

Building recording at
Leckhampton Industrial Estate,
205, Leckhampton Road,
Leckhampton,
Cheltenham,
Gloucestershire



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Building recording at Leckhampton Industrial Estate, 205, Leckhampton Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Tim Cornah and Tom Vaughan

Summary

Building recording was undertaken at Leckhampton Industrial Estate, 205, Leckhampton Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 94767 19933). It was undertaken on behalf of Brodie Manning Ltd, whose client intends to demolish the existing buildings and undertake residential development, for which a planning application has been submitted.

The development is considered to have the potential to affect heritage assets with archaeological interest, one of which is a subterranean building conjectured to be a World War Two air raid shelter.

Analysis of the structure was based upon the recorded fabric and documentary research. The development of the building was reconstructed and illustrated on a phased ground plan. This has been reproduced at the end of the report along with relevant photographs. This building appears to be broadly consistent with an air raid shelter, although an interpretation of the building as a munitions store is also possible.

The building is broadly rectangular and brick built with a steel reinforced flat concrete roof. It is currently largely subterranean, though to what degree it was originally designed as such is unclear. The building originally had three separate entrances: at the east and west ends via a dogleg, while that in the centre of the north wall was accessed down a short walled passage. A corridor ran internally along the length of the building on the southern side with two small alcoves at either end beyond the two entrances. Seven full height doorways gave access to rooms north of the passage, of which the central doorway led to the northern central exit doorway in the northern wall. The further six rooms appear to have made separate spaces, with low access spaces between each individual room. This form is consistent with the interpretation that it was built as an air raid shelter, either just before or during World War Two, as one of a pair associated with the factory adjacent. No original fixtures or fittings were identified. The building was subsequently altered, possibly for use as a garage.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

Recording of a historic building was undertaken at Leckhampton Industrial Estate, 205, Leckhampton Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 94767 19933). It was commissioned by Brodie Manning Ltd in response to requirements of Gloucestershire County Council Archaeologist (the Curator; dated 23 May 2013), following the submission of a planning application to Cheltenham Borough Council (13/00756). This proposes demolition of existing buildings and residential development comprising the construction of 28 dwellings. This is considered by the Curator to have the potential to affect heritage assets with archaeological interest (HER ref. 11284), one of which is conjectured to be a World War Two air raid shelter.

The building is an undesignated heritage asset within the terms used by the *National Planning Policy Framework*.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by WA (2014).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (IfA 2008).

The project reference given by WA is P4383.

2 Aims

The aims and scope of the project were:

- to record the possible World War Two air raid shelter, prior to demolition

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The fieldwork was undertaken by Tim Cornah BA (Hons); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2006 and has been practicing buildings archaeology since 2012. The report was prepared by Tom Vaughan MA BA (Hons) AlfA, and Tim Cornah. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan. Illustrations were prepared by Tim Cornah.

3.2 Documentary research

The archaeological and historical background to the site is presented in a desk based assessment previously undertaken, which collated and discussed the relevant historical, archaeological and cartographic data including that provided by Gloucestershire Historic Environment Record (HER) (CgMs 2012).

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2014).

Fieldwork was undertaken on 19 November 2014. The WA project reference number is P4383.

Building recording consisted of a photographic survey of the interior and exterior of the building, analysis of their development, annotation of existing survey drawings and measured survey. All photographs were taken with photographic scales visible in each shot (where possible). The photographic survey was carried out with a Pentax digital SLR camera. All photographs were recorded on a pro-forma Photographic Record Sheet. Measured drawings completed to scale on drawing film at 1:50 scale complemented the photographic record.

The project conformed to the specification for a level 2 survey as defined by English Heritage (*EH 2006 Understanding historic buildings: A guide to good recording practice*). A level 2 record is a

descriptive record. It is a visual record supplemented by the minimum of information needed to identify the building's location, age and type, to produce enough information to allow conclusions about the buildings development and use. It includes the following elements of survey:

- Photography
 - General view or views of the building in its wider setting or landscape
 - External appearance of the building, using oblique and right angle shots
 - Internal appearance of the principal rooms and circulation areas
- Drawings
 - Dimensioned sketched plan
 - Measured drawings showing the form of any architectural decoration (when required)
- Written account
 - A summary of the building's form, function, date and sequence of development, including builders, architects, owners or patrons names where known

3.4 Building analysis

Analysis of the building was based on the study of the photographic record and a measured drawing. It was also informed by the documentary sources listed above. This allowed plans to be drawn up showing the structural development of the building.

