and NAAFI. Floor surfaces of a second (demolished) range were also recorded; these displayed scars of former rooms including toilets and corridors. The upstanding range is of standard temporary brick construction, and originally comprised three interconnecting rooms. Additional smaller rooms have been added during the post-war period. No internal historic fixtures or fittings remain. All but one of the original windows have either been blocked up or replaced.

The other recorded building was a Romney hut of Second World War origin, but was relocated to the site in the 1960s. The original curved steel frame supporting the roof, along with the corrugated sheet covering, was reused, but new brick gable walls were added. Electrical fixtures and fittings date from the hut's re-erection in the 1960s with some more recent upgrading.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

1.1 This document sets out the results of historic building recording undertaken by AC archaeology in September 2020 prior to a development at the McBains Business Units, Westcott Road, Clyst Honiton, Devon, EX5 2BA (SY 01257 93410; Fig. 1). The investigations were commissioned by Velobrands Ltd, and were required under condition 4 of the grant of planning permission (East Devon District Council reference 16/1578/MFUL) for 'proposed Industrial unit, roadways, parking and infrastructure'. Guidance on the scope of works was provided by the Devon County Historic Environment Team (DCHET) in their consultation response to the application; no formal site-specific brief was provided.

1.2 The McBains Business Units are located 1km to the east of Exeter Airport within the historic parish of Clyst Honiton, and have origins as a dispersed site associated with RAF Exeter, now Exeter Airport (see Section 2 below). It is situated at a height of approximately 35m above Ordnance Datum on land that gently rises up to the southeast. The underlying geology consists of Triassic mudstone of the Aylesbeare Mudstone Group; there are no overlying superficial deposits (British Geological Survey online viewer 2020).

The scheme

1.3 The scheme comprises the demolition of a pair of mid 20th-century buildings, and their replacement with a new single industrial unit, along with associated landscaping including car parking and the creation of a roundabout at the head of an existing internal access road within the larger complex of business units.

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The McBains Business Units occupy part of the former Dispersed Site 2 associated with RAF Exeter, a Second World War airfield operational between June 1940 and October 1946. This fighter station was located on an existing civil airfield (opened in 1932) and civil operations resumed after the war, continuing to the present day (Francis 1999, 14-15). Dispersed Site 2 was located on the north side of Westcott Road, with Dispersed Site 3 located immediately to the east within the same Air Ministry landholding. Both these sites were located within the main perimeter of the airfield but were separated from the runways and technical complex to the west and northwest by fields.
- 2.2** As their name indicates, dispersed sites were located away from main airfield. Dispersed site 2 covered an area of 2.14ha (Devon Historic Environment Record (HER) entry MDV48846) to the east of the main airfield; Dispersed Sites 3 and 4 were located to the northeast and east respectively (Francis 1999, map 11). A list of original buildings (Francis 1999, appendix 14) indicates that this site contained a variety of buildings associated with billeting but did not include barrack huts for sleeping. They included a dining room, buildings for ablutions and showers, latrines, stores and an institute and NAAFI (Francis building number 259 which is shown but not labelled on his map 11; HER entry MDV78394). This building, which falls within the application area, originally consisted of three 28ft span temporary brick huts which were linked together to create an E-shaped building; only the western of the three huts survives.
- 2.3** By the late 1960s a pair of Romney huts had been constructed within the complex (HER entry 78396; Francis building numbers 270 and 271); the northernmost falls within the application area. These buildings had military origins and were presumably brought in from elsewhere on the airfield or other nearby military establishment. The majority of the institute and NAAFI building was demolished sometime in the later 20th century.

Archaeological background

- 2.4** The site was included within Paul Francis' 1999 survey of Exeter Airport, but access was not permitted, and his description of the buildings is limited. The survey also omits ancillary structures within this domestic site (visible on post-war RAF aerial photography) including tracks and air raid shelters. Additional mapping was undertaken in 2014-15 as part of the East and Mid Devon River Catchments National Mapping Programme Project, which included recording some ancillary features (HER entry MDV48846).

