

Gala Bingo Hall Site, North Street, Bedminster, Bristol.

Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

BHER 24879



on behalf of

Urbis Development, Bristol

Nick Corcos BA, MA, PhD, AIFA

Avon Archaeological Unit Limited

Bristol: May 2010

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Frontispiece: Surviving stone boundary wall, running NW-SE, on western side of Carr Power site. View along wall to SE from its NW end.

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ABSTRACT

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment covering approximately 0.41 ha of land at the eastern end, and on the southern side, of North Street, Bedminster, Bristol, and currently occupied by the Gala Bingo Hall, Barcan Woodward Solicitors, and Carr Power Products (centred on NGR STREET 58169 71512), has produced the following results:

The study area currently comprises a mix of buildings – Gala Bingo Hall is a converted, early 1940s cinema; Barcan Woodward consists of offices converted from residential dwellings which may be of early 19th century date, or even earlier; and Carr Power is a retail premises, the eastern half of which is a modern brick building, while the western half may also preserve elements of an earlier residential property. Open spaces used for car parking are associated with all three sites, and at Carr Power, large ancillary buildings occupy spaces behind the street frontage.

Bedminster was a large royal manor both before and after the Norman Conquest and also the site of an early, possibly 7th century minster church. Such churches are now known often to be associated with large, complex and high-status occupation, including royal halls and multiple, contemporary churches. Little is known about the physical nature of Bedminster in the medieval period, but there are indications that it would have had the appearance of a large, rural settlement, probably with long tenement plots stretching back behind street frontages. Evidence for prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval occupation has been found at West Street, Bedminster, not far from the study area, with West Street itself possibly following the line of a Roman road.

The study area is first shown in any detail on a Smyth estate map of the late 18th century, with settlement concentrated around the junction of Cannon, North, West and East Streets. The eastern end of North Street, on the southern side, is already by this time depicted as partly developed, although not continuously, and it is clear that buildings, probably houses, occupied at least part of the study area by this date. A 17th century building surviving at 49 North Street, immediately adjacent to the west side of the study site, suggests that in fact, development was well in train at least by that date. The north side, by contrast, retains a very much more rural appearance. By the early 19th century, the study area had become integrated into a line of continuous development along the southern side of North Street. During the 19th century, the formerly open plots behind the frontages on this side of North Street, previously used for orchards and gardens, became sub-divided and developed. A non-conformist chapel was founded before 1841 at the SE end of a site carved out of one of the long plots stretching behind the study area, and it had a burial ground attached to it by 1881-82, which now abuts part of the site's southern boundary. By the early 20th century the study area block was fully built up, and in the late 1930s, houses in its north-eastern corner, on the street frontage, were demolished to make way for The Rex Cinema, now the Gala Bingo Hall.

On the basis of the documentary, cartographic, and HER evidence consulted during this study, the development site is considered to have a low to moderate potential for the survival of significant buried archaeological deposits, particularly relating to the post medieval development, dwellings and associated back-spaces formerly located along the North Street frontage. In addition, the Gala Bingo Hall itself retains some original internal fixtures, fittings and architectural detail that may justify recording in advance of development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

Whereas Avon Archaeological Unit Limited have taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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ABBREVIATIONS

aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
BRO	Bristol Record Office
NGR	National Grid Reference
BHER	Bristol City Council Historic Environment Record
OS	Ordnance Survey

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Avon Archaeological Unit were commissioned by Urbis Development, Bristol, to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment on an area of land encompassing just under half a hectare in total. The study site which is the subject of this report, lies at the eastern end of North Street, Bedminster, on its southern side. The centre of the site lies at OS grid reference STREET 58169 71512, and it presents a total length of about 70m to the North Street frontage (**Figures 1 and 2**). The shape of the development site is roughly rectangular, with a straight boundary along the street frontage, a stepped boundary along its southern side, and a long, narrow protrusion extending north-eastwards from its south-eastern corner. It is at present occupied by a mixture of open ground used mainly as car parks, work or storage areas with ancillary buildings, and two separate blocks of buildings on the street frontage used for retail and legal businesses. The largest single building on the site, at its eastern end, is, however, the Gala Bingo Hall, formerly The Rex Cinema, currently closed and unused. This research was requested in order to elucidate the historic development of the study area so far as documentary sources will allow, and to assess the potential for the survival of significant archaeological structures and deposits on the proposed site. In particular, this work has made it possible to cast considerable new light on the development of the former cinema building itself. This report is referenced under BHER 24879 in the Bristol City Council Historic Environment Record.

1.2 The details of the development proposal for the study site are by no means yet finalised, and remain open to continuing amendment. Fundamentally however, the scheme calls for the removal of both the Carr Power Products premises and the Gala Bingo Hall, and their replacement with a mixed, terrace development of retail shops along the street frontage, and two-storey, residential accommodation behind. A top, third floor will be set back from the upper frontage in order to reduce the bulk, and therefore the visual impact of the assemblage as a whole. There are no listed buildings within the compass of the proposed development area, but the site lies within the currently designated Bedminster West Conservation Area.

1.3 All information gathered during the project was collated, summarised and presented in the following report. All photocopies, manuscript copies and notes, including photographs, are preserved in the project archive to be stored at Avon Archaeological unit Ltd. A full list of documents and sources consulted can be found in the Bibliography and References section below.

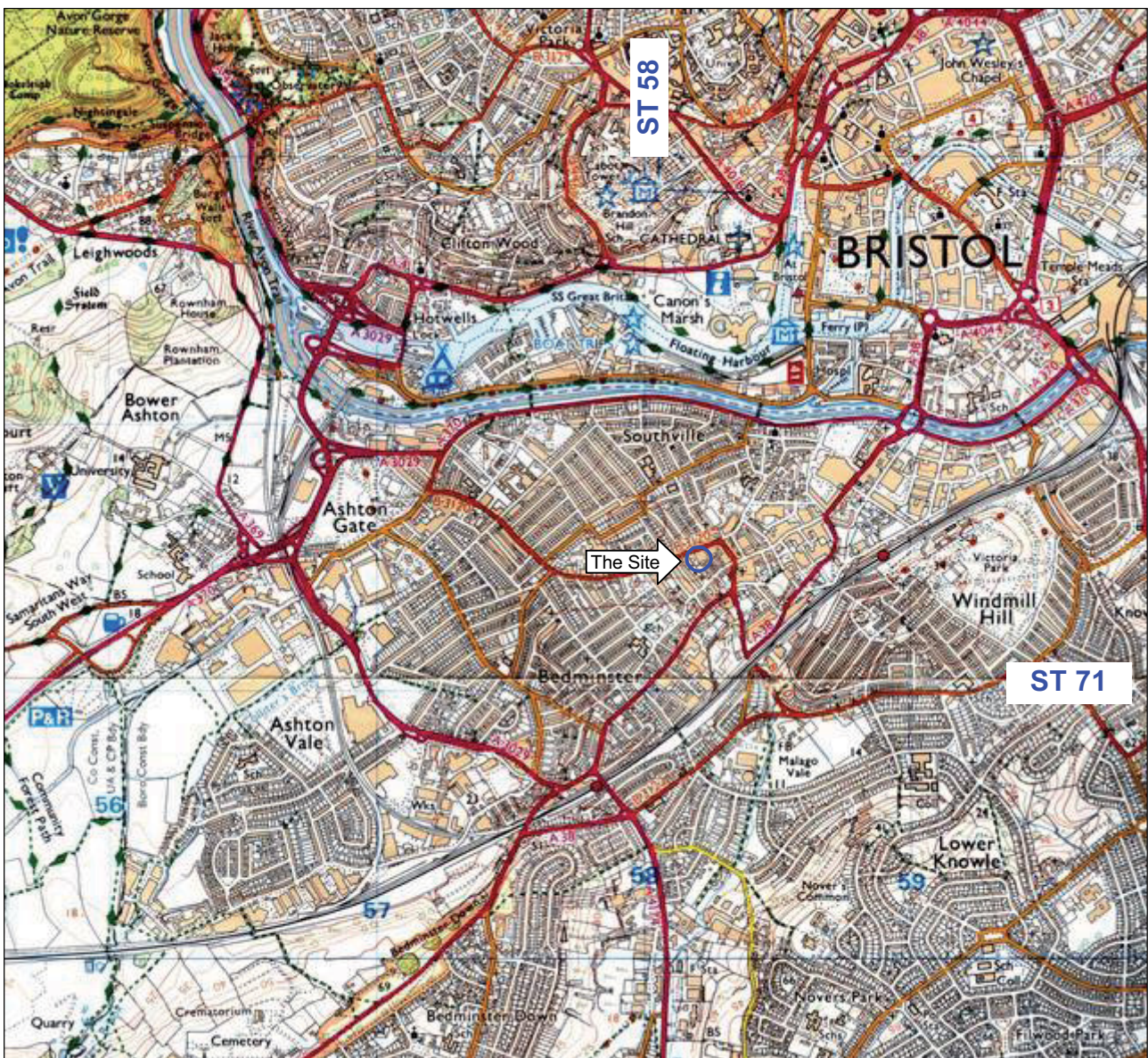
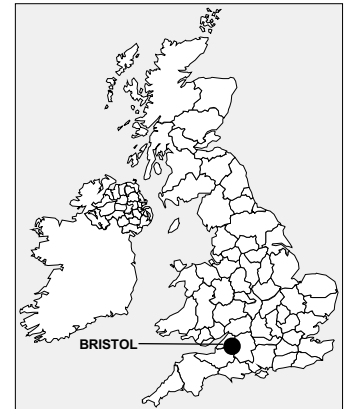
2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Searches were made of the indices of the collections of the Bristol Record Office, and appropriate material was consulted. Relevant printed material was examined at the Bristol Central Library, and a trawl was made of the Bristol Historic Environment Record, by Mr Peter Insole, HER Officer for Bristol City Council, on behalf of AAU Ltd, and encompassing a 500m radius around the development site. An Extensive Urban Survey, representing a joint study of the area's historic environment by English Heritage and Bristol City Council, provided a particularly useful source (La Trobe Bateman 1999). In addition, and thanks to the good offices of Mr Insole, historic planning applications were

Figure 1

Location of the Study Area 

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Scale 1:25,000

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Figure 2

Perimeter of the Study Area. 1:2000 scale



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0 100m

consulted at the offices of the Bristol City Planning Dept, and in the event these proved crucial in establishing a sequence of development for the original Rex Cinema building.