The building as recorded is depicted in Plates 1-16. A ground plan, with phasing, is included as Figure 3.

3.5 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

4 Context

The previous desk-based assessment outlines the background to the site (CgMs 2012). An Ordnance Survey map of 1953 shows the site with a carpet factory at its eastern end close to the road (Fig 2). Towards the western end is what appears to be areas of quarrying, with two apparently identical buildings within these depressions. Neither of these two buildings is depicted on the edition of 1938. The southernmost of these two buildings appears to be the extant one. The northern building of these two is also of the same plan form so it is possible that the remaining building was originally one of a pair. Only the northernmost of these buildings remains on the 1971 edition, suggesting that much of the ground around the remaining shelter had been raised by this point. Neither of these buildings is shown on the 1991 map.

5 The building

5.1 Building description

5.1.1 Phase 1: 1938-1953

The main elements of this building were brick built with a steel reinforced concrete roof. It was largely subterranean, though to what degree it was originally designed as such is unclear given that the 1953 cartographic source shows it to be visible at the surface (Fig 2). Only its eastern end is now visible (Fig 1; Plates 1-3). The bricks were standard frogged London Brick Company bricks, stamped 'LBC PRORPRESS', which were manufactured at Stewartby in Bedfordshire in 1938 (Plate 16; Antrobus 2011). The floor comprised compacted soil, although this may have been an accumulation above brick or concrete.

The internal space extends 16m in length and 5.40m in width, with an internal height from floor to ceiling of 1.95m. The external walls, where visible, were 0.40m thick. The internal walls were 0.22m thick. The flat concrete roof was 0.17m thick and reinforced with steel rods.

The building originally had three separate entrances: at the east and west ends entrances were accessed round a dogleg, while that in the centre of the north wall was accessed down a short walled passage. The entrances at the eastern and western ends appear to mirror each other in form. None of these entrances remain intact; they were all blocked during later alterations (Plates 4, 5, 9, 12-14).

The internal layout consisted of a corridor running along the length of the building on the southern side with two small alcoves at either end beyond the two entrances (Plates 10-14). Seven full height doorways gave access to rooms north of the passage, of which the central doorway led to the northern central exit doorway in the northern wall (Plates 7 and 9). The further six rooms appear to have made up areas measuring 1.40m by 3.00m. These were originally separate spaces, although the brick had clearly subsequently been cut back at an unknown date, leaving buttresses to north and south (Plates 6-8). On the northern side, some of the buttresses comprised clean square brick faces below 0.70m from the floor, with rough, ragged brick above (Plate 6). This suggests that there were low access spaces between each individual room. These access spaces are likely to have measured about 0.70m in both width and height and are probably crawling gaps between each room (pers comm Mick Wilkes).

No original fixtures or fittings were identified.

5.1.2 Phase 2: 1953 to present

The secondary phase of this building is likely to relate to the development of the current industrial estate. It is likely that at least some of the changes in ground level occurred at this point, as the entrances at the northern and western ends were buried and various tarmac surfaces laid which obscure the concrete roof. The ramp down to the structure and the retaining walls at the eastern end (Plates 2 and 3), date to the post-war period and are likely to be contemporary with a change of use of the building, probably into a garage. This is indicated by the eastern external wall having been demolished to create a wide access suitable for vehicles and the original eastern pedestrian entrance being blocked (Plates 14 and 15). The other two entrances were also filled in, that to the west with concrete (Plates 12 and 13). It is during this alteration that the six internal, north to south aligned walls are likely to have been removed, creating one large open space (Plates 6-8). A cast iron joist was also inserted to strengthen the roof toward the east end (Plate 7). The building was until recently used for storage.

5.2 Historical information

Whilst this building is suggested to date from within the war years, 1939-45, it is possible that a slightly earlier date could be ascribed as the Air Raid Precautions Act of 1937 started a national programme of shelter building. The design of air raid shelters varied widely, but many outside of a domestic setting were of single storey brick and concrete construction, rectangular in form with entrances at either end. These were often free standing buildings, although some were partially subterranean. Many had a blast wall (Lowry 1996, 67), a feature that was not seen here, but the entrances on either end are to some extent protected by the shape of the building and its location within a quarry. Many of these broad features fit with the interpretation that this was an air raid shelter, although the number of internal divisions within this structure is unusual and may indicate another use such as for munitions storage (pers comm Mick Wilkes).