3. AIM

- 3.1** The scheme will include the demolition of the surviving element of the Second World War institute and NAAFI, along with the relocated Romney hut of Second World War origin. The aim of the investigation was therefore to prepare an historic building record of the two structures prior to their demolition.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** All works were undertaken in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by AC archaeology (Passmore 2020), the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and*

recording of standing buildings or structures (revised 2019), and the AC archaeology *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*.

4.2 The historic building recording was also undertaken in accordance with the guidance set out in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (Historic England 2016), and was undertaken to levels 2-3.

4.3 The recording comprised the following:

- A written description of the buildings and their context in wider Dispersed Site 2, prepared in a digital format suitable for direct inclusion within this report;
- A colour digital photographic record including general views of the buildings and their context within the wider Dispersed Site 2, detailed external elevations and internal views, and a more detailed record of individual historic fixtures and fittings. Where appropriate, all photographs included a photographic scale. Details of photographs taken were made on *pro forma* record sheets; and
- Preparation of a 1:100 floor plan of the remains of the institute and NAAFI to include a record of piers/positions of roof trusses, doorways and windows, internal partitions, along with any other features.

4.4 The recording considered the following:

- Date/period of initial build and subsequent alterations;
- Materials and method of construction (and differences in material and construction techniques/architectural styles in each identified phase);
- Fenestration and the design of elevations and elements of the buildings in relation to the function of internal spaces, and the demolished sections of the institute and NAAFI;
- Internal arrangements including evidence for alterations;
- Original fixtures and fittings; and
- Subsequent fixtures and fittings, and evidence for change of use.

4.5 The recording also included an assessment of the remains (at ground-level) of the demolished sections of the institute and NAAFI.

5. BUILDING SURVEY (Fig. 2; Plates 1-16)

The institute and NAAFI

External description

5.1 The surviving west range is a single-storeyed structure measuring 39m long by 9m wide, and constructed of brick finished externally with render. Internally the lower sections are also rendered (with a white paint finish) with the upper parts of the walls painted white. It has a gabled roof covered with corrugated asbestos sheets with an additional gable at the south east end facing east. The latter has been truncated, and would have continued over the demolished south range of the building. With the exception of a short length on the east side, where the building would have been abutted by the south range, the external walls, including at the corners, incorporate projecting piers.

5.2 The east elevation features double wooden doors located towards each end of the building (Plate 1). The northern opening has an external loading bay defined by concrete blocks that slopes gently down towards the building. The southern opening

is accessed from a raised area, also retained by concrete blocks, located within the footprint of the demolished south range. There are five replacement UPVC windows along with a smaller casement window. The south elevation has lost some of its render exposing the brickwork which is laid in stretcher bond (Plate 2). There is a single central replacement UPVC window. The north elevation has two replacement UPVC windows located in the eastern two bays (Plate 3). The majority of the west elevation is obscured externally by mature vegetation although the piers are visible (Plate 4). At north end there is a single replacement late 20th-century door, a replacement UPVC window and a partially blocked window opening that retains a metal frame with some of its original (8) small glass panes (Plate 5). Other window openings present in all but the southernmost bay of this elevation are visible internally; they have all been blocked in brickwork (see Plate 8).

Internal description

- 5.3** The building is currently entered from the door at the north end of the west elevation. This opens into a small *lobby* that gives access to a small *kitchen* and a *WC* to the north; these two rooms have been subdivided from the larger lobby. A blocked doorway in the south wall of the lobby formerly provided access into the *central room*. A door on the east side of the lobby leads into a *north room* in the northeast corner of the building. A large opening, central to the building, provides unobstructed access into the central room. The east side of this opening is currently defined by part of an *office*, inserted into the northeast corner of the central room (Plate 6). The office has a wooden door with an upper glass panel and a window in its west wall. The partition between the central room and *south room* again incorporates a wide, tall unobstructed central opening. In the southeast corner of the south room is another inserted office divided by partitions of wood and glass (Plate 7), and which is entered via a pair of double wooden doors. The only other feature in the central room is a concrete slope down from the double doors in the east elevation. The roof covering throughout is supported on steel trusses constructed of pairs of 'rafters' with and three-part 'tie beams' supported with diagonal struts (Plates 7 and 8). These support a ceiling comprising (?asbestos) panels that obscure the structure above supporting the sheet finish. The feet of the trusses rest on internal brick piers which line up with the external piers.