3 GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND CURRENT LAND USE

3.1 The underlying geology is Redcliffe Sandstone, a division of the Triassic Series, and found generally within the same facies as the Mercia Mudstone (formerly Keuper Marl) (Green 1992, 81). The ground in this area slopes naturally from south to north, as one might expect since Bedminster lies on the southern bank of the Avon, in its river valley. The main former cinema building is effectively terraced into the slope to its south, with ground level on the North Street frontage at about 12m aOD, and with the north-western end of Victoria Place, immediately adjacent to the south-eastern corner of the site, at about 16m aOD.

3.2 As might be expected on a site encompassing a relatively large area in a busy and built-up suburb of a major UK city, land use is varied. The single most extensive area, perhaps something over a half, is taken up by the building that was formerly The Rex Cinema, and latterly the Gala Bingo Hall. The building, which is surrounded on its southern, eastern and northern sides by strips of open ground, is now closed. Historic plans show that it, and its associated driveways and carparks, occupy the sites of several former houses and their garden plots, representing numbers 13-25, and 33-35 North Street. To the west, and excluded from the original cinema development, were numbers 27-31 North Street, also former houses, and now the premises of Messrs Barcan Woodward, Solicitors. It is important to note that at the time of writing (May 2010), these premises are *excluded* from the proposed scheme of development. The western end of the site is occupied by the retail premises of Carr Power Products, although only the westernmost block appears to be numbered (43-47 North Street) (**Plates 1-4**). Between Barcan and Carr, a wide driveway opens out into a large, rectangular area behind the street frontage, sloping northwards, and now used as a car park. The cinema building forms the south-eastern boundary of this area, and directly behind Carr's, an enclosed space is occupied by ancillary sheds. The main open area forms the extreme south-west corner of the site (**Figure 2**). The total area of the site amounts to 0.405ha, with 0.26ha accounted for by Gala Bingo, 0.107ha by Carr Power Products, and the remainder, some 0.038ha, occupied by the Barcan Woodward premises¹.

4 SITE VISIT

4.1 The author visited the site, in the company of Mr Julian Nuttall, of Urbis Development, on Wednesday, 5th May, 2010, and took a series of digital photographs of both the interior of the former cinema building itself, its exterior elevations, and also of the immediate environs including the other, adjacent sites under consideration as part of the present development proposals. A representative selection of the images captured during the site visit are discussed under the appropriate sections, below.

1 I am very grateful to Mr David Rhodes, of Green-Rhodes, Architects, for supplying this information.

5 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 Bedminster was a large ecclesiastical parish in northern Somerset, lying in the Hundred of Bedminster and Hartcliff. There is no *Victoria County History* covering this part of Somerset as yet, but an early account can be found in Collinson (1791, II, 280-288). Bedminster has also been the subject of an Extensive Urban Survey, carried out by the former Avon County Council (La Trobe Bateman, 1999).

At the former Mail Marketing site, there is evidence from a series of archaeological investigations, beginning in 2003, of multi-period activity which includes prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval remains, quite close to the study site, just to the south along West Street. The Romano-British phase here may represent a 3rd-4th century rural farmstead (Williams 2005, 128: Mail Marketing Site, West Street; BSMR 22159; Young, forthcoming), and these discoveries indicate that even in seemingly unprepossessing areas of Bedminster, archaeological survival may be better than one may first think. It has, indeed, been suggested that West Street may also follow the line of a Roman road between the Chew Valley and Almondsbury. The line of the road is known to follow the modern Bishopsworth and Bedminster Down Road (A38), before vanishing, only to reappear in the north of the city. The most obvious route for the road on leaving Bedminster Down would be along the line of West Street. In addition, the name *Chessel* appears as a street name just over 460m south-west of the centre of the study site. This is generally regarded as an archaeologically highly indicative name, especially with regard to Romano-British occupation, and the more so if an early spelling is available (Corcos 2009). In this case the name is indeed recorded in the mid-14th century, but it does not appear that any material of Roman date is known from that area at the present state of knowledge (Russell and Williams 1984, 25; Bristol HER 10903).

5.2 This area lay well beyond the limits of the Anglo-Saxon settlement of *Bricg Stowe* (Sivier 2002, 13), and activity of that date on the south side of the River Avon is as yet unattested *archaeologically*. However, the witness of Domesday Book suggests very strongly that there ought to be high-status occupation in this area at least by the late Anglo-Saxon period (Williams and Martin 2002, 231). In 1086, Bedminster was a large, royal manor held directly by the king, having previously been part of the Anglo-Saxon royal demesne. Its sheer size, as it emerged into the post-Conquest and modern periods as an ecclesiastical parish, is an indication that it was by no means of 'ordinary' origin. In the mid 19th century, its total tithable area amounted to 4,115 acres (1,665 ha), excluding only 44 acres (18 ha) which were counted as exempt from tithe (Bedminster Tithe Survey 1841-43, BRO EP/A/32/7). Domesday notes that in the late 11th century, the estate was unhidated, that is, it was not rated for geld, usually taken as a diagnostic indicator of a status as ancient, core royal land. However, even though there is no record of the number of hides at which Bedminster was rated, an indication of its size and agricultural potential is given by the number of *ploughlands* which Domesday records there, and at 26, this amounts to a very large estate (Costen 1992, 166, and notes 1 and 2)². In addition however, Domesday notes the presence of a priest holding land, and although it is not

2 It is also worth pointing out that of Bedminster's 26 ploughlands, only some 14 appear actually to have been cultivated (three in demesne, 10 by the customary tenants, and one by the priest). The inference is that there was scope for an expansion of agriculture amounting to something a little under a half the total size of the estate. The exact nature of the Domesday ploughland, and what it denotes in real terms, remains problematic, however: see especially Higham 1990.

explicitly stated, it can be presumed that this priest was attached to the church at Bedminster, again a relationship that is usually taken to indicate at least an origin as a mother church of high status, the land being a remnant of an original endowment, and the priest himself all that remained of a formerly collegiate institution (Blair 2005, 366-367).

5.3 Indeed, the place-name itself makes this much clear: Bedminster appears to derive from Old English *Beda*, a personal name, together with *mynster*, possibly commemorating either the church's founder, or the name of a priest attached to the church there (Costen 1992, 154). It has been suggested that the minster was in decline by 1086 (La Trobe Bateman 1999, 7), and in general terms, for a wide variety of reasons, this is indeed likely to have been the case (Blair 2005, 364-367); but even so, it is important to consider current ideas about the *physical* nature of high-status, pre-Conquest churches. These are now seen far more as sometimes dense *complexes* of buildings, which may well have had several churches, dwellings, workshops and other ancillary structures. Important middle Anglo-Saxon monastic sites, which Bedminster may well represent, seem to have been not only religious but also economic and political central places, and may in fact have had far more the appearance of somewhat sprawling, proto-urban settlements in their own right; indeed, John Blair has described such places as the nearest thing to towns that the period had to offer (Blair 2005, 246-290)³. This has direct implications for our view of these places in terms of the potential archaeological resource which they may represent, and in particular, for the possible existence of contemporary, *multiple* churches (Blair 2005, 199-204). In addition, modern ideas about the close relationship between early minsters and royal halls would point very strongly towards the possibility of there having previously existed a substantial timber hall, perhaps rather like that excavated by Philip Rahtz at Cheddar (Rahtz 1979), somewhere in the vicinity of the former medieval parish church of Street John Baptist, which lay just to the south-east at New John Street. Relationships with major Roman sites, and especially villas, are also a well-known part of this overall occupation mix (Blair 2005, 183-191 and 271-275; Bell 1978). It is likely that St John's represents the site of the original minster which gave its name to the settlement and its estate (Morris 1989, 131; for the specific local example of Cheddar, Blair 1996; and for the site of St John's, Dawson 1979). The church itself, especially in the post-medieval period, underwent a series of misfortunes. It has now gone, although probably very little original medieval fabric remained in it anyway, having been rebuilt once in the later 17th century following damage sustained during the Civil War, and again in the mid 19th century (Latimer 1970, 197, 244). In April 1941, the church then fell victim to a major enemy bombing raid, but the location remains a small, public open space, and lies only 250m away from the study site.

5.4 Bristol's rapid rise in the post-Conquest period to the status, intermittently, of England's second largest town, meant that Bedminster became overshadowed, and by the 18th century, it had become effectively a village suburb of its much larger neighbour. The somewhat complex descent of the manor through various landlords, with occasional reversions to the crown, is described by Collinson (1791, II, 280-288). However, a key

3 Bedminster does not appear in Dr Costen's list of major Somerset churches which may have been in existence by AD 750, applying a range of different criteria initially established by John Blair. However, this is by no means an absolute bar to its actually having done so; and indeed, it does appear to satisfy the basic requirements of attachment to a large, probably ancient royal manor, and possession of a priest at Domesday (Costen 1992, 105-107). It was also the mother church of the (admittedly post-Conquest) foundation of Street Mary Redcliffe (Ponsford 1987, 145-146), and, according to Collinson, of Street Thomas, in the city of Bristol, and Abbot's Leigh (Collinson 1791, II, 285).

date which should be noted is 1605, when it was bought by Sir Hugh Smyth, and by virtue of its size alone, its acquisition made that family, later of Ashton Court, among the most eminent landowners in the region. Most of the core settlement area of Bedminster village was deliberately razed in the Civil War period, reputedly on the orders of Prince Rupert (Latimer 1970, 197, 244). Coal-mining established itself as a major industry in south-west Bedminster from the 18th century onwards, and by the 19th century there were 15 pits in or close to the core settlement area. Other notable industries included tanning, rope-making, brick and tile-making, cigarette manufacture, printing and packaging (La Trobe Bateman, 1999).