6 Conclusion

The cartographic evidence suggests that a structure closely resembling the recorded building in both plan and location was built between the years 1938 and 1953 as the southern one of a pair of buildings. The general form of this with its reinforced concrete roof, thickened exterior walls and multiple pedestrian entrances access through doglegs and corridors strongly supports its

interpretation as an air raid shelter. This is further supported by the 1953 map showing the building placed within the base of an earthwork, probably a quarry, although an alternative interpretation may be that it was used for storage of munitions. It appears that the ground level was filled in around it within its second phase when it was converted for an entirely different use, possibly as a garage.

6.1 Research frameworks

The presence of an air raid shelter is of significance within the local context, particularly in relation to the former factory immediately to its east, with which it is probably related. This record should be included within the Defence of Britain project archive, where it may be of relevance to future research.

7 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

Building recording of a subterranean structure was undertaken on behalf of Brodie Manning Ltd at Leckhampton Industrial Estate, 205, Leckhampton Road, Leckhampton, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 94767 19933), in advance of demolition.

The building is broadly rectangular and brick built with a steel reinforced flat concrete roof. It is currently largely subterranean, though to what degree it was originally designed as such is unclear. The building originally had three separate entrances: at the east and west ends via a dogleg, while that in the centre of the north wall was accessed down a short walled passage. A corridor ran internally along the length of the building on the southern side with two small alcoves at either end beyond the two entrances. Seven full height doorways gave access to rooms north of the passage, of which the central doorway led to the northern central exit doorway in the northern wall. The further six rooms appear to have made separate spaces, with low access spaces between each individual room. This form is consistent with the interpretation that it was built as an air raid shelter, either just before or during World War Two, as one of a pair associated with the factory adjacent. No original fixtures or fittings were identified. The building was subsequently altered, possibly for use as a garage.

8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Wendy Hopkins (Brodie Manning Ltd), Alex Scott (Boo Homes Ltd), Mick Wilkes (Defence of Britain project), and Charles Parry (Archaeologist, Gloucestershire County Council).