The Romney hut

- 5.4** This has a fully curved roof of corrugated metal sheets which extend down to ground level. It incorporates high-level integral roof lights. The north and south gables are constructed of brick laid in stretcher bond. Each have four piers, with the central pair in the north elevation extending to the full height of the buildings; the others terminate at the level of the top of the doors. Both gables incorporate central double height, sliding wooden doors hung from concrete lintels. Above these are ventilation holes of slightly differing designs in each gable (Plates 9-10).
- 5.5** Internally, the structure supporting the roof covering is partially visible behind a modern plastic waterproof lining (Plates 11 and 12). This structure comprises semi-circular metal ribs formed from four circular tubes bolted together at their ends, and set into the concrete surface. To these a series of thinner steel angle-section purlins are attached horizontally, onto which the corrugated sheets are fixed. The only remaining fittings, dating from the period of its erection on the site post-war, are electrical cables, switches and fuse boxes and lights attached to the north and south gable walls (Plates 11-14); some of the cabling and switches are more recent replacements.

Remains of the demolished sections of the institute and NAAFI

- 5.6** The concrete surface on the footprint of the south range is of post-war date, and other than the shape of the concrete there is no evidence at ground level for this part of the building. The raised loading area against the surviving west range has been constructed onto this surface (Plate 1).
- 5.7** The concrete floor of the demolished central range survives (Plate 15). At the south end is a plain slab, then there is a longer section that incorporates what appears to be the scar of a central room or set of rooms, surrounded by walkways on all sides; the northern part of this area divided into four smaller patches of concrete. Scars of brickwork in between the concrete floors indicate that northern part of the building had a central corridor flanked by three rooms on the east side and four rooms on the west side, all of varying sizes. The smallest room on the west side was a toilet and was partially divided into two cubicles with holes in the floors for sewer pipes (Plate 16). The adjacent end room to the north is also divided into two spaces by a north-south aligned wall.
- 5.8** The site of the east range is located outside of the application area. The southern section has a replacement concrete surface. The northern section is under a steel cabin and not visible but appears to be original.

6. COMMENTS

- 6.1** Institutes and NAAFIs provided social facilities, food and a shop. The former were sometimes purpose built with dining rooms in the late expansion period (immediately before the war), or from 1942 were attached to earlier (pre-war) dining rooms and comprised two huts containing a games room, reading and writing room (Francis 1996, 184). Designs varied, with those of the expansion period being of higher architectural quality (and generally of a larger size with two storeys), whilst those of wartime era comprised standard (usually 28ft span) huts of either temporary brick, wood, or of Nissen hut design (*ibid.*, 184-5; Innes 1995,108; Innes 2000, 96-100). The institute and NAAFI at Exeter Airport's Dispersed site 2 was of the standard temporary brick design, with the shell incorporating integral piers that supported steel trusses.
- 6.2** The recorded surviving part of the institute and NAAFI was originally one of three ranges connected by a front block. This range comprised three principal interconnected spaces. There are no original fixtures and fittings but the wide, doorless openings in the partitions perhaps indicates that these spaces contained recreational facilities associated with the institute.
- 6.3** The fenestration of the building has been significantly altered, with almost all the windows in the west elevation blocked, and others replaced with UPVC frames; only the partial remains of a single original metal-framed window survives. The former probably took place in the 1960s when the adjacent Romney Hut was erected, effectively blocking light from entering the building through these windows. New double doors have been added in the east elevation – one pair probably within an original opening that originally provided access to the now demolished south range. Internally, new offices, a kitchen and a WC have also been added within the pre-existing larger spaces.
- 6.4** All that remains of the demolished sections of the institute and NAAFI are the concrete floors of the central range which displays scars of former rooms including toilets and corridors.

- 6.5** The Romney hut was one of pair brought to the site and rebuilt here probably in the 1960s. It is of Second World War date, but its original location and function are unknown. The second hut, which was located to the south, has already been demolished as part of the redevelopment of the southwest corner of the business units. The original steel frame supporting the roof along with the roof covering have been reused, but the brick gables (and attached contemporary electrical fittings) were added new when the hut was rebuilt. These buildings originally had corrugated sheet gables supported on steel frames incorporating corrugated sheet (rather than wood) doors (Francis 1996, 213).