5.5 Coupled with Bedminster's industrial expansion in the 19th century came a dramatic increase in population levels, a development which we may infer from Collinson's account, at the end of the 18th century, of how

This parish, which in ancient times consisted of only a few cottages, is now grown so populous and crowded with buildings, as to form a very considerable suburb of the city of Bristol, the principal street being the great road thereinto from the western parts of England (Collinson 1791, II, 280).

This testimony certainly seems to be borne out from the point in the late 18th century when cartographic evidence is of a sufficient quality to discern the extent of occupation in detail (see further below, Para. 7.2). In 1801, the population is recorded as 3,278. Within a century, this figure had risen to over 70,000. It was formally incorporated as part of greater Bristol in 1835. The increase came about partly due to the clearance of Bristol's slum areas in the 1880s, and relocation of their inhabitants to areas such as Bedminster. Growth continued in the 20th century, not least with the construction of large housing estates on the outskirts. This urban expansion led to the filling in of gaps that once existed between numerous settlements in the area. The Wills Tobacco Factory served as one of Bedminster's major employers in the 1920s and 30s.

6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

6.1 As already noted, the HER Officer for Bristol City Council carried out a trawl of the authority's HER database on behalf of AAU Ltd, and supplied the results for the purposes of this report.

6.2 The search revealed that there are no items from the HER within the strict compass of the study area *itself* which might be considered to have direct implications for the proposed development, with the sole exception of the Gala Bingo (Rex Cinema) building, which is designated as HER 3158M – although it is not listed, its historical significance is considered such as to justify its appearance on the HER, and the present work will now allow its formal description in that list to be corrected and greatly expanded.

6.3 However, and with the above exception, while the study site itself does not contain any items listed on the HER, it is nonetheless the case that there are sites close by which should constitute material considerations in the formulation of any archaeological or historic buildings mitigation strategy in relation to the site. HER 24585, 2670M, No. 49 North Street, is a 17th century dwelling, probably originally a modest yeoman farmhouse and recently listed by English Heritage. It was only recently identified as being of

potentially significant historic and architectural interest, and lies immediately adjacent to the western end of the study site frontage onto North Street (Corcos 2007). In 2008, a watching brief carried out at 177 East Street (HER 24595), only about 100m south-east of the study site's southern boundary, revealed a complex range of both cut features and structures, with finds from the 12th-19th centuries, and most importantly, a pit containing an exceptional and important assemblage of 18th century artefacts of many types, many of them complete. This was completely unexpected, and must give pause to views about what might be expected to survive in an intensely-developed semi-urban setting such as Bedminster. The discovery of occupation remains of Roman date about 400m to the south in West Street (HER 21690; see above, Para. 5), also indicates at least the possibility of further finds of this date in the immediate area. In terms of the built environment generally, there are individual elements of this part of the North Street frontage, or buildings and structures directly related or associated with it, which may be seen as material considerations in terms of the visual impact of the proposed development. Among the most notable are the Ebenezer Chapel, and an associated burial ground, now an open grassed area, both immediately south of the development site; and a pair of splendid, late 19th century ornamental iron gates, framed by a freestone monumental arch, fronting on to North Street and giving access to the chapel via a narrow alleyway behind, running NW-SE. The alleyway separates the western end of the development site from the listed building No. 49, and it is intended that the full restoration of the gates and their framing arch would be an integral part of the proposed development (*pers comm* Mr Julian Nuttall). Note that *neither* the Ebenezer Chapel itself, or the gates, are currently listed buildings. In the case of the former, this is probably because it has undergone extensive modernisation since its construction in the late 19th century.

6.4 In addition, both within and surrounding the development site, there survive a range of stone-built wall lines, delineating former and current building lines and property boundaries, sometimes of crude construction, and many of them incomplete, damaged and/or in poor condition (**Frontispiece** and **Plate 16**). Nonetheless, these again may be considered to form a notable element in the overall pattern of survival relating to the historic built environment.

7 CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

7.1 The inclusion of the study site within the compass of a major secular estate from the early 17th century, is fortunate in that from the mid to late 17th century onwards, major landlords were no longer content simply to list their holdings in *written* surveys, or so-called terriers; but were instead among the earliest systematic adopters of the new and rapidly expanding science of land survey – indeed, it is no coincidence that the rise of surveying as a profession can be traced to exactly this period. The upshot is that there survives in the Bristol Record Office, mainly among the archive of the Smyth estate, a series of maps and plans which depict the study site from the late 18th century onwards, albeit with varying degrees of usefulness.

7.2 The first cartographic source that shows the area of the site in any useful detail appears to date from the late 18th century (but before 1786), and is a Smyth estate plan (BRO AC/PL /92, **Fig. 3**). Property boundaries at this relatively early date seem to be composed entirely of 'soft' fences such as hedges, some of them no doubt with associated

ditches. The study site, shaded in blue, probably encompasses, either in whole or in part, the plots labelled on this plan as 638, 639, 640, 641, 642 and 644. Extensive changes since the late 18th century may not allow exact correlations between the site boundaries and those shown on this map, and in particular the exact line and position of the eastern, elongated extension is somewhat problematic. But a useful element of stability is Plot 638, which almost certainly represents the later site of the Ebenezer Chapel, sited at its southern end. Also, the back lane running SW-NE, and which forms the rear boundary of the plots fronting North Street, certainly marks the line of the present British Road. Likewise, the north-south lane bounding the western side of the group of plots of which the study area forms part, clearly represents the line of the later Hebron Road. The probable line of the later Braunton Road is also indicated. Another landmark is a characteristic kink at the northern end of the western boundary of Plot 638, which is picked up in the later OS maps. The overwhelming majority of the land behind the built-up frontage on both the southern and northern side of North Street, is given over to large garden and orchard plots. However, a continuous building line fronting North Street is depicted at the northern end of Plots 638, 639 and 640, and a detached building fronting Plot 641. Presuming that the latter stood on what is now the Gala Bingo site, then it clearly no longer survives; however, as to the former, while it cannot be certain without a systematic standing building survey that anything of their actual *fabric* remains above ground in either the Barcan Woodward, or Carr Power premises, there is at least the possibility that pre-late 18th century structures may survive below ground on both of those sites.

7.3 A superb plan of 1827, again a product of the Smyth estate, in a minute hand at a tiny scale, fills in some gaps at a slightly later date (BRO AC/PL/107/1; **Fig. 4**). Although it is not possible to be absolutely certain, it seems very likely, from the hard lines used to delineate them, that the majority of property boundaries had by this time been formalised and 'hardened' with stone walls. Some surviving walls on and around the study site may, therefore, be of late 18th-early 19th century date. The plan adopts a different numbering scheme from its 18th century predecessor, but correlation with both the latter and the later 19th century OS, allows a reasonable attempt to be made at delineating the site boundary on this plan. By this date it is clear that the frontage at this eastern end of North Street, on the southern side, was now virtually a continuous building line, with the notable exception of the very large enclosure right on the corner with Cannon Street, which remained undeveloped, and probably an orchard, well into the late 19th century (below). As also with the previous plan, there is little helpful detail about the nature of the buildings on the street frontage, but we may presume a mixture of houses and businesses, with at least some combining the two functions. And while the plots behind the street frontage remain very largely undeveloped at this date, the map clearly indicates the existence of rear yards and outbuildings, as well as the houses themselves, that may well have left archaeological survivals. It is also very significant that by this date, all of the plots in the development site block had had transverse boundaries inserted in them, in varying positions but the overall effect of which was to divide them into two or more smaller plots. The properties fronting North Street no longer had the luxury of plots which ran all the way back to the line of the later British Road, and this process from thenceforth left the way open for the proto-British Road frontage to be developed in its own right. One of these plots, 2171, provided the site for the late 19th century Ebenezer Chapel. It is highly likely that surviving elements of both the Carr Power and Barcan Woodward premises, are represented on this map.

7.4 The map described above has with it an accompanying terrier of 1826, BRO AC/E21/1, which contains some information about the individual plots depicted on the map, occupation, use, area (intermittently) and the grant of leases where applicable. These were usually taken out for three lives, most often for spouses and children. The landowner for all these premises was, of course, the Smyth estate. This is set out in the table below, plot numbers are as indicated on the map.

PLOT NO.	DESCRIPTION	AREA (acres-roods-perches)	OCCUPIER
2159	Orchard	0-1-38	John Morgan
2160	Garden	0-1-9	John Morgan
2163	Garden	0-1-2	Rvnd. R. Watson, 'sundry tenements'
2170	Garden	0-1-13	As above
2171	House, outbuilding and garden		Henry Shill Lease granted 1804 for three lives
2172	Garden		Henry Shill Lease as above
2173	Three houses, outbuilding etc		Henry Shill Lease as above
2182	House, garden, outbuildings, pleasure of yard	0-2-14	Robert Ring, himself & others
2183	House, outbuildings and gardens	0-1-26	John Cliburne Lease granted 1788 for three lives
2187	House, yards, outbuildings and garden	0-1-31	John Cliburne Lease as above
2188	As for 2187		John Cliburne Lease as above

It is clear that this book continued as a working document for many years after its first use in 1826, for it is full of pencilled amendments, mainly where the names of occupiers have been crossed out and new ones inserted. It was effectively a working register of historic leases. It is also clear that some of the larger tenants were landlords in their own right, sub-letting their holdings to others. For example, although none are noted in the table because they are not directly related to the study area, the terrier notes that the Rvd Watson held several houses, plots, orchards and other tenements, which he could not possibly have occupied or worked just by himself, although names of sub-tenants are not given. It is also clear that the system of leases for lives gave considerable scope for premises to become, effectively, heritable: the lease granted to John Cliburne in 1778 had by 1826 passed, presumably, to his son, also John, but who was only 4 years of age at the earlier date; John senior would otherwise have been impossibly old by 1826. Gardens could be leased completely independently of houses, and facilities such as yards were sometimes shared, as in the case of Plot 2182, in which Robert Ring and his co-holders had the 'pleasure of yard'.