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Figures

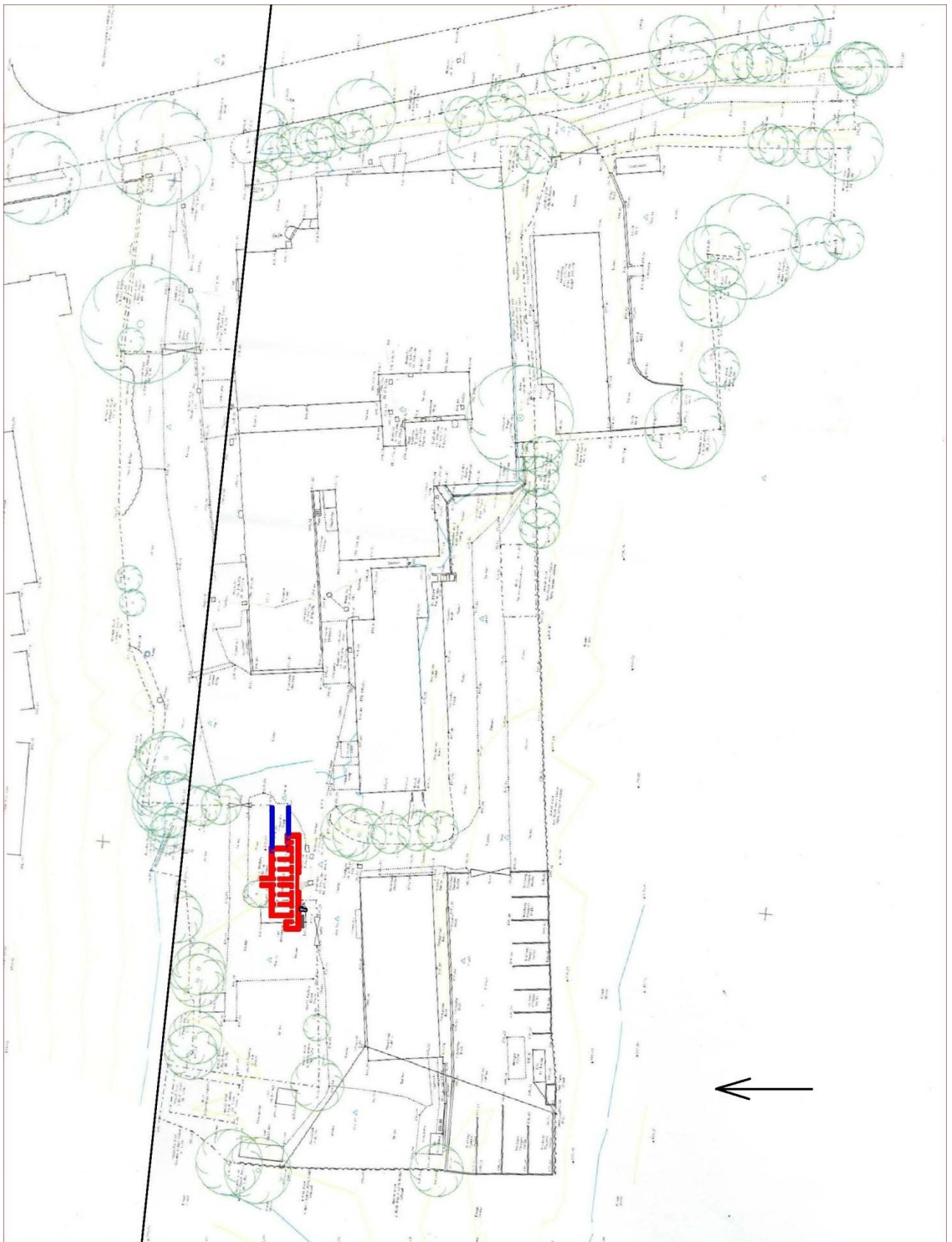
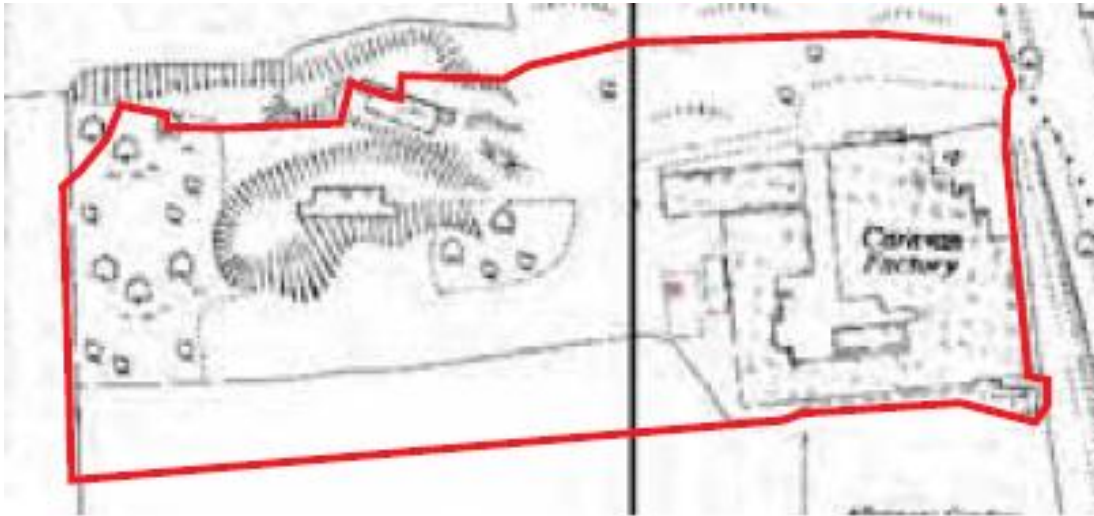


Figure 1 The location of the structure on the site (after BPN Architects 2014)



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Figure 2 Extract from the 1953 Ordnance Survey map showing the site boundary and the pair of identical structures within quarries in the north-west part of the site

