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Chapman Warren

THE WHITE HOUSE  
MAIDSTONE  
KENT

HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

September 1999

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## THE WHITE HOUSE, MAIDSTONE, KENT HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

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### *Summary*

*An archaeological building assessment has been made of the White House, the Officer's Mess at the Royal West Kent Barracks in Maidstone in advance of a planning application to convert the building to a restaurant. The construction of the early/mid-nineteenth century building is of particular interest being timber-framed and covered in weatherboarding. An audit was made of surviving primary elements of the building and other features of interest.*

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit has been commissioned by Chapman Warren to undertake an archaeological building assessment of the former Officer's Mess, known as the White House, at the Royal West Kent Barracks, Sandling Road, Maidstone (centred at NGR: TQ75805640).
- 1.1.2 The building, which has been purchased in recent years by Kent County Council from the MoD as part of the larger barracks site, is listed Grade II and is located on a high profile site facing onto the main route into Maidstone from the north. The assessment is in advance of an planning application to convert the White House into a restaurant (ground floor) and hotel (upper two floors).
- 1.1.3 The building has suffered in recent years from neglect and vandalism, and following a direct threat of the theft of some of the internal features of the building, a number of these were removed and put in storage. These were particularly the fireplace surrounds, almost all of which were removed from the building, and some panelled doors. Unfortunately there is no inventory of which rooms the features were removed from, but it has been confirmed with Caroline Proctor of Kent County Council Estates that they are now in storage at the Aylesford Highways Depot, and it is intended that they will be reinstated in the building in the proposed development.

## 1.2 Aims and objectives

1.2.1 The principal aims of this report are:

- to identify and assess the survival of the original/primary building
- to highlight the features within the building of particular interest
- to make an assessment of the importance of the building.

1.2.2 To achieve this the report includes a room-by-room audit (Appendix 1), detailing the primary elements and other surviving features of interest in each or space. A selection of typical illustrations has also been included (pls. 1-15).

## 1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The assessment has been based almost entirely on observations made during site visits made on 7-8 September 1999. At this point almost all the plaster had been removed from the walls and most of the ceilings in an attempt to dry out the structural frame and confirmation of the construction was relatively straightforward. A large number of colour photographs were taken of the building and features within it during the site inspections. Historic maps which may be able to confirm the phasing of the building have not been examined and only secondary sources have been studied to provide further background information.

## 1.4 Historical background

1.4.1 As referred to above historical research has not been formally undertaken as part of this assessment and therefore only an outline of the building's history is known, largely based on information from the recent study by J. Douet, *British Barracks 1600-1914 Their Architecture and Role in Society* (1998). The building was constructed in 1797 in the early stages of the war with France (1792-1815), as the officer's quarters of a cavalry station. It was an important station between Chatham and Brighton and between London and the Kent coast.

1.4.2 In this period timber-framed barracks were frequently constructed as a fast, short-term measure but the building at Maidstone was one of six barracks built by the Barracks Department considered to be permanent. The White House is the only one of these structures to survive.

1.4.3 Officers had small plain rooms with a fireplace in one corner and a built-in cupboard in the other. They are reported to have been issued with bedding, a table, bellows, fire irons and a chamber pot.

1.4.4 Around 1819 the building began to be used as the cavalry depot for inducting new recruits. The building remained in use by the military until the second half of the twentieth century when it was replaced by the Invicta Barracks in

Maidstone, sometime after 1963 when the services accommodation was reorganised under the Ministry for Public Buildings.