7. OASIS ENTRY AND ARCHIVE

- 7.1** An OASIS entry has been created using the unique identifier 399391, and includes a digital copy of this report.
- 7.2** An archive of relevant born-digital data has been compiled in accordance with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) standards and guidelines, and will be deposited with the ADS within three months of acceptance of this report.

8. SOURCES CONSULTED

Printed Sources

Francis, P., 1996. *British Military Airfield Architecture, From Airships to the Jet Age*. Patrick Stephens Ltd.

Francis, P., 1999. *Exeter Airport, Historic Airport Survey for Devon County Council and East Devon District Council*. Airfield Research Publishing.

Innes, G.B., 1995. *British Airfield Buildings of the Second World War*. Midland Publishing Limited.

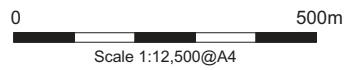
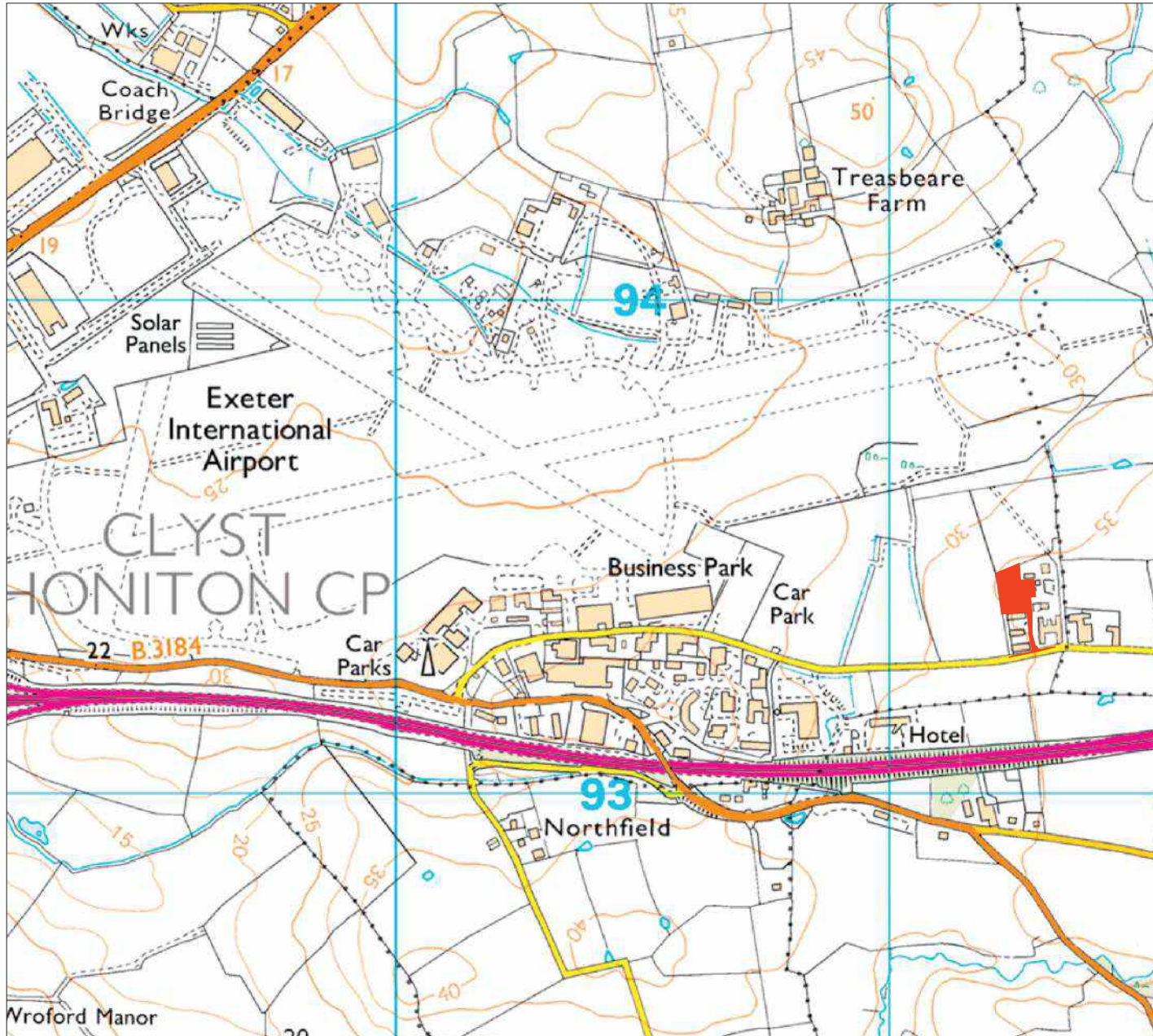
Innes, G.B., 2000. *British Airfield Buildings Volume 2: The Expansion & Inter-War Periods*. Midland Publishing.

