

Town Lodge and No. 29 Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City Historic Building Investigation and Recording

March 2021

Client: Croudace Homes

Issue No: 1

OA Report No: 2492 NGR: TL 21776 32409 Event No: EHT8889





Client Name: **Croudace Homes**

Town Lodge and No. 29 Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City Document Title:

Historic Buildings Investigation and Recording Document Type:

Report No.: 2492

Grid Reference: TL 21776 32409 Planning Reference: 19/02999/FP

Event No.: EHT8889 Site Code: XHTGRL21

OASIS No. oxfordar3-416379

OA Document File Location: Y:\ Hertfordshire\XHTGRL21\Project Reports

Y:\ Hertfordshire\XHTGRL21\Project Data\Graphics OA Graphics File Location:

Issue No:

Date: March 2021

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Town Lodge and 29 Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City

Historic Buildings Investigation and Recording

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Summary

On the 25th of January 2021 Oxford Archaeology East was commissioned by Croudace Homes to undertake a historic building survey at Levels 1 and 2 on the Town Lodge and No. 29 Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City. Town Lodge is a large red brick building constructed as The Madonna Nursery and Preparatory School in 1923 which was later partially demolished and then extended to form Letchworth Council offices – Town Lodge – during the 1950s. The building was found to be much altered with very little of its original form remaining. An adjacent bungalow known as No. 29 Gernon Road was also the subject of an historic buildings survey at Level 1. This building had also been much altered since it was first built.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology East (OA East) was commissioned by Croudace Homes to undertake Historic Investigation and Building Recording at the site of the Town Lodge, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City prior to demolition work (Fig. 1; TL 21776 32409). This investigation was required by Simon Wood, Hertfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Advisor (HCC HEA), in relation to Conditions 32 to 34 of Planning Application 19/02999/FP. In response to this request, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by OA East (Moan 2020) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for this investigation. This document outlines how OA East implemented the specified requirements detailed in the WSI.

1.2 Aims of the building recording

- 1.2.1 The historic building recording work defined in the WSI sought:
 - to investigate and record for posterity the Town Lodge and No. 29 Gernon Road, which will be removed in the proposed development;
 - to make the record publicly accessible through a report (a public document) and a project archive deposited with a public institution; and
 - to disseminate the results through the production of a site archive for deposition with the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record.

1.3 Location

1.3.1 The investigated buildings were located on Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City and consisted of The Town Lodge and No. 29 Gernon Road, a small bungalow to the east of the Town Lodge (Fig. 1). The site is approximately 0.38ha in size and is bounded by both public and residential buildings to the west, east and south, with Gernon Road to the north.

1.4 Methodology

- 1.4.1 The building recording work on the Town Lodge was undertaken broadly at Level 2 for the Town Lodge and at Level 1 for No. 29, as defined by Historic England in their document *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practise*.
- 1.4.2 Photographs were taken with a high-quality digital camera and were recorded in both raw and high-quality jpeg digital file formats.
- 1.4.3 Plans were produced indicating directions from which photographs were taken. This was done both for the interior and exterior of the Town Lodge and the exterior of No. 29. All photographs that are represented on the plans and have been retained for archive purposes but only those relevant to the report have been included within this document.
- 1.4.4 Photographs taken included general views of the rooms and any original features or exposed wall fabrics noted. Photographs were also taken for all exterior elevations.



1.4.5 Annotated and measured plans were produced to describe, explain and interpret the buildings construction, development and use.

2 BACKGROUND HISTORY

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 A suitable level of background research has previously been undertaken for a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) produced for the redevelopment of the site (Brown 2019). This research drew on information in the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record and County Record Office and included historical resources, maps, previous archaeological finds and past archaeological investigations in the site's vicinity. The results of the HIA will be referred to in this report where relevant.

2.2 General Historical Background

- 2.2.1 Letchworth is considered to be the world's first garden city. Work was undertaken in 1903 as a solution to the squalor and poverty of urban life in the late 19th century. This was based on the ideas of Ebenezer Howard as published in his book of 1898 *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path for Reform*.
- 2.2.2 Construction by First Garden City Ltd in 1903. The company appointed architects Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin to design the masterplan for the new community.

2.3 Specific Historical Background

The site

2.3.1 The building currently known as Town Lodge was designed by the architect Cecil Hignett in the second phase of development in Letchworth. It was built as The Madonna Nursery and Preparatory School in 1923 and was opened as a boarding school for children aged 2 to 12 years old. It was then partially demolished and extended in the 1950s by Letchworth Council and used as offices. A large-scale internal reorganisation saw most of the structure which came to be known as Town Lodge altered again during the 1980s.