7.5 The next available map in chronological order is very close in time to previous one, but unfortunately cannot be said to be terribly useful for present purposes. It is Plummer and Ashmead's plan of Bristol, the first of three from that source, the latter two from Ashmead alone. The first is dated 1828, and Bedminster appears only on the very southern edge of the map, with very little detail shown. The study area can be

approximately located, but that is all (BRO 40860, Sheet 90; **Fig. 5**). The map depicts the site as an undifferentiated plot, with a virtually continuous building line fronting North Street, divided into two long blocks, separated by a narrow gap. Some caution may be necessary in treating this as a literal interpretation of reality, but it does confirm the impression of a fully developed street frontage in this area by this date. No detail to the south is shown, so whatever occupies the rear on the tenements is invisible to us. For these reasons, it has been impossible here to make anything other than a basic attempt to outline the study site, based mainly on a comparison from earlier maps of the position of boundaries on the northern side of the street.

7.6 In many cases the tithe records would provide key evidence, but in this case the tithe map for Bedminster, of 1841, is rather a disappointment, and like the 1828 Plummer and Ashmead, it lacks detail on the North Street frontage (BRO EP/A/32/7 – Tithe Map and Apportionment, Bedminster Parish, 1841-43; **Fig. 6**). There is effectively no detail shown on the developed street frontage, and only a selection of boundaries is shown behind the buildings. A colour wash differentiates between residential dwellings (orange) and workshops and other ancillary buildings (grey), so that at least it is possible to see that, for example, the rear of Plot 602 is still occupied by the non-residential building that first appears on Plot 2164 on the Smyth map of 1827. Whatever this building is (it does not appear to be mentioned in the accompanying Apportionment) it is well within the footprint of the proposed development. This map also marks the appearance of a Wesleyan Chapel, on its own plot, 605 (HER 2404M). This further demonstrates that since 1827, transverse subdivision of the original long plots stretching back behind the North Street frontage had continued, with the chapel plot being created by adding a boundary at the southern end of Plot 2170 of 1827. It is also clear that while Plot 604 is listed in the Tithe Apportionment as 'garden', it was later appropriated as the burial ground for the chapel (HER 2398M), and this is highly relevant because its northern boundary marches with the southern boundary of the proposed development site. In this regard it may be more than coincidence that the owner of this garden is given as Rvd Robert Watson, who we remember from the 1826 terrier accompanying the 1827 Smyth map. It may well have been this gentleman who had some hand in the garden's later change of use. Tithe Plot 600 also indicates that the lane running parallel to it on its north-eastern side is clearly the later Victoria Place, and that at least the north-eastern half of the double-terrace row that emerges on the later maps, and survives today, was in place by this date. The following table gives details taken from the Tithe Apportionment of those holdings of 1841 which probably lay within the development footprint.

PLOT NO.	OWNER	OCCUPIER	NAME OF PREMISES	USE	AREA (acres-roods-perches)
597	Sir John Smyth	John Smith	Orchard	Arable orchard	0-1-38
598	Do.	Do.	Houses & gardens		0-1-26
599	Do.	Do.	Do.		Incl. Plots 593,594,595,596,599. Total area 0-2-28
600	Do.	Do.	Houses, gardens & path		0-1-2
601	Do.	Do.	Garden		0-1-18
602	Do.	Do.	Houses & gardens		0-1-3
603	Do.	Do.	Do.		1-1-5
604	Revnd. Robt. Watson	George Williams	Garden		0-0-27
606	Do.	Do.	House & garden		0-2-14
607	Do.	Do.	Do.		0-2-14

7.7 The following two available maps are both by Ashmead, and are his surveys of 1854 and 1874; the former was Ashmead's first survey to include Bristol's rapidly expanding suburbs in any detail (BRO/40860; Sheet 90; **Fig. 7**). There is no description or survey to accompany either of these maps, but because they are drawn at a larger scale than their predecessor of 1828, the detail depicted is correspondingly greater. However, since there is apparently very little change in the area of the study site between the two dates, only the earlier map, of 1854, is shown here, because the Bristol Record Office copies are clearer and in a far better state of preservation than the later survey. The modern bounds of the study site can now be superimposed with reasonable confidence, and it is clear that in the thirteen or so years since the Tithe Map, development *behind* the street frontage has continued apace. The small terraces of Jubilee Place and Berkeley Square have appeared on the western side of the site, and within its footprint; both terraces have now gone, and seem clearly to lie underneath the Carr Power premises, and its yards and outbuildings. Albert Place has been established immediately south-west of Victoria Place. The northern end of Albert Place marches with the development site's southern boundary, and indeed, it is now clear that the northernmost house in Albert Place has gone and its site lies within the development area footprint. The present solicitors' premises may well be represented at least in part by the central block on the site's street frontage, shown here for reference with a dashed outline. The early Wesleyan Chapel is shown but, crucially, it is not explicitly clear just from the map whether the area of ground immediately to its north was at this date in use for burial. This is also the first systematic attempt at street numbering, with the terrace at the eastern end of the site numbered 1-5.

7.8 Following hard on the heels of Ashmead's 1874 survey, there follow in quick succession three OS maps at 1:2500 scale⁴ (**Figs. 8 to 10**). The development site is

⁴ Because it is an urban area, there is also a First Edition OS Plan at 1:500 scale, surveyed at the same time as the 1:2500, but this does not show as wide an area around the site and is therefore not as useful for context.

depicted on Gloucestershire Sheet 75.4, and in fact this numbering does not change through the series used here. The maps were surveyed in, respectively, 1881-82 (First Edition), 1902 (Second Edition), and 1913 (Third Edition). The First Edition shows that in fact, there had not been a great deal of change within the study area since 1854. The Wesleyan Chapel has acquired an ancillary building to its north, identified as a Sunday School, and the open area beyond it, between it and Berkeley Square, is now explicitly identified as being set aside for burial. There is some difficulty of interpretation in that unlike later editions, this first OS survey at this scale does not shade buildings or in some other way differentiate them from other land uses. What is perhaps surprising at this late date, however, is the amount of back-plot land that yet remains as open gardens or orchards, most notable the large, curvilinear enclosure which forms the frontage corner between Cannon and North Streets. This is clearly depicted as an orchard. Clyde Terrace has not yet appeared, its later site still orchards.

7.9 By 1902, there has, however, been considerable change. The new Ebenezer Chapel has appeared, at the southern end of the plot immediately south-west of the old chapel, and a house on the North Street frontage has been removed to make way for the access alleyway to it from that direction, together with, presumably, the erection of the decorative iron gates and freestone arch which yet survive. Very large buildings, probably warehouses or workshops, have appeared immediately north of the westernmost terrace on the western side of Victoria Place, and these lie right behind the current Barcan Woodward offices. The orchard on the corner of Cannon and North Streets has gone, and that entire eastern block is now fully developed, including a new row of houses forming the north-eastern side of Victoria Place. A large building in the middle of this new terrace, clearly an integrated part of its layout from the outset, is not, unfortunately, identified, but it may be related to the new Bedminster Town Hall, immediately to its north-east and to which it appears to be linked by a building which connects the two. It can also for the first time now be seen that the unusual, long extension protruding from the study site's south-eastern corner, in fact represents the former site of a house and its front and rear yards in this 'new' row. From later evidence, we know this to be No. 20 Victoria Place, and it is interesting to note that, unlike the other houses on this side of Victoria Place, No. 20 appears to have enjoyed access to spaces at both front *and* rear – the front area, may, indeed have been a garden. And it now also becomes clear that the surviving short length of stone wall at the extreme south-eastern corner of the development site (**Plate 16**), represents the south-western boundary wall of No. 20's front open space. The wall itself may of course be considerably older, inherited from an earlier phase of stone property boundaries - a boundary in approximately this position is discernible on the map of 1827 (**Fig. 3**). It is most likely that the loss of No. 20, leaving its site empty and derelict up to the present time, was due to its falling victim to the same German bombing raid, in April 1941, which also devastated the then brand new cinema that was its immediate neighbour to the south-west (see further below). Tram lines have appeared in Cannon Street, East Street, and North Street itself, and Clyde Terrace, and its associated houses, has now been pushed through on the line of a former property boundary immediately west of the new chapel.

7.10 By the time of the 1913 edition of the OS 1:2500 map, there has, as might be expected, been little change in such a short interval. The large, probably commercial buildings behind the present Barcan Woodward offices, have been extended to the south, so that the area between the northern end of the western row of Victoria Place, and the

North Street frontage, is now fully developed. Open spaces remain however, most notably the long yards or gardens associated with the little terrace of five houses on the north-eastern corner of the development site.

8 THE GALA BINGO/REX CINEMA SITE: DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCE

8.1 The face that the Gala Bingo building currently presents to the world is perhaps most kindly described as 'unprepossessing' (**Plate 1**). This somewhat sad external appearance disguises, however, internal spaces and features which are not without their own merit, and perhaps even a degree of historical importance. These are briefly related in the series of images, with descriptive captions, reproduced here as **Plates 5 to 15**; and it has now proved possible to piece together a coherent narrative of the building's history from primary sources held at the Bristol Record Office, and the Bristol City Council Planning Office.

8.2 The original series of building plans for the cinema survive in the BRO (Building Plans, Vol. 152, fos. 20, 21, 74, 75, 76), and there are numerous versions. The first was submitted for consideration in July 1936⁵, and there follows a whole series of subsequent applications running to August 1940. It is clear that initial designs for at least the front elevation of the building, were not without some ambition, and included classical columns fronting on to North Street (**Fig. 11**). At this point, the cinema did not have a name. The various ground plans for the site, however, crucially reveal what it was proposed to remove to make way for the cinema, and what was to be kept. A site plan of 1938 (**Fig. 12**) shows the then current numbering on this side of North Street, and this is, indeed, the numbering which remains current today; it has, inevitably, been revised since Ashmead's map of 1854. The five houses numbered 1-5 on Ashmead's plan, and which are shown on all the OS maps, have survived, having been renumbered 15-23, and are earmarked for removal. The next house 25, has also been thus marked, as has a group of three houses to the west, numbers 33-35. Between these two small blocks however, and for reasons which have not become apparent in the course of this research, numbers 27-31 North Street, the current Barcan Woodward offices, were always *excluded* from the cinema development, and this has clearly contributed to their survival. The plan also appears to show that at this stage, it was not intended to include the long narrow extension to the site which we can now see from this ground plan to belong to No. 20 Victoria Place, and this must therefore have been a subsequent addition at an as yet unknown date.