## **2 BUILDING ASSESSMENT**

### **2.1 Description**

- 2.1.1 The White House is a striking and unusual landmark within Maidstone a short distance to the north of County Hall and the town centre (pl. 1). With its simple classical design and weatherboarded skin it is more reminiscent of an early nineteenth century mansion in the southern United States than a part of an army barracks in Kent.
- 2.1.2 Structurally the primary building has a pine balloon frame and is clad in weatherboarding. It is orientated north-south in an E-shape with three primary service wings extending to the east and two further secondary projections extending the northern and southern wings (fig. 3). The building is two storeys tall with three storeys to the central third and three small individual basements beneath each of the eastern projections. The main elevation (west) is nine bays wide with the raised central three bays beneath a pedimented gable. The north elevation, including the primary projection, is four bays deep and the southern elevation is similarly four bays deep with a secondary semi-octagonal projection (pl. 3).
- 2.1.3 The hipped roof is slate-covered and is supported by king-post trusses (pl. 12). There are four trusses above the main two-storey sections of the building with a further similar truss above the main primary eastern projections. The roof structure above the three-storey central section consists of two king-post trusses orientated north-south and a single truss orientated east-west.
- 2.1.4 The secondary projection extending the southernmost wing (pl. 15) is two storeys tall and is constructed in a light brown stock brick with a slate-covered hipped roof. The window openings have gauged brick heads which match those to the single storey extension to the northernmost wing, also of a similarly coloured stock brick.
- 2.1.5 There are three main sorts of windows within the building. The predominant sort is the 12-light sash (pl. 14), in both the primary building and in both of the main secondary brick projections. There is a wide variety of subtle differences in the ovolo-section glazing bars suggesting that many have been replaced at different stages, largely in the nineteenth century. Some glazing bars and entire sashes are clearly secondary, probably having been inserted in the early twentieth century. The other main window type is the large-paned 4-light sash, with ovolo glazing bars, probably of mid-late nineteenth century date. All the windows to the north elevation of the building are of this type along with about half the window to the front (west) elevation. All the windows to the second floor are the third type of window: the 6-light sash.
- 2.1.6 The building is divided into three sections, each one with a front door with bracketed doorcase (pl. 11) (doorcase to north lost) leading into an entrance

hall and staircase. The building was not however three separate houses because each officer had a single room and internal doors linked between the three sections (fig. 4). The plan of the main north-south body of the building has three internal chimney stacks utilised by corner fireplaces in each of the officers rooms.

## 2.2 Phasing

- 2.2.1 The main body of the White House strongly appears to be of a single phase (plan, fig. 3). Analysis of the structural frame, particularly the roof, shows that the two main weatherboarded eastern projections are clearly primary and the two storey section of the central projection also strongly appears to be primary. The roof timbers and chunky ceiling joists within this section are of a similar date to those in the main building and nothing suggested that the roof was a secondary addition. There is also nothing to clearly suggest that the doorway at first floor level between the main building (F15) and the projection (F26), was originally a window in an external wall.
- 2.2.2 The single storey section of the central projection also appears to be primary. No inspection was possible within the room (G33) at this point but the structure is weatherboarded and therefore presumably timber-framed, with a red brick wall to the east. That this structure is primary is most strongly suggested by the basement below this area apparently of the same date as the basements beneath the other known primary wings.
- 2.2.3 The two outer brick projections to the other two wings are secondary. The eastern end of the primary section of the southernmost wing is of a brick different to (and abutting) the adjacent extension, thus confirming that this must have been secondary. The similarly constructed, single storey extension to the northern wing is shown to be secondary by the fact that it abuts the formerly external weatherboarding on the eastern end of the primary wing. These extensions are not however substantially later than the primary building and probably date to the early-nineteenth century. The button-headed newel post and swan-necked handrail of the staircase within the southern wing (pl. 10), together with the gauged brick-headed window opening to both wings are suggestive of the first half of the nineteenth century.

## 2.3 General assessment and survival

- 2.3.1 The feature of the White House which is of greatest interest and significance is its timber-framed construction. It is representative of a number of timber-framed barracks buildings constructed around the turn of the nineteenth century, during the Napoleonic Wars, and is the only survivor of these (Douet, 1998). The primary structure remains largely intact and is apparently in relatively good condition. Plaster has been removed from the walls and ceilings and this has allowed the confirmation that almost all the internal partitions are primary and that although there have been problems with damp within the building the frame appears sound. The primary layout of the

building, consisting in the main north-south body of three internal chimney stacks and stud partitions radiating from these to create officer's rooms, survives largely intact.