The site in context

- 2.3.2 The 1922 1:2500 OS map shows a large amount of development in the areas adjacent to the site as part of the construction of the garden city. Gernon Road ran along the line of the site's northern boundary, and a museum had been constructed to the west, a Roman Catholic church to the south and a hall to the east of the site. A large park had been designed further to the west while an extensive road network had been laid out in anticipation of further development similar in nature to the housing to the east of the site.
- 2.3.3 The 1938 1:2500 OS map (Fig. 2) shows a large building later identified as the Town Lodge (Council Offices) built within the site boundary, as well as a smaller building in the north-eastern corner. Further development was noted to the west of the site, with



- a library and a hall having been built next to the museum. A Presbyterian church was built next to the church and a cinema was added to its north.
- 2.3.4 The 1973 1:2500 OS map (Fig. 2) shows the final stage of development within the site boundary, with a Civil Defence Centre (now the Teacher's Centre) being constructed directly to the west of the Town Lodge building. The hall located to the east of the library was shown as a mission hall, and a large Roman Catholic church, the Church of St Hugh of Lincoln, was present to the south west of the site boundary. The previous Roman Catholic church located to the east of the presbytery was marked as functioning as a church hall. The land boundaries previously visible in the southern part of the site were significantly altered, perhaps as a part of the development of the new church. What previously appeared to form gardens around the museum was shown to have been divided up into much smaller plots of land, now occupied by the mission and civil defence centre.



3 OUTLINE DESCRIPTION

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The Town Lodge is described first by its exterior elevations (Figs 3-8) followed by descriptions of its interior rooms (Figs 9-11). Subsequently, exterior descriptions of the adjacent courtyard buildings and of No. 29 will be given (Fig. 12). The photographs used in the report are referred to as Plates 1-41. Photographic location arrows for each plate referred to in the report appear in red. All other photographs taken of the site have been retained for archiving purposes with their photograph numbers and locations given on Figs 3-7. The interior plans of the Town Lodge also act as the context register.
- 3.1.2 Due to the complete past alteration of the Town Lodge's interior, only rooms that displayed evidence of the original wall fabric or that had original features have been described below. Nevertheless, a comprehensive record (including photographs) of room dimensions and their use prior to demolition have been retained for archive purposes.

4 TOWN LODGE

Exterior description

North facing elevation (Figs 1, 3 and 4; Plates 1-5)

- 4.1.1 The north facing facade of the building had a length of 29.44m and a height of 8.4m. It was a two-storey building with a flat roof and was constructed of red bricks which measured 0.23m x 0.10m x 0.07m. These were mainly laid in a running bond but with some variations surrounding doorways and windows. A hard, sandy mortar had been used between the bricks. At various locations of the building re-pointing of the mortar had been undertaken.
- 4.1.2 The east and west ends of the elevation projected slightly from the building with a less pronounced projection centrally.
- 4.1.3 Surface rendering had been applied in bands around the central first floor windows and either side of the main entrance first floor windows. Crenelated parapets that topped the wall projections had pronounced banding which were capped with finials over the central part of the building that gave the northern elevation an art deco appearance.
- 4.1.4 The north facing elevation contained 29 windows with 16 on the ground floor and 13 on the first floor. All of these windows were modern Neo- Georgian UPVC units. These had replaced the earlier metal framed casement type that were commonly used in the early buildings of Letchworth. Slit windows were located either side of the main entrance to the building. These measured 1.26m x 0.30m.
- 4.1.5 Stepped brickwork surrounded the main entrance to the building. The wooden centrally opening double doors measured 2.10m x 1.58m which were a replacement of original doors of the same dimension. Above the door was a simple geometric



decorative metal framework that had been retained from the original doorway. This is an original feature which was placed there when the building was constructed in 1923. The geometric design of this metal framework was replicated in the balcony framework directly above on the upper floor.

4.1.6 A date stone of 1923 was inset directly above the door. A further stone known to have borne the word 'Madonna' was probably hidden by modern signage on the upper first floor.

East facing elevation (Figs 1, 3 and 7; Plates 6-8)

- 4.1.7 The east facing elevation had a length of 35.39m and a height of 7.2m and was constructed from similar materials to the northern elevation. The later 1950s extension to town lodge by Letchworth Council was evident. This later building work stepped outwards significantly from the original wall line with the bricks of a slightly darker hue (Plate 15).
- 4.1.8 Although this 1950s building extension was of a more utilitarian design, care had been taken to continue the surface rendered banding around the building. A vertical fluted brick decoration that measured 1.90m x 0.23m had also been added to this later phase of construction.
- 4.1.9 A total of 30 windows exists on the eastern elevation and displayed a modern UPVC design.
- 4.1.10 A chimney stack was observed on the eastern elevation that related to the heating system of this later building. The Council boiler room was located directly below ground.
- 4.1.11 At the southern end of the 1950s extension was the later addition of a fire escape. This was metal framed and aided escape from the first floor.
- 4.1.12 An interesting feature was noted on the eastern elevation in regard to the first phase of the building. A blocked-up doorway had been replaced with a window (Plate 8). This doorway possibly acted as a side entrance for staff to the former school. A set of steps that led up to this entrance was observed, although the handrail was more likely a contemporary feature of the 1950s extension. This feature suggests the doorway was still in use for a period after the later alterations.