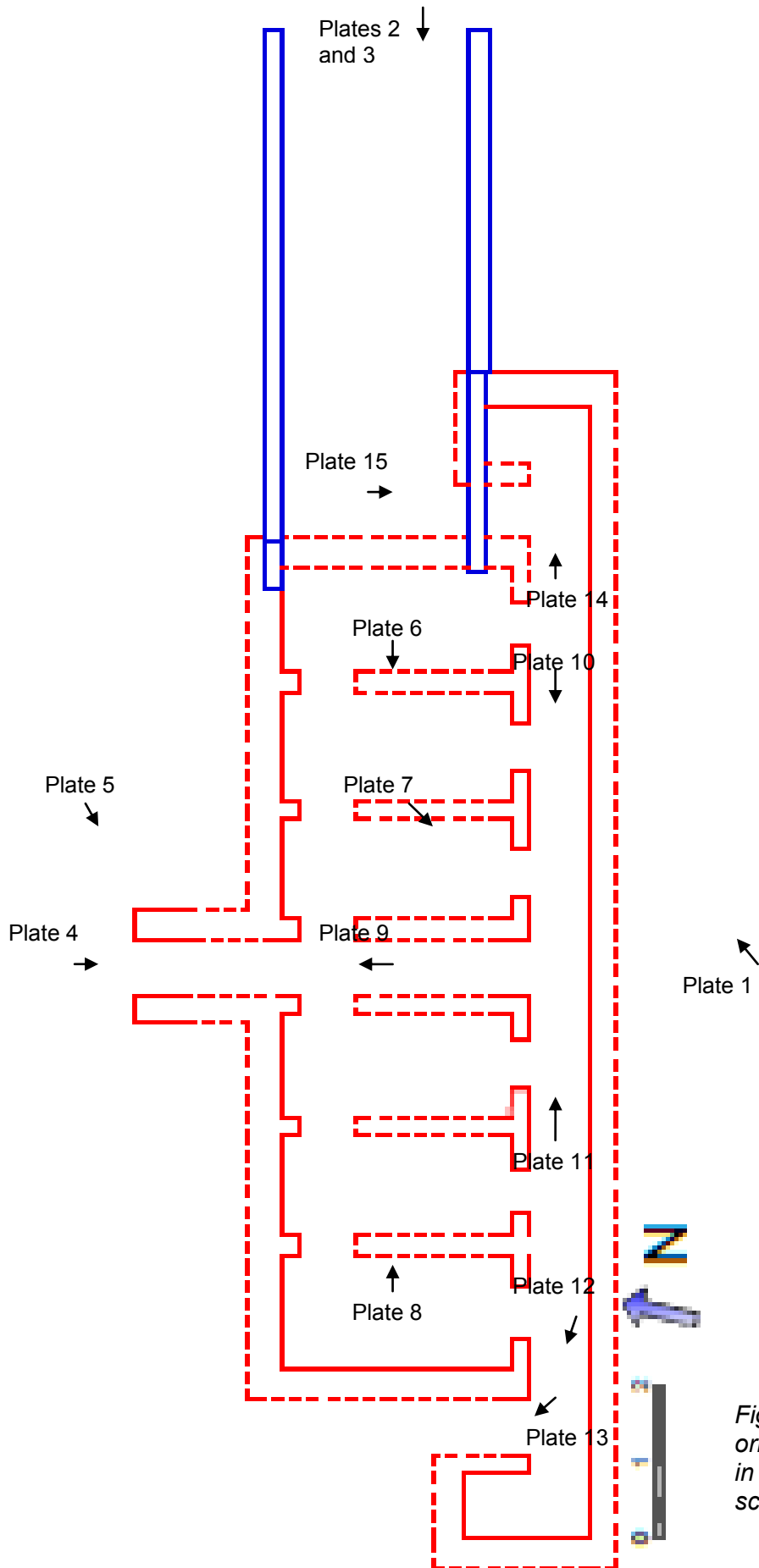


Figure 3 Plan of the structure with orientation of plates (original layout in red; later additions in blue; 2m scale)

Plates



Plate 1, Exterior landscape above the structure, looking east-north-east



Plate 2, Exterior view of the existing east entrance, looking west (2m scale)



Plate 3, Exterior view of the existing east entrance, looking west (2m scale)



Plate 4, Exterior view of the truncated and backfilled north entrance, looking south (2m scale)



Plate 5, Exterior view of the truncated and backfilled north entrance, looking south-west (2m scale)



Plate 6, Interior showing the truncated wall divides, looking west



Plate 7, Interior showing the truncated wall divides, the doorways to southern corridor, and inserted cast iron joist, looking south-west



Plate 8, Interior showing the truncated wall divides, looking east toward existing entrance



Plate 9, Blocked doorway in the northern wall, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 10, Interior view of the corridor on the southern side, looking west



Plate 11, Interior view of the corridor on the southern side, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 12, Interior view of the west end of the corridor on the southern side, and blocked west entrance, looking west



Plate 13, Interior view of the blocked west entrance in the corridor, looking north-west



Plate 14, Interior view of the blocked east entrance in the corridor, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 15, Exterior detail of later breeze block wall and former east entrance lintel to south side of existing entrance, looking south



Plate 16, Interior, example of frogged London Brick Company brick, stamped 'LBC PRORPRES'