- 2.3.2 The architectural detailing of the building is also of considerable interest denoting the high status of the cavalry officers. Externally this is reflected in the fanlights above each of the doors and in the pediment above the central third of the building. It is interesting to note the subtle differences in the fanlight above the central doorway and those to each side (pls. 4-5).
- 2.3.3 Internally there is also a relatively good survival of primary and early, period detail and little replacement or modernisation appears to have taken place in the twentieth century. These include skirting boards, panelled doors with beading to one face and moulded door frames, almost all of which are intact (pl. 14). There are also picture rails, dado rails and cornices which survive to a lesser extent. All of these simple features appear to be either primary or sufficiently early in the nineteenth century to be of interest. Due to the relatively early date of these it is not possible to be certain of exactly which date to the original construction of the building. This is particularly true for the panelled doors, most of which have been covered with twentieth century boarding over their faces.
- 2.3.4 The central staircase is of particular interest (pl. 6), rising two storeys with very slender newel posts and hand rail strongly appearing to be primary. The northern staircase, rising a single storey, has similarly slender detailing (pl. 7) although it has lost its button-head to the ground floor newel post. In contrast the detailing to the southern staircase is more solid in form (pl. 8) and this, together with its generally better condition than the other staircases suggest that it was inserted in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Each of the staircases have lost some of their square-section balusters.
- 2.3.5 One feature which has not survived particularly well are the cupboards which were located in each of the officer's rooms (Douet, 1998). There is a single large cupboard in G6 (pl. 13) which shares the same beading and detailing as the primary doors and may be primary. It is more likely that the cupboards to which Douet refers are those which survive upstairs in F12, S1, S2, S3 and S4. Each of these are smaller corner cupboards again with detailing to suggest that they may be primary.
- 2.3.6 Although the condition of the building appears largely to be sound it has deteriorated since the MoD vacated the building, seriously in parts and particularly at the southern end where a fire has made the first floor dangerous. Other smaller fires have caused minor damage and much of the ground floor towards the front of the building has been removed, probably due to rot.



## **2.4 Impact of proposed development**

- 2.4.1 The structure and layout of the White House make it ideally suited for conversion and adaptive reuse without large numbers of substantial alterations to its historic fabric.
- 2.4.2 Due to the building's high profile location facing onto the main road into Maidstone from the north one of its most important features is the attractive west elevation and this would be little altered in the proposed development. In consequence of this the layout of the main north-south body of the building would also remain largely intact with the retention of all of the main primary partitions in this part of the building.
- 2.4.3 The main impact of the proposed development on features of interest within the building is the removal of the primary central staircase at ground floor level. As detailed in this report the central staircase is of particular interest due to the period detailing of its slender newel post and hand rail and due to the fact that unlike the other two staircases it rises two storeys. The more solid detailing of the southern staircase (pl. 8) suggest that it may have been inserted towards the latter half of the nineteenth century and the northern staircase has lost the button-head to its ground floor newel post.
- 2.4.4 The other main impacts are towards the rear of the building. The east elevation, which is of limited interest containing the service wings, would be substantially altered by the removal of the single storey, secondary extension to the northern wing and by the addition of a new kitchen extension to the north side of the southern wing. The internal layout of the service wings, particularly the northern wing would also be altered to allow its reuse.
- 2.4.5 The historic fabric of the upper two floors would be little affected by their conversion to hotel rooms. The existing partitions would remain and the overall layout would only be amended by the insertion of en-suite bathrooms. Each of the probably primary corner cupboards (one on first floor, four on second) would remain.
- 2.4.6 The greatest difficulty with a building of this nature is the structural changes required for services and fire protection, all of which are expected to be of a high standard for residential accommodation. Although no detailed specifications have been examined, there is potential for gradual removal of substantial quantities of the historic fabric in the course of work, even if this is not at first envisaged. The audit attached to this report (Appendix 1) may assist in deciding the amount of fabric that must be retained.
- 2.4.7 The building is of such significance that detailed records should be made if fabric is to be removed, and this may require a further stage of survey before works commence (e.g. to elucidate the precise character and form of the timber framing).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

- 2.5.1 The White House is a building of considerable local interest as an attractive landmark and a surviving historic fragment of the former barracks. It is also of wider interest due to being the only surviving structure of the six timber-framed 'established' barracks buildings constructed in the 1790s by the Barracks Department. The building has been little altered in the twentieth century and retains a wealth of simple period detailing, much of which is hoped to be retained in the proposed development.

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September 1999

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J. Douet, *British Barracks 1600-1914: Their Architecture and Role in Society* (1998)

JONG/REPORTS/MAWHBS

## THE WHITE HOUSE, MAIDSTONE, KENT HISTORIC BUILDING ASSESSMENT

### APPENDIX 1: Room by Room Audit

This Appendix aims to note the principal surviving features of each room and to highlight those of particular interest.