South facing elevation (Figs 1, 3 and 6; Plates 9-11)

- 4.1.13 The south facing elevation had a length of 28.4m and a height of 7.2m. It was constructed from the same materials as the east facing elevation. As with the east elevation little had been done to hide the utilitarian use of the building. The same vertical fluted decorative brickwork was observed along with the continuation of the surface rendered banding.
- 4.1.14 Three doors and seventeen windows constructed in UPVC were observed on the southern elevation. These features would probably have replaced original steel framed units of similar dimensions.



West facing elevation (Figs 1,3 and 5; Plates 12-16)

- 4.1.15 The west facing elevation had a length of 35.39m and a height of 8.4m. It was of a similar construction to the other elevations described above. A total of 34 windows were observed on the western side of the building; more than the eastern side of the building. Areas of replacement brickwork surrounding some of the windows suggest that some of these replaced original doorways. Alternatively, these later areas of brickwork represent wall repairs carried out during installation of the windows.
- 4.1.16 The later construction of this 1950s extension to the original building was clearly evident on the western side due to the discolouration of the later brickwork. The location where this later phase of construction tied into the earlier building was more prominent than that on the eastern side.
- 4.1.17 None of the roof guttering or rainwater pipes were contemporary with the first phase of the building and were probably replaced in the 1950s when the building was extended and remodelled.

Interior description

4.1.18 The interior of the 1920s building was entirely remodelled when the 1950s extension was added. Very little of the original fabric or internal features was observed during this investigation that related its original use as the Madonna School. Extensive work on the interior had also been carried out in the 1980s when much of the building's interior which related to its later use as a Council office was removed to be replaced by a set of wall partitions. However, a few notable features were recorded during this investigation and are described below.

Room 1 (Fig. 9; Plates 17-18)

- 4.1.19 Room 1 had a length of 2.6m, a width of 2.3m and a height of 2.69m. This room acted as a reception and/or side entrance to the Madonna School, although not the main entrance used by staff or pupils.
- 4.1.20 The walls were constructed from painted brick with a small cupboard or storage room opening on its eastern side (Room 3).
- 4.1.21 The doors were located on the west and east walls. The door on the western wall led further into the school.
- 4.1.22 A staircase with a metal handrail was located on the southern wall which led to the first floor. This staircase was probably an original feature of the building.
- 4.1.23 The ceiling was covered in painted plaster. All of the remaining fixtures and fittings were modern.

Room 3 (Fig. 9; Plates 19-20)

4.1.24 This room was a small cupboard or storage room which existed on the eastern side of Room 1. It was likely to have been part of the structure of the original school building.

Original paintwork was possibly observed on the east and south walls.



Room 5 (Fig. 9; Plates 22-23)

- 4.1.25 This room was the main entranceway into the school building from Gernon Road. It had a length of 6.95m, a width of 4.13m and a ceiling height of 2.39m. No evidence was observed of its original use. Walls were a mixture of brick and modern flexi board partitions.
- 4.1.26 Doors were located on each of its walls with those observed on the east and west walls possibly in their original locations.
- 4.1.27 The ceiling was surfaced with suspended tiles and painted plaster. All fixtures and fittings were modern.

Room 6 (Fig. 9; Plate 24)

- 4.1.28 Room 6 was a stairway located to the west of the main entrance which led to the first floor. It had length of 4.41m, a width of 1.46m and a ceiling height of 3.23m. The walls were of painted and plastered brickwork. The ceiling was a painted plaster.
- 4.1.29 Nine carpeted steps led to a small landing before they turned left to access the first floor.
- 4.1.30 The rounded curtail and design of the oak newel post and handrail suggest these were original features associated with the earliest phase of the building.