8.3 The cinema went through a whole series of design amendments, which mainly leant towards making the external elevations slightly more austere, as well as a host of internal changes, both major and minor, required by the then Office of the City Engineer. By 1938, front elevation drawings, and other documentation, show that the cinema had a name: The Ritz (**Fig. 13**). Almost up to the point of its opening, all the internal elevations and sections of the building show that it had been designed to accommodate an upper balcony (**Fig. 14**). However, the very final plan in the series, dated for approval in August 1940, shows that almost at the last minute, the balcony was abandoned, and the access doors to it were to be bricked up. The cinema opened in December 1940, with a last-

⁵ Charles Anderson is therefore incorrect to state that The Rex "was first planned by Union Cinemas in 1937"; Anderson 1983, 67.

minute change of name to The Rex (the reason for which is unclear), and ground-floor accommodation only (**Fig. 15**)⁶. There can be no doubting the reason for the sudden change of design. Britain had, at this date, been at war with Germany for over a year, and it would have been nigh on impossible to obtain either the manpower, or the supplies of structural steel necessary for supporting stanchions, to construct a cinema balcony; such an undertaking would have been seen as having an effectively zero priority. Stephenson and Willmott publish a photograph, unfortunately undated, of the interior of The Rex, showing a large, austere, barn-like space, and without the balcony which is in place today; but because of the building's subsequent experience, it is impossible to be certain whether or not this image is of the *original* cinema (Stephenson and Willmott 2005, 94-95).

8.4 Only four months after opening, on Friday, April 11th, 1941 (Good Friday in that year), Bristol, and Bedminster in particular, suffered a devastating raid from enemy bombers. Extensive damage was done, The Rex Cinema was gutted, and a notice in the *Western Daily Press & Bristol Mirror* for the following Wednesday, 16th April, announces that it was then closed indefinitely. The Rex is then absent from the newspaper for a while, but rebuilding must have been swift, and only five months later, on Monday, August 11th, a further newspaper advertisement shows that The Rex had reopened, but still, as is clear from later evidence, *without* a balcony at that date.

8.5 The narrative is continued from a series of historic planning applications relating to the cinema held at the Bristol City Council Planning Office, under File No. 15723⁷. It is clear from these papers that the present balcony in the old Rex Cinema building, is an addition of the mid 1950s. With the war long over and structural materials again in reasonable supply for civilian building projects, the first application for this work was received by the City Engineer's Office in Sept. 1955 (Application No. 2472/55), and there follow a whole series of amendments and design changes, along with extensive correspondence between the City Engineer's Office and all the interested parties, much of it concerned with the loading tolerances of the structural steelwork required for the new balcony. Work was clearly well advanced by the summer of 1956, because on 28th June of that year, the structural engineers carrying out the work wrote to the City Engineer informing him that

.....we are complying with your instructions regarding the welding of the flange plate on the main plate girder at the above site.....

Thereafter, The Rex continued in its intended function as a cinema. In 1968, however, a planning application (No. 696P/68) was received for a change of use to "indoor games", although the change itself did not come about for several years afterwards. As late as 1978, for example, another application was submitted for a change of use from cinema to bingo and social club (No. 285P/78S), and Stephenson and Willmott (94) note that The Rex finally closed as cinema in August 1980. An application from 1981 (No. 0942P/81S) is, however, of particular interest, because it states explicitly that

the heating and ventilation system that existed for the original cinema is to be reinstated to its original efficient function.

6 A notice advertising the cinema's opening, under its 'new' name, appears in the *Western Daily Press & Bristol Mirror* for Tuesday, Dec. 10th, 1940.

7 I am extremely grateful to Peter Insole for arranging access to this crucial source.

This presumably explains why the original (1940s?) machinery survives to this day (**Plate 15**). Another observation by Stephenson and Willmott is worth noting here: they state that in the course of its conversion for use as a bingo hall, “the interior has been restored with great integrity” (2005, 94).

8.6 From all this evidence then, it is clear that The Rex Cinema building went through no fewer than four phases of development, although it is doubtful whether much survives at all from the first, very short-lived phase, and we must also now wonder how much of the surviving interior should be attributed to the very latest, early 1980s changes. It is regrettable that not a single photograph could be found of the complete exterior elevation of the building in its heyday, although that is not to say that none exists. Also, because, presumably, of the wartime conditions, it is not possible to say with any certainty whether the *rebuilt* Rex was constructed to exactly the same design as the old one – it seems rather more likely that corners were cut, as it were, both because of wartime restrictions on materials and manpower, and also to get the building back up and running as quickly as possible. Certainly, it is clear that at least one element of the original design has survived, whether as original (pre-bombing) fabric, or from the rebuild, and that is the stairwell block immediately to the left of the entrance foyer on the front elevation, with its characteristic tall, narrow window for lighting the staircase (**Fig. 13**, and **Plates 1** and **7**). Indeed, the entrance structure itself, even in its present state, looks on the face of it to conform pretty closely with the 1938 elevation. A detailed comparison between the surviving fabric of the building and the original series of plans in the BRO might go some way to elucidating further survivals, but that task is beyond the scope of the present study.

9 CONCLUSION

9.1 There has previously been no archaeological, buildings survey or recording work within the compass of the study site itself, although such work has been carried out nearby, most notably at 49 North Street, immediately adjacent to the western frontage of the site, which revealed the unexpected survival of a 17th century house. North Street was a major routeway leading westwards out of Bristol in the medieval period, and therefore might reasonably be expected to have carried some building development at that time, especially at its eastern end. Indeed, from the point at which the first detailed maps of the area become available in the late 18th century, it is clear that this part of the southern side of North Street has been subjected to antecedent development, and it is at least possible that this may be reflected in surviving, sub-surface archaeology that one might expect to encounter within a regulated medieval settlement very close to a major urban centre – rubbish and cess pits, drains, ditches, outbuildings, workshops and yards etc.

9.2 The construction of The Rex Cinema, now the Gala Bingo Hall, in the late 1930s required the demolition of existing properties at the eastern end of the site, and trenching for foundations, and reductions of level in this area make the prospect of archaeological survival problematic, but by no means impossible. Assuming at least a degree of survival, then the footprints of 18th and 19th century houses, with their associated yards and outbuildings, might be expected from the map evidence alone; and the fortunate presence of 49 North Street as a standing building very close by, holds out at least the possibility of an even earlier, buried stratum of building history. Certainly No. 20 Victoria Place, the

construction of which can be closely dated from the map evidence to the twenty or so years between 1881-82 and 1902, may well survive archaeologically *if* its site has indeed lain derelict and untouched since the early 1940s.

9.3 A coherent sequence of development, from primary historical sources, has been mapped out for the cinema building itself, and the surviving fabric can now at least be placed firmly in its historical context. Externally, the building appears, frankly, far from special, although major elements of the original late 1930s design clearly survive. Internally however, surviving fixtures, fittings, aspects of the decoration, and preservation of apparently original air-extraction machinery, may suggest that the immediate external impression of general dishevelment is actually more apparent than real; this said though, an important question mark remains over the exact extent and nature of the 'restoration' that was carried out in the early 1980s.

9.4 The other buildings on the site, while on the face of it having little of architectural or historic interest to offer, may also to some extent be the victims of inevitable first impressions. The Barcan Woodward 'complex' is explicitly excluded from the development scheme as presently constituted. It is worth noting, however, that pitched rooflines behind the two-storey street frontage, and a varying height line to the front elevation, all hint that *internally*, there may be elements of architectural survival – again, the late 18th map evidence seems strongly to indicate buildings in this position by that date (**Fig. 1**). This, however, remains speculation as it was not possible to arrange an internal inspection of the building.

9.5 The brick frontage of the Carr Power building presents a face of unremitting, functional, boxy modernity. But it should be noted that this applies *only* to the three-storeyed eastern section, which appears, one must concede, almost completely without architectural merit. By contrast, the *western* half of the structure, of two storeys, has a roofline and windows which might suggest perhaps a degree of 18th or 19th century survival, at least in the upper level and roof, and even allowing that the entire ground floor has been knocked through and opened up into effectively a single space for retail and storage use.

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BRO 40860, Ashmead, Map of the Borough of Bristol, 1854, **Sheet 90**.

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Bristol City Planning Office

Archive File No. 15723, historic planning applications for The Rex Cinema, North Street, Bedminster, 1955 onwards.