#### GROUND FLOOR

- G1** Divided from G2 and G3 by modern stud partitions. Previously a single large room with semi-octagonal secondary projection. Three tri-partite windows survive two of which within projection. Fourth window lost. Each has 4-pane timber-framed sash windows to central section and flanking timber pilasters. Windows to S and W non-glazed to sides panels. Tall skirting survives, moulded cornice largely survives. Parts of south-east wall fire damaged and lumpy concrete apparently poured and set between damaged posts.
- G2** See G1 above.
- G3** See G1 above.
- G4** Entrance hall to southernmost unit. Button-headed newel post of relatively broad girth and prominent moulding. Chunky hand rail also in-situ and in relatively good condition. Lower half of square-section balusters in-situ. Simple softwood panelling to mid-height on each wall including alongside staircase. Floorboards in-situ. Iron-framed fan light above front door in-situ. Panelling to lower half of door lost.
- G5** Softwood joists almost entirely removed, brick supporting piers beneath exposed. Decorative moulded cornice and picture rail intact. Tall skirting board partially survives. Two 4-light sashes with primary glazing bars and simple panelling beneath window. Iron security bars (early-mid C20th) attached to internal frame. Primary door frames in-situ.
- G6** Window formerly 12-light sash, now with 6 vertical lights. Sash chains in-situ. Half of floor joists removed. Cupboard with same detailing as primary doors, possibly only surviving example of cupboard which is known to have originally been within each officer's room. Primary door to S in-situ – 6 panels, one face with decorative beading.
- G7** Primary studwork to each internal wall. Floor removed. 12-light sash window all glazing bars apparently primary and panelling beneath. Both doors apparently primary. Small, simple plaster cornice in-situ.
- G8** Entrance hall to central unit. Front door intact but with some fire damage. Semi-circular-headed frame around fan-light. Fan light of different design to those in side units. Mid-height primary panelling to walls, simple and with some limited fire damage. Very slender newel post (button-headed) and handrail. Square-section balusters (approximately two thirds in-situ). Primary glazed screen above door to rear of hall. All primary door surrounds in situ.

- G9** 12-light window, primary bars in-situ. Tall skirting, floor boards in-situ. Small section of former picture rail survives.
- G10** Tall skirting, primary floor boards and low dado rail all survive. Timber framed casement window secondary but C19th. Possibly in former door opening. Probably primary door in-situ.
- G11** Tall skirting in-situ. Primary joists largely removed. Secondary (mid-C19th) bay window with large panes.
- G12** Tall skirting in-situ, probably primary. Probably primary floor boards. Probably primary door but with secondary boards covering each face. Window formerly 12-light primary but lower half secondary with 3 vertical lights.
- G13** Northernmost entrance hall. Door with secondary boards covering probable panelling. Square-headed frame around fan-light. Slender newel post in-situ but button head lost. Slender hand rail intact but most of square section balusters lost. Walls panelled to mid-height dado rail. Apparently primary panelling beneath mid-C20th rippled covering chipboard. 2 doors to SE and E in-situ probably primary but with secondary boarding over panels. Apparently primary low skirting in-situ.
- G14** Skirting boards all in-situ. Early C20th tiled fire surround not in-situ but within room. 3 windows, each 4-lights large panes. Probably primary floorboards in-situ. Doors not in-situ but in room, probably primary but with secondary boards over panelling.
- G15** Simple horizontal boarding to walls up to mid-height. 4-light sash window to W, to E secondary casement at high level. Primary floor boards, skirting. Door to G18 probably primary but with covering boards. Cast iron fireplace surround within room on floor. Too small for fireplace in G15.
- G16** Primary floor boards, large sash with secondary frosted glazing.
- G17** WC late C19th?. T+G boarding to walls.
- G18** Small hall off G16.
- G19** Roofed external staircase to basement.
- G20** Within secondary projection. Stone flagged floor. 12-light sash, primary bars. Primary external door in-situ.
- G21** Within secondary projection. 12-light sash same as those in primary building. Vertical iron security bars to external face. Solid floor, cement skirting. Door frames survive but no primary doors.
- G22** Lean-to, same brick, gauged over door opening as G21, G20.
- G23** 12-light sash with secondary frosted glass. See also G25.
- G24** See also G25.
- G25** Large sash window for formerly larger room with G23 and G24. Window originally-12 light, only 2 lights with original glazing bars. Solid floor.
- G26** Solid floor covered with quarry tiles. 2 sash windows to S. 12-light sash with chamfered (possibly replacement) glazing bars, 8-light sash with slender ovolo bars. Plain panelled door to rear without beading to either face.
- G27** Small room formerly external passage shown by overlapping weatherboarding to E and W faces. Floor solid. 2 stone steps to E allow access to raised floor height above basemented area.
- G28** Ground floor removed.
- G29** Asbestos – not accessible.
- G30** 12 light sash, primary bars. Walls covered with simple boarding to full height.
- G31** No ground floor survived at time of survey. Open to basement.