Room 25 (Fig. 9; Plates 25-26)

- 4.1.31 Room 25 was located on the eastern side of the building. It had a length of 5.94m, a width of 3.71m and a ceiling height of 2.19m. The walls were constructed of painted and plastered brick. A single door was located on the northern wall. Windows were located on the eastern wall and at a higher elevation on the western wall. The ceiling was constructed from modern suspended tiles.
- 4.1.32 No fixtures or fittings were observed which related to the function of this room as part of the original school building.
- 4.1.33 Two concrete steps were uncovered by contractors on the day of the building recording (Plate 26). These steps would have led to a doorway (later blocked) that was located in the northwest corner of the room that provided access from the side entrance and Room 1 (Plate 25).
- 4.1.34 Although no original floor plans relating to the school building were inspected during this investigation, the location of Room 25 close to the side entrance suggests it may have been a reception area or staff room.

Room 35 (Fig. 10; Plates 27-28)

- 4.1.35 Room 35 was located on the first floor above the front entrance to the building from Gernon Road. The room had a length of 3.71m, a width of 2.3m and a ceiling height of 2.43m. Walls were constructed of painted and plastered brick. A modern door was located on the southern wall and a UPVC window was on the northern wall. The floor was carpeted, and the ceiling consisted of suspended tiles.
- 4.1.36 The central position of the room in relation to the northern elevation suggests that this room may have had some significance within the former school, conceivably the



location of the head teacher's office. There was no evidence for an access between this room and the small exterior balcony to the north.

Basements (Fig. 11)

- 4.1.37 The building had two subterranean rooms. Both rooms were located beneath the eastern side of the building (Fig. 9). A boiler room lay beneath the council offices and a storeroom lay beneath the school building.
 - School Storeroom (Fig. 11; Plates 30-32)
- 4.1.38 The school storeroom had a length of 4.57m, a width of width of 3.51m and a ceiling height of 2.79m. The room was accessed by a brick staircase located on the exterior of the building (Plate 30). The walls were constructed of whitewashed brick with a wooden door on the eastern side of the room which measured 1.84m x 0.88m. A small window that measured 0.52m x0.46m was located to the south of the door.
- 4.1.39 A coal chute was located in the corner of the room on the eastern wall (Plate 32). This suggests that the room may have originally housed the school's heating system, although no evidence for the former presence of a boiler was observed.
 - Council Office boiler room (Fig. 10; Plates 33-35)
- 4.1.40 The Council Office boiler room had a length of 8.6m, a width of 3.92m and a ceiling height of 2.60m.
- 4.1.41 The room was accessed by an external staircase (Plate 33) with a louvre style door and window located on the northern wall.
- 4.1.42 The walls were constructed of painted brick with a surface rendering to a height of 0.60m from floor level. The room was also partially sub divided by a brick wall at a distance of 3.05m from the southern end of the room. The presence of this internal division suggests that the room had two functions: a store, possibly for coal; and to house the boiler. Only the modern heating system remained (Plate 34).

5 COURTYARD BUILDINGS

Exterior description

Document Centre (Fig. 2; Plates 36-37)

5.1.1 This building was located to the west of Town Lodge. It was a single storey brick and prefabricated structure. A flat roof sat above the brick structure with a pitched roof above the later prefabricated extension to the rear. No internal structure was recorded during this investigation, although photographs were taken of it to show its position in relation to the wider development area. This building is believed to have been constructed after 1938 but before the 1950s extension to the original school building.

Building to south of Document Centre (Fig. 2; Plate 38)

5.1.2 A further small building existed within the southwest corner of the site. This building consisted of a rectangular, prefabricated type of structure with a pitched tin roof and windows on its eastern elevation. Historical maps of the site demonstrate this building



did not exist in 1938 but was present by 1973. It is possible this building was associated with the 1950s remodelling and extension to the main building.

6 No. 29 GERNON ROAD

Exterior description

- 6.1.1 A small residential bungalow known as No. 29 Gernon Road was located to the east of Town Lodge which had been vacated by the time of this investigation.
- 6.1.2 The building was constructed of brick with a rendered coating and a pitched tiled roof. The windows were of modern UPVC design. A small single storey UPVC conservatory had been added to the rear. Access to a garage located to the rear of this residential plot was covered with plastic sheeting.

North Facing Elevation (Figs 8 and 12; Plate 39)

- 6.1.3 This building was 12.38m in length and extended to a height of 6.39m. The central doorway was located on a small porch likely to be a later addition to the original building.
- 6.1.4 Two windows were located east of the door and bay window and an access door to the garage were located to its west.

West Facing Elevation (Figs 8 and 12; Plate 40)

- 6.1.5 The west facing elevation of this building had a length of 16.39m and a height of 6.39m.
- 6.1.6 A door which accessed the kitchen of modern UVPC design was placed centrally between UVPC windows. The entire length of the building was covered by a clear plastic sheet over a wooden frame.