Figure 3

Extract from Smyth Estate Map, Parish of Bedminster, late 18th century

BRO AC/PL/92

Footprint of Study Area shaded blue



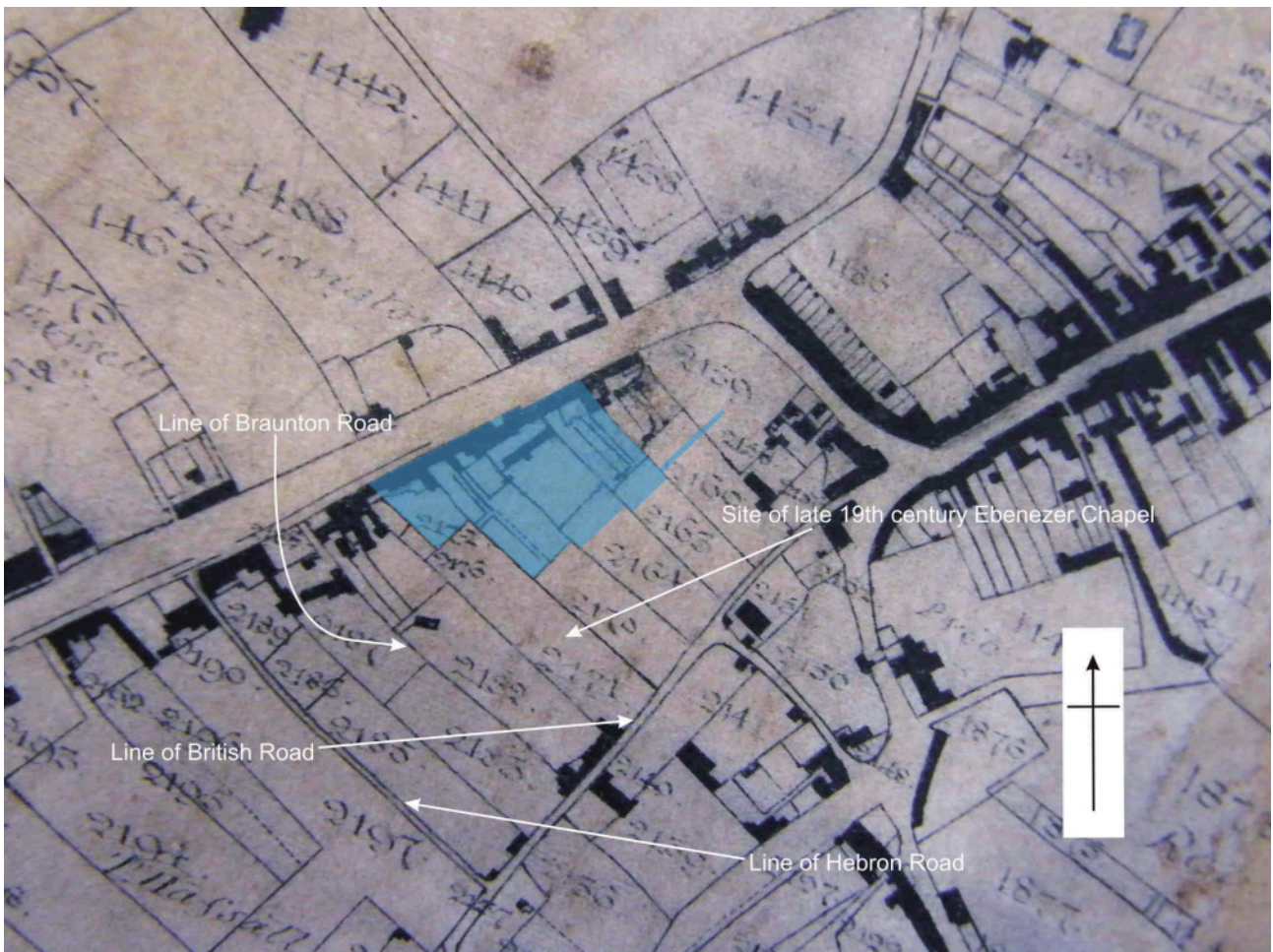
Not to scale

Figure 4

Extract from Smyth Estate Map, Parish of Bedminster, 1827

BRO AC/PL/107/1

Footprint of Study Area shaded blue



Not to scale

Figure 5

Extract from Plummer and Ashmead, Map of the Borough of Bristol, 1828

BRO 40860

Footprint of Study Area shaded blue



Not to scale

Figure 6

Extract from Tithe Map of the Parish of Bedminster, 1841

BRO EP/A/32/7

Footprint of Study Area shaded blue



Not to scale

Figure 7

Extract from Ashmead's Map of the Borough of Bristol, Sheet 90, 1854.

BRO 40860

Footprint of Study Area shaded blue



Not to scale

Figure 8

Extract from OS 1:2500 First Edition Map, Gloucestershire Sheet 75.4, 1881-82.