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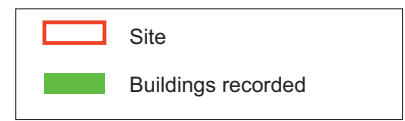
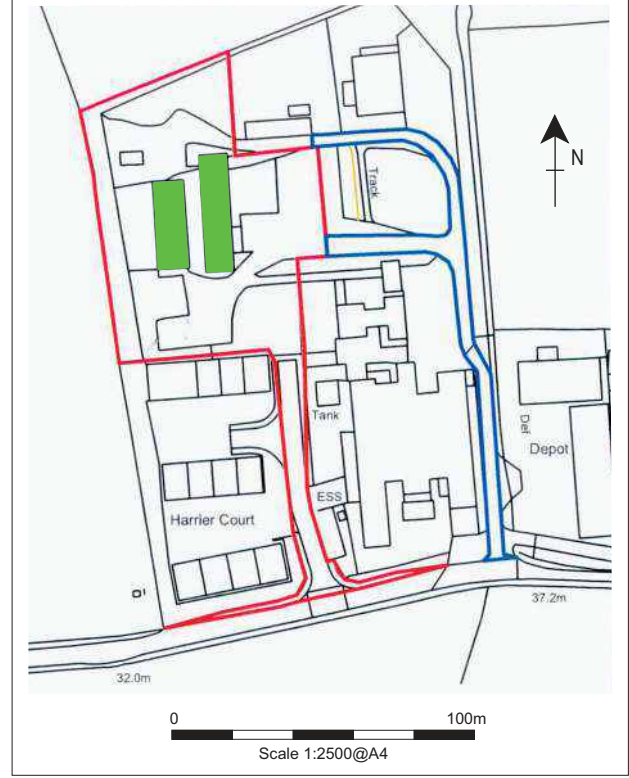
Websites (accessed September 2020)

British Geological Survey on-line viewer
www.bgs.ac.uk

Devon County Council environment Viewer
<http://map.devon.gov.uk/dccviewer/?bm=OSGreyscale&layers=Historic%20Environment;0;1&activeTab=Historic%20Environment&extent=210064;27188;338387;150088>