South Facing Elevation (Figs 8 and 12; Plate 41)

- 6.1.7 The south facing elevation had a length of 9.15m and a height of 6.39m.
- 6.1.8 Part of the rear wall of the building had been removed to accommodate a modern conservatory. A kitchen window existed on the western side of the conservatory. A bedroom window was located to the east of the conservatory.



7 HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

7.1 Conclusion

- 7.1.1 The buildings surveyed at Gernon Road, Letchworth display a significant amount of remodelling and alteration had been carried out since its they were first built.
- 7.1.2 The Town Lodge building was originally erected in 1923 as a preparatory boarding school the Madonna School aimed at attracting the children of middle and upperclass families. The initial phase of the building would have provided modern facilities and the Art Deco design would have reflected this modernity but would also have been designed to compliment other buildings erected in Letchworth at the time. The building's architect, Cecil Hignett, also designed other buildings in the town, notably the Spirella Factory in Bridge Street.
- 7.1.3 Externally and internally the building had been radically altered over the years with little thought being given to its historic structure. The building in its earliest phase had a two-storey façade and a rear single storey aspect. This single storey was demolished by the 1950s and a two-storey brick extension had been erected in its place (Fig. 13). Evidence for this remodelling can be observed on the historic maps of 1938 and 1973 (Fig. 2). By 1973, the layout of the Town Lodge building as it was at the time of the survey existed.
- 7.1.4 Externally all the windows of the Town Lodge had been replaced by modern UVPC units. The doors had also been replaced with either a UPVC type or, as on the northern elevation, a modern wooden unit to the main entrance. The brick structure on the northern elevation had survived almost intact. Some doorways had been bricked over and some windows on the western elevation had either been replaced or enlarged.
- 7.1.5 Internally the building had been completely redesigned with most of the internal walls having been demolished. Many partitions to the rooms of the Town Lodge were added during the 1980s and later. Only a few rooms gave any indication of their original purpose within the school setting.
- 7.1.6 The residential bungalow to the east of Town Lodge was also erected early in the 20th century. Originally it was an L-shaped structure constructed between 1923 and 1938 (Fig. 2). The original brick walls had been rendered. A bay window and porch were added to its northern elevation before 1973. The windows and doors had been replaced more recently. This building had also been re-roofed relatively recently. Little of its original structure and building material could be seen during its external survey.



APPENDIX A BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APP	ENDIX B	O	ASIS RE	PORT F	OR	M					
Proj	ect Details										
OASIS Number		oxfordar3-416379									
Proj	ect Name	Town	Town Lodge and No.29 Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City								
Star	t of Fieldwork	25/01	/21	/21			End of Fieldwork		í	26/01/21	
Prev	vious Work	No				Future Work		ork		No	
Proj	ect Reference	Codes									
Site Code		XHTGRL21			Planning App. No.		Γ:	19/02999/FP			
HER Number		EHT8889			Related Numbers		١	N/A			
5			NDDE								
	mpt			NPPF							
	elopment Type			Residential After full determination (eg. As a condition)							
Plac	e in Planning Pr	ocess	After	tuli deter	mın	iation (e	eg. As	s a condit	lor	1)	
Tech	niques used (1	tick all	that apr	olv)							
	Aerial Photograph interpretation								Re	mote Operated Vehicle Survey	
	Aerial Photograph	y - new		☐ Gravity-core						mple Trenches	
	Annotated Sketch			☐ Laser Scanning			\boxtimes		Survey/Recording of Fabric/Structure		
	Augering			☐ Measured Survey						rgeted Trenches	
	Dendrochonologic	cal Surve								st Pits	
	Documentary Sear			☐ Phosphate Survey						pographic Survey	
	Environmental Sar	mpling		•			У			oro-core	
☐ Fieldwalking☐ Geophysical Survey				☑ Photographic Survey☐ Rectified Photograph					VIS	sual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)	
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HER office Hertfords			ordshire				Hertfordshire				
Size of Study Area			SG6 3HN								
National Grid Ref TL 21776 32409											
Proi	ect Originators	,									
Organisation			OA East								
Project Brief Originator				HCCHET							
-	ect Design Origi			Louise Moan (OA East)							
Project Manager				Louise Moan (OA East)							
Project Supervisor			-	James Fairbairn (OA East)							
-											