BRO

Footprint of Study Area shaded blue



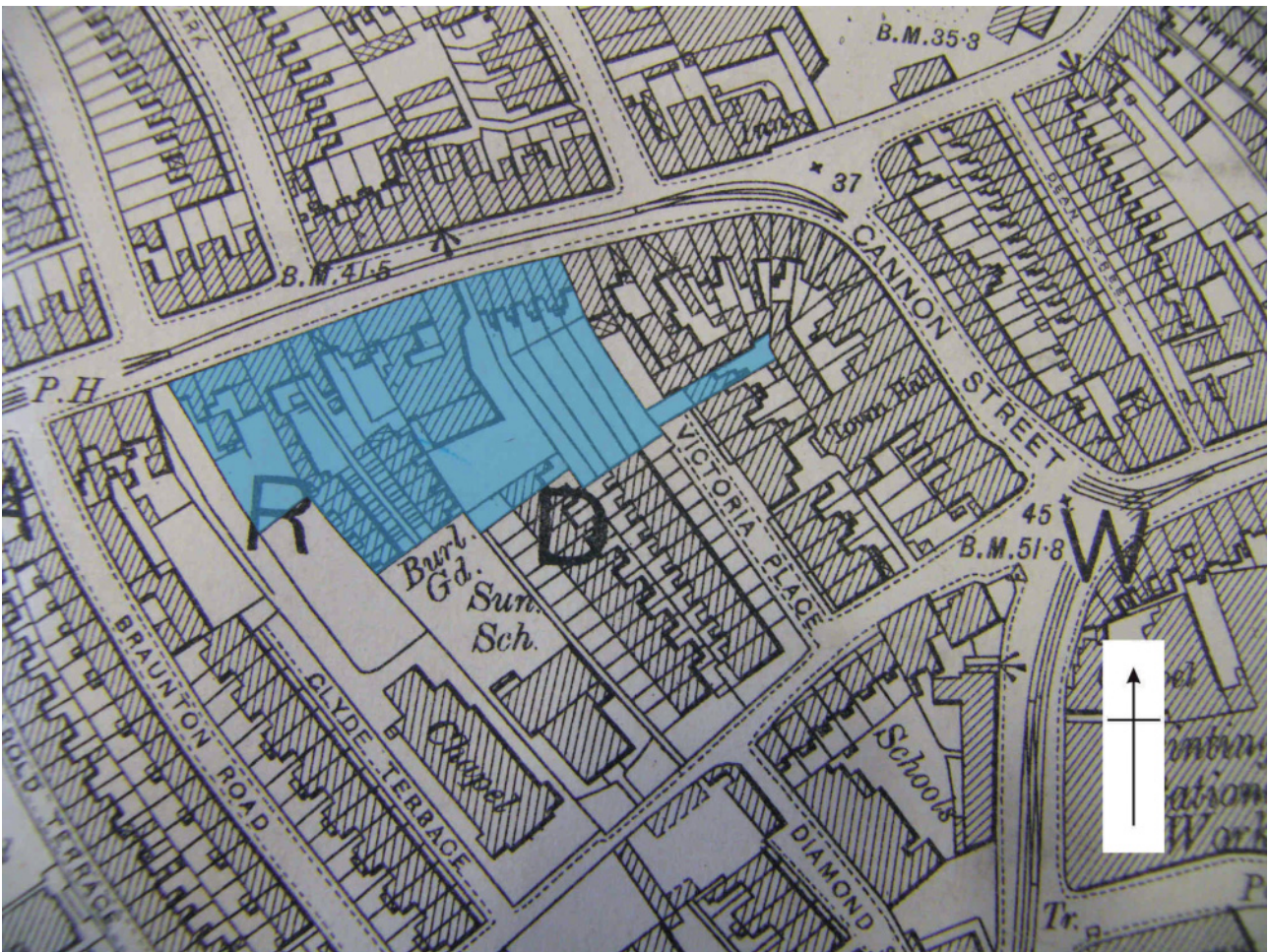
Not to scale

Figure 9

Extract from OS 1:2500 Second Edition Map, Gloucestershire Sheet 75.4,
1902

BRO

Footprint of Study Area shaded blue



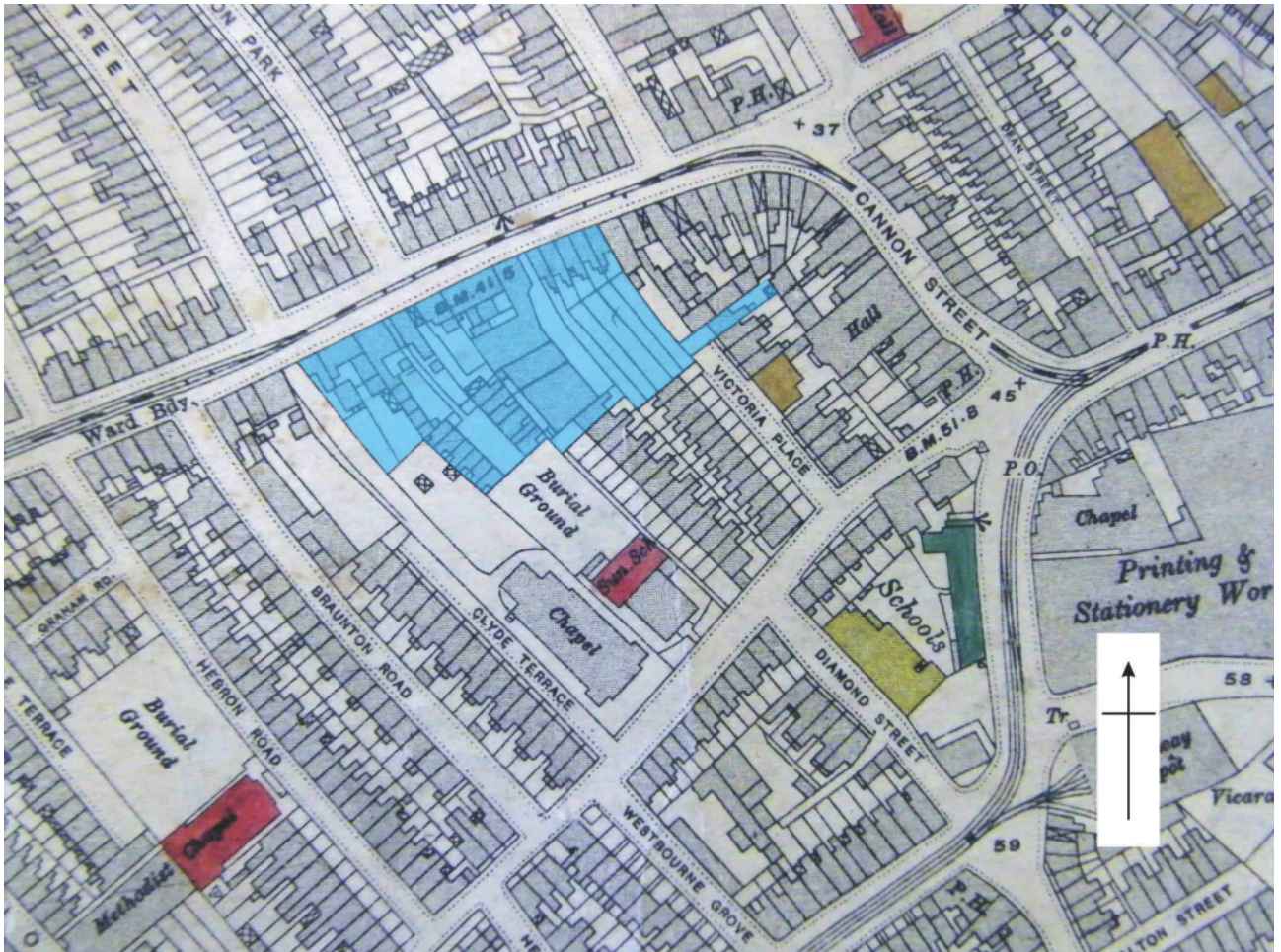
Not to scale

Figure 10

Extract from OS 1:2500 Third Edition Map, Gloucestershire Sheet 75.4, 1913

BRO

Footprint of Study Area shaded blue

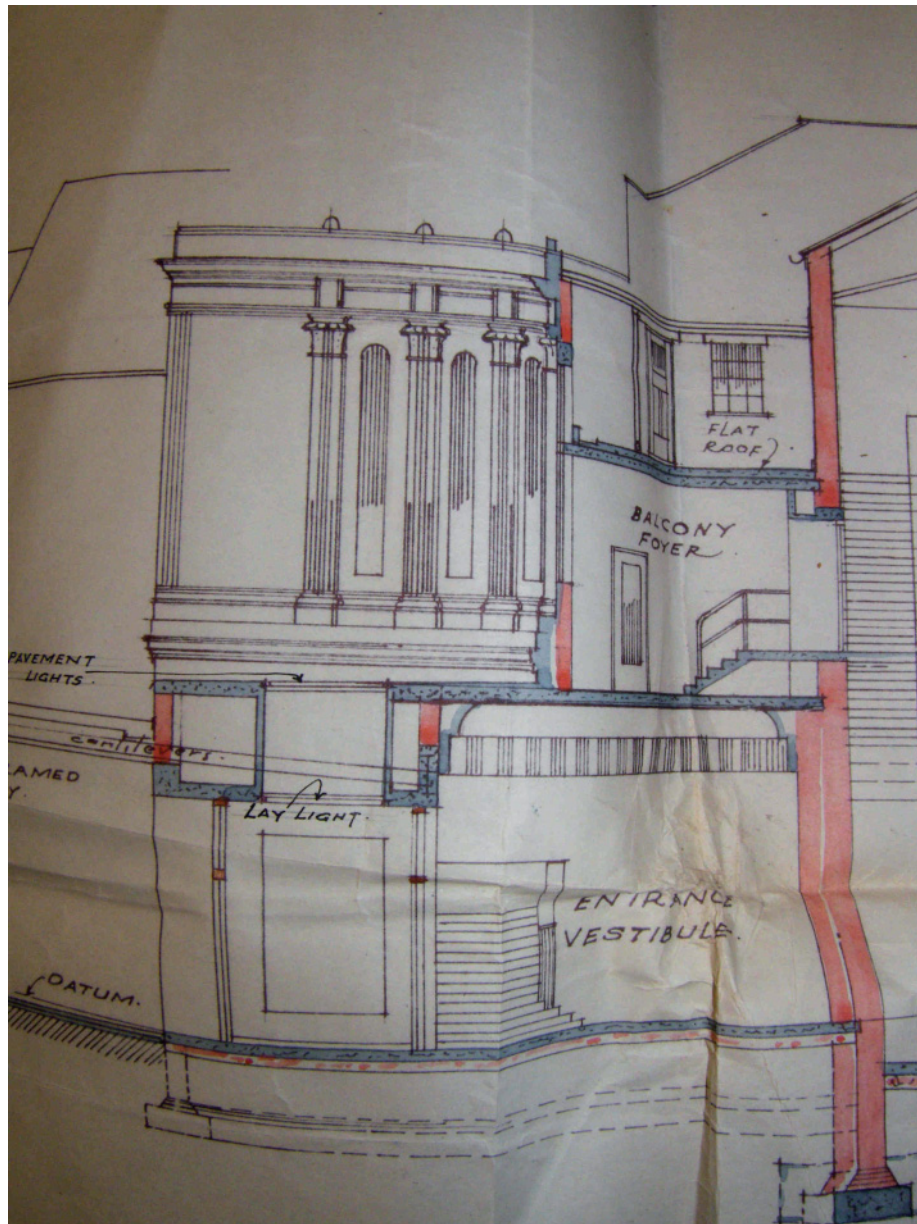


Not to scale

Figure 11

Early design for front elevation of proposed new cinema, showing classical columns, capitals and pediment. 1936.

BRO Building Plan Volume 152/20c.



Not to scale

Figure 12

Plan showing outline of cinema site superimposed on pre-existing properties and boundaries. 1938.

BRO Building Plan Volume 152/20.

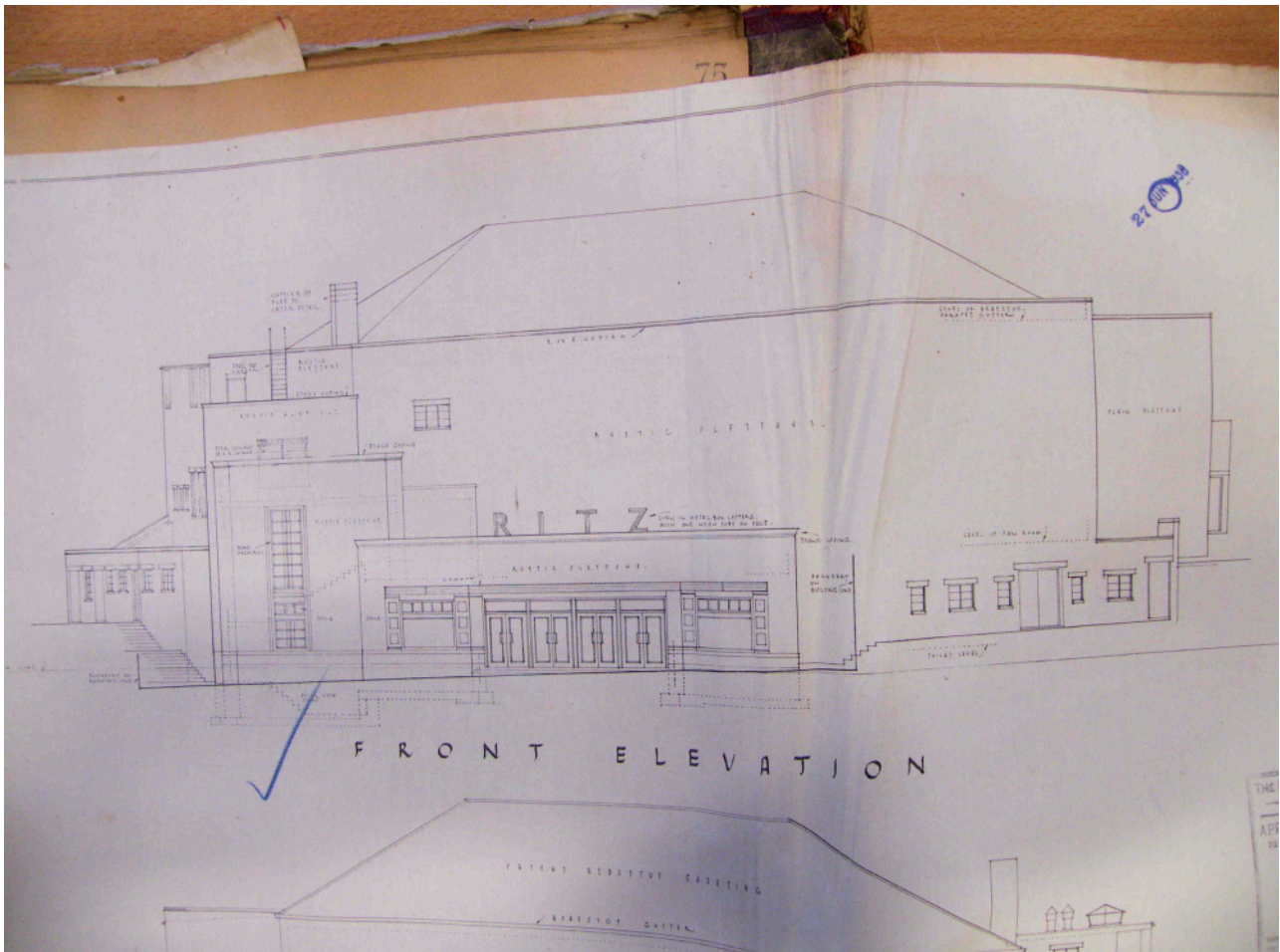


Not to scale

Figure 13

Drawing of front elevation of new cinema, with proposed name above entrance foyer. 1938.

BRO Building Plan Volume 152/74.