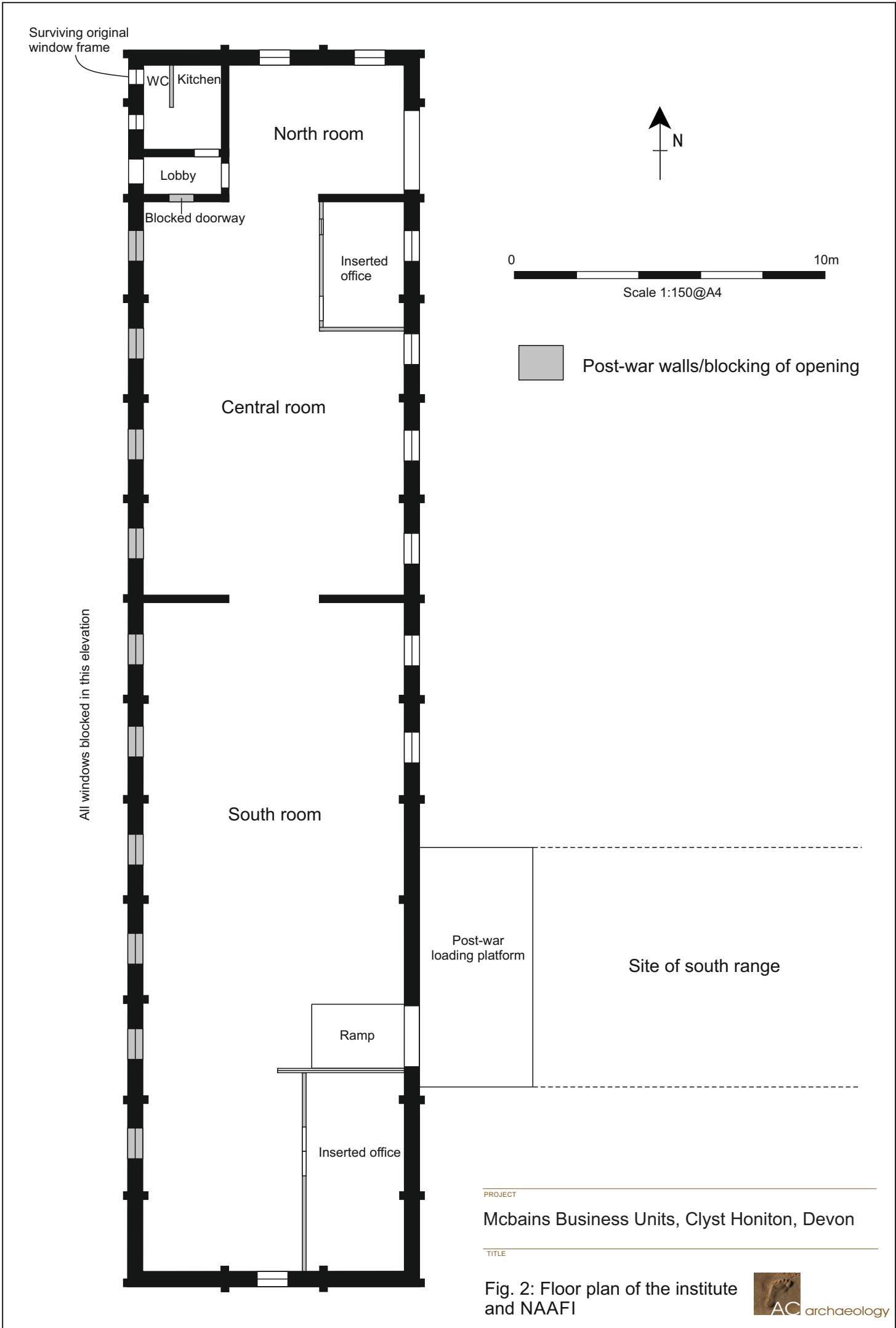


Plan supplied by Cawse Design



PROJECT
Mcbains Business Units, Clyst
Honiton, Devon

TITLE
Fig. 1: Site location



Surviving original window frame

WC Kitchen

North room

Lobby

Blocked doorway

Inserted office

Central room

South room

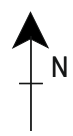
All windows blocked in this elevation

Post-war loading platform

Ramp

Inserted office

Site of south range



0 10m

Scale 1:150@A4



Post-war walls/blocking of opening

PROJECT

Mcbains Business Units, Clyst Honiton, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 2: Floor plan of the institute and NAAFI





Plate 1: East elevation of the institute and NAAFI, looking west (1m scale)



Plate 2: South elevation of the institute and NAAFI, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 3: North elevation of the institute and NAAFI, looking south (1m scale)



Plate 4: West elevation of the institute and NAAFI, looking southeast



Plate 5: North end of the west elevation of the institute and NAAFI, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 6: Central room of the institute and NAAFI, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 7: South room of the institute and NAAFI, looking south (1m scale)



Plate 8: Blocked windows in the west wall of the institute and NAAFI, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 9: North elevation of the Romney hut, looking south (1m scale)



Plate 10: South elevation of the Romney hut, looking north



Plate 11: Internal view of the Romney hut, looking north



Plate 12: View of roof construction, looking west



Plate 13: View of electrical fittings on the south wall of the Romney hut, looking south



Plate 14: View of electrical fittings on the north wall of the Romney hut, looking northwest



Plate 15: The concrete floor of the demolished central range, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 16: Brick scars in between concrete floors of the central range, looking west (1m scale)

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