Project Archives

Town Lodge and 29 Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City

 Location
 ID

 N/A
 N/A

 OA East
 XHTGRL21

 NHDCMS
 EHT8889

1

Physical Archive (Finds) Digital Archive Paper Archive

Physical Contents	Present?	Digital files associated with Finds	Paperwork associated w Finds	rith
Animal Bones Ceramics Environmental Glass Human Remains Industrial Leather Metal Stratigraphic Survey Textiles Wood Worked Bone Worked Stone/Lithic None				
Other Digital Media Database GIS Geophysics Images (Digital photos) Illustrations (Figures/Plat Moving Image Spreadsheets Survey Text Virtual Reality	ces)	Paper Media Aerial Photos Context Sheets Correspondence Diary Drawing Manuscript Map Matrices Microfiche Miscellaneous Research/Notes Photos (negatives/prints) Plans Report Sections Survey	□ /slides)	



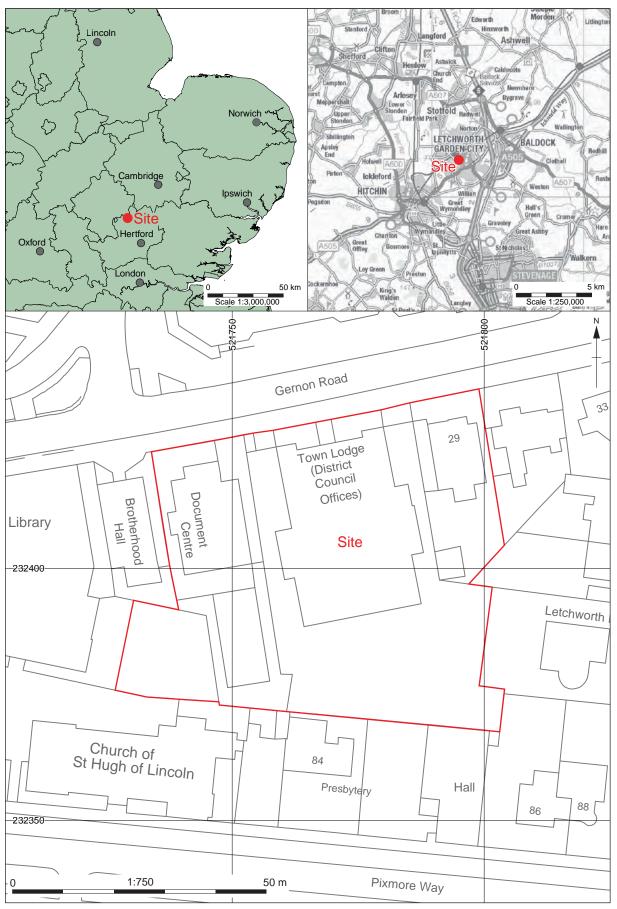
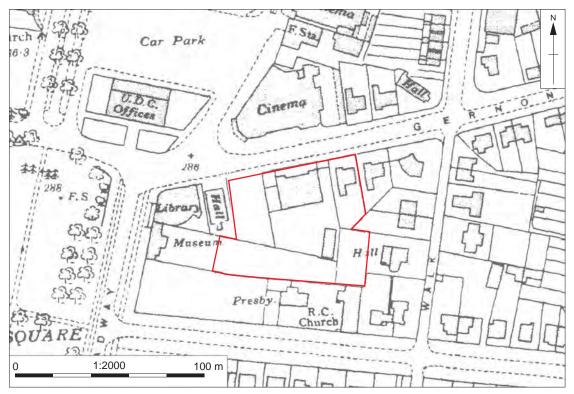
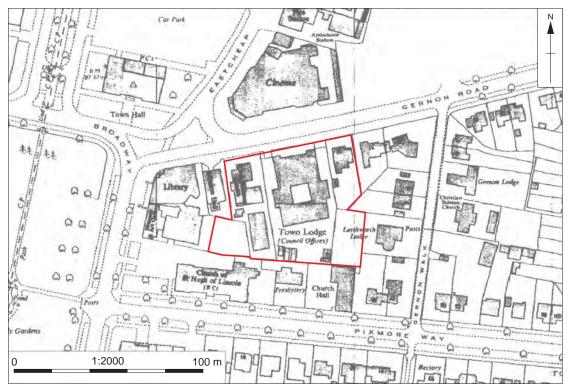