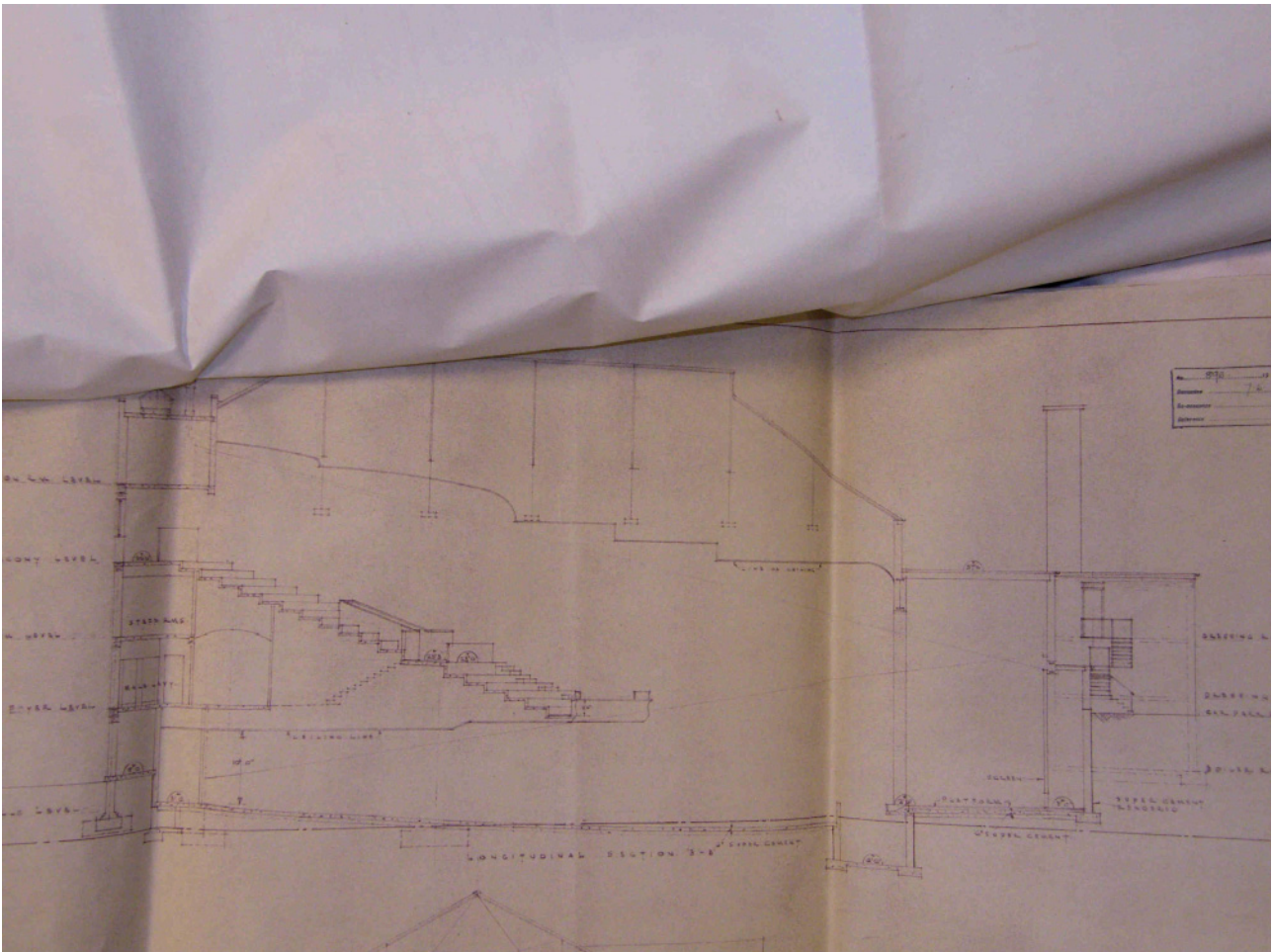


Not to scale

Figure 14

Drawing of section through proposed original balcony structure of new cinema. 1938.

BRO Building Plan Volume 152/75.



Not to scale

Plates



1. Gala Bingo Hall, North Street, Bedminster.
View to south-west.



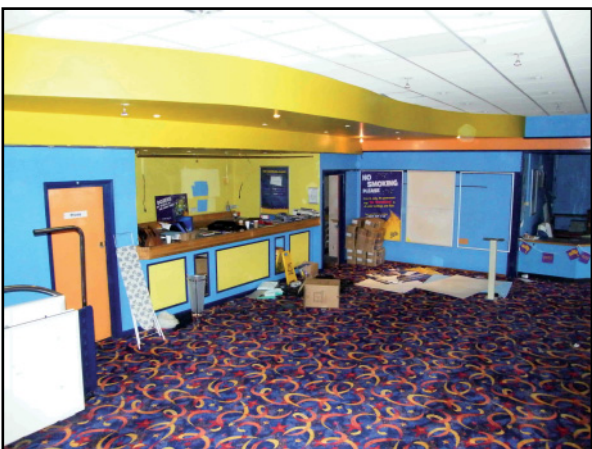
2. Offices of Messrs Barcan Woodward,
Solicitors, North Street, Bedminster. View to
south-east.



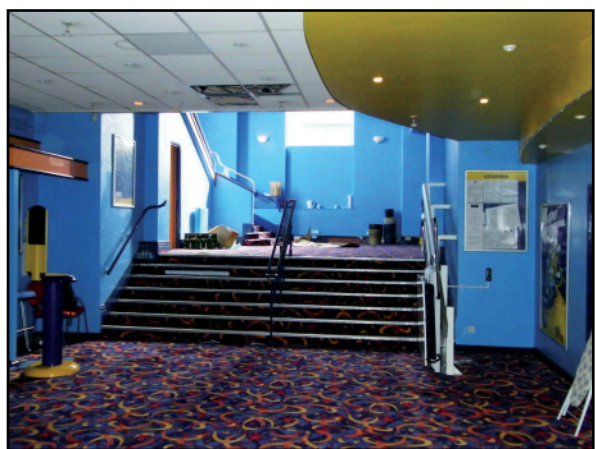
3. Premises of Carr Power Products, North
Street, Bedminster. View to south-west.



4. South-eastern, rear elevations of Gala Bingo
Hall. View to north-west.



5. Gala Bingo Hall, entrance foyer.



6. Gala Bingo Hall, base of main staircase.

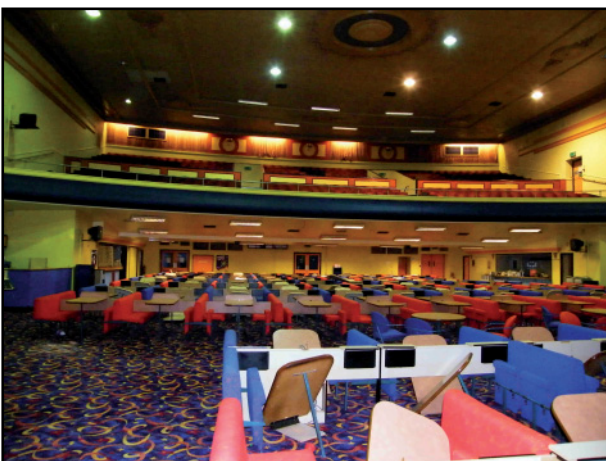
Plates



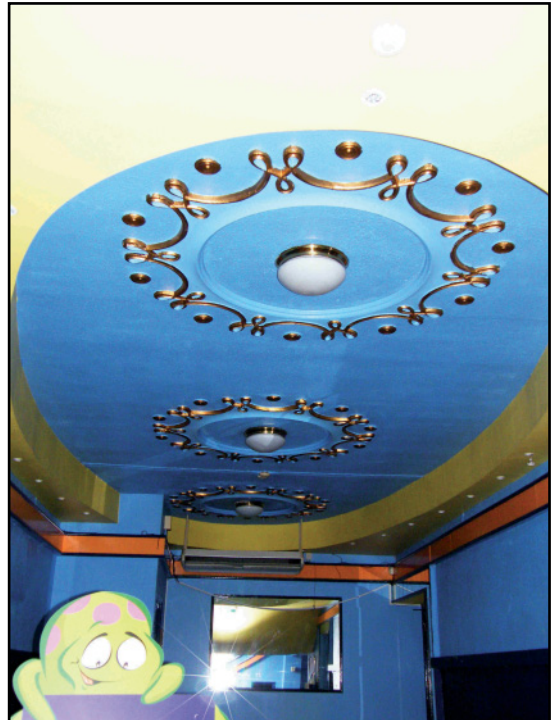
7. Gala Bingo Hall, upper staircase, showing main stairwell window visible on external front elevation, and part of original design.



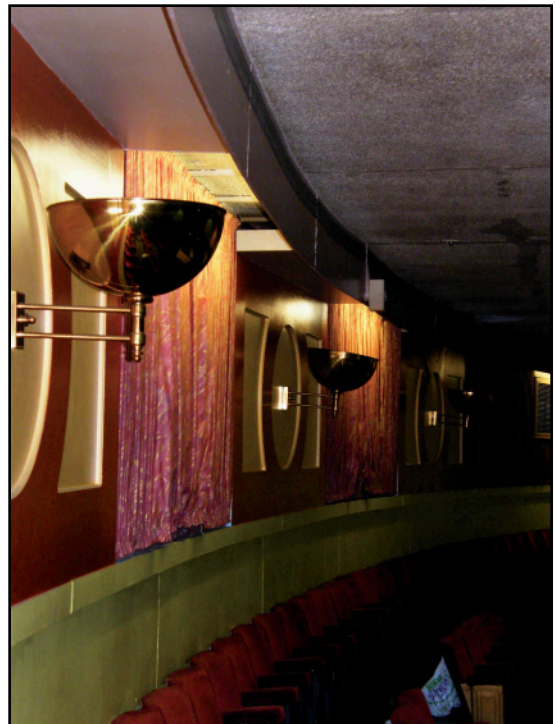
9. Gala Bingo Hall, view from upper balcony towards former screen position.



11. Gala Bingo Hall, view of main auditorium from lower (stalls) level, back towards balcony.



8. Gala Bingo Hall, first floor, detail of decorative ceiling lighting surrounds.



10. Gala Bingo Hall, decorative uplighting, rear balcony wall.

Plates



12. Gala Bingo Hall, original (mid 1950s?) seating with decorative woodwork and cast iron frames, upper balcony.



13. Gala Bingo Hall, view of main auditorium from lower (stalls) level, towards former screen position.



15. Gala Bingo Hall, detail of original and *in situ* (1941?) air extraction machinery.



14. Gala Bingo Hall, detail of decorative air extraction grille, main auditorium, lower (stalls) level.



16. Surviving stone wall representing original south-west boundary of No. 20 Victoria Place, now removed. Extreme south-east corner of development site, view to north-east.