- G32** Central stairwell within secondary brick projection. Button-headed newell post of moderately slender girth.

## FIRST FLOOR

- F1** In secondary brick projection. 12-light sash with slender ovolo bars.
- F2** In secondary brick projection. 12-light sash with slender ovolo bars. Button-headed newel post, sharp swan-necked hand rail suggestive of early C19th. Primary doors intact.
- F3** In secondary brick projection. 12-light sash with slender ovolo bars.
- F4** Not accessible
- F5** Not accessible
- F6** Not accessible.
- F7** Two windows, 12-light sashes, primary slender ovolo glazing bars in-situ. Simple plaster cornice partially survives. Skirting intact, dado largely survives
- F8** 12-light sash, lower sash not in-situ but in room. Slender ovolo bars. Picture rail and cornice largely intact.
- F9** Window to S removed, surround intact. 12-light sash to W largely intact except for lowest horizontal of upper sash. Panelling intact beneath both windows. Tiled fireplace intact but mantel removed. Skirting intact, door frames intact but only door to SE in situ.
- F10** Hand rail survives. Solid late C19th newel post at W end. Primary panelling in-situ. Simple plaster cornice largely intact. First floor square section balusters all intact. Primary doors all in-situ except to SW. 12-light sash three-quarters intact, slender ovolo bars.
- F11** Picture rail, dado, skirting all largely intact. Fragments of cornice survives. 12-light sash – little primary survives, 3 large secondary vertical lights to top half and only one primary glazing bar to bottom.
- F12** 12-light sash with thin ovolo bars intact. Picture rail, dado and skirting all largely intact.
- F13** 12-light sash, chunky ovolo bars with thin inner face. Small plaster cornice partially intact. High skirting intact, dado rail largely intact, picture rail intact. N door and door to centre intact but boarded.
- F14** 12-light sash, slender ovolo bars. Dado and skirting intact. Picture rail and simple cornice partially intact. Doors intact but boarded.
- F15** Hall/stairwell. Primary panelling matching that on ground floor in-situ. Primary handrail intact, balusters one-third intact. Primary slender newel post at W end intact. Small simple cornice largely intact, similar to others in adjacent rooms (F16, F17). Primary doors all in-situ. 12-light sash window, thin ovolo bars intact, panelling beneath window removed.
- F16** High skirting with beading in-situ. Picture rail  $\frac{3}{4}$  intact. Simple moulded plaster cornice  $\frac{1}{2}$  intact. 12-light sash window, upper and lower halves of different phases but both C19th. Chunky ovolo bars to upper, thin ovolo bars to lower. Sash chains intact. Panelling beneath window intact. Both primary doors intact. Very simple secondary cement/concrete fire surround and mantelpiece of limited interest intact.
- F17** High skirting almost entirely intact. Simple moulded plaster cornice half intact. 12-light sash window, primary glazing bars intact and chains partially

- intact. Panelling beneath window intact. Door in-situ probably primary but with secondary boards covering face.
- F18** 12-light sash all bars (slender ovolo) intact and sash chains. Panelling beneath intact. Primary panelled door. Decorative plaster cornice almost entirely intact. Tall skirting intact with simple beading to top.
- F19** 4-light sash, glazing bars to lower half lost. Panelling beneath intact. Tall skirting intact with simple beading.
- F20** Lower half of walls and continuing up the stairs covered with crinkled C20th boarding. Previous (probably primary) panelling in-situ beneath. Handrail of stairs intact. Square section balusters almost all intact. Low primary skirting intact. Moulded plaster cornice intact to rear half of room. Door frames all intact, all 5 doors in-situ but with C20th boards covering faces. 4