Figure 1: Site location





OS 1938



OS 1973

Figure 2: Ordnance Survey Mps 1938 and 1973



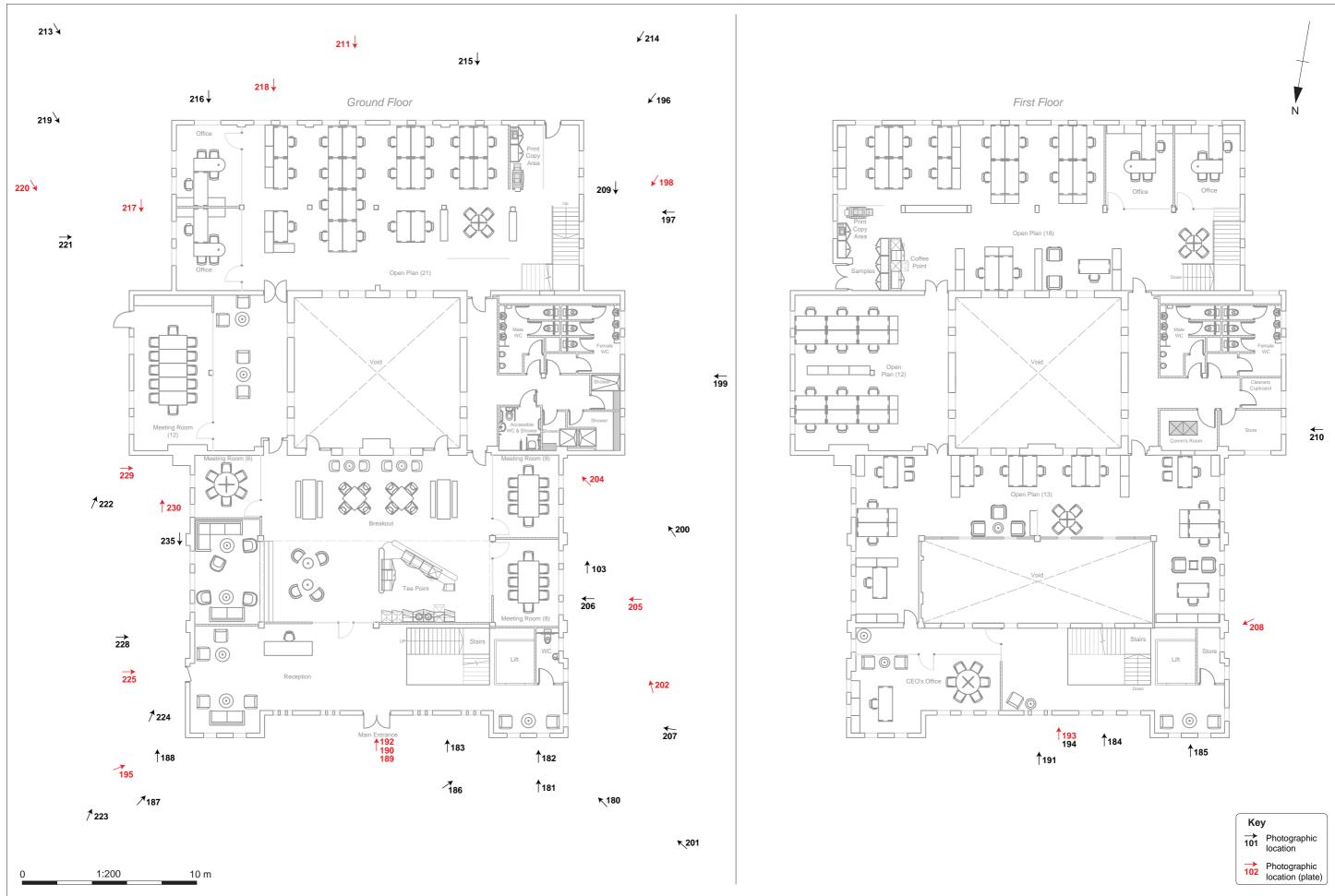


Figure 3: Photographic location plan exterior





Figures 4-7: Elevations

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Figure 8: Photographic location plan courtyard buildings

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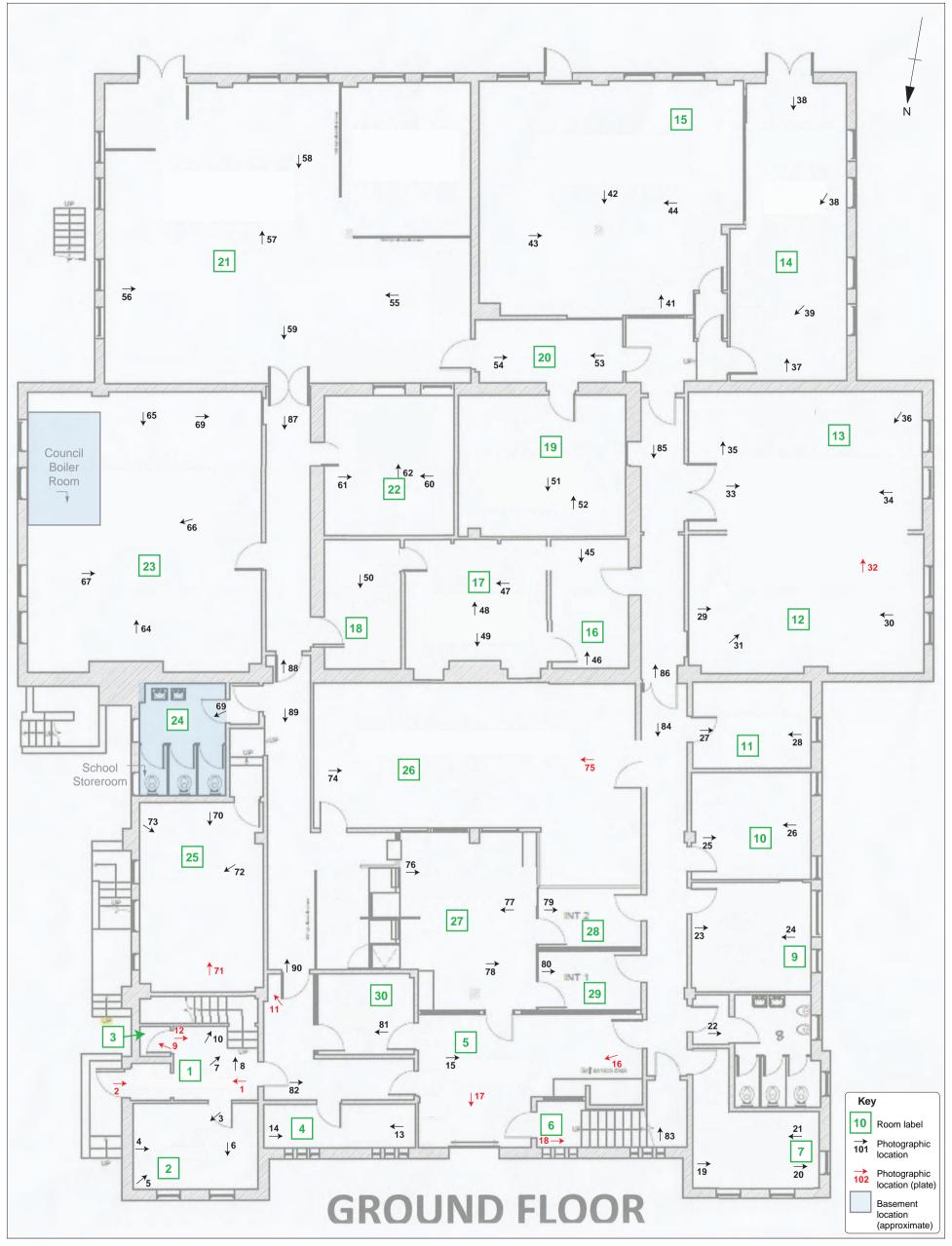


Figure 9: Photographic location plan ground floor





Figure 10: Photographic location plan first floor



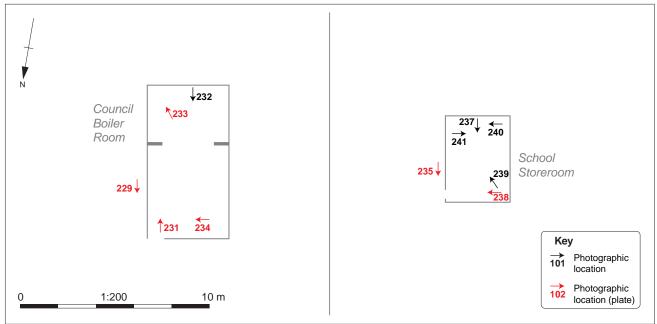


Figure 11: Photographic location plan basements





Figure 12: Elevations of No 29



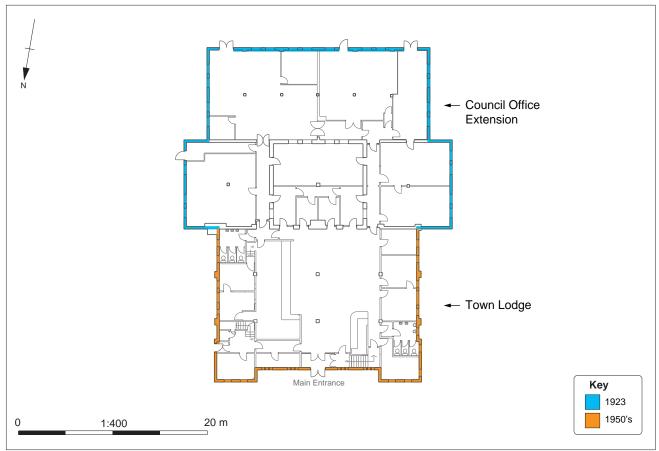


Figure 13: Town lodge building phase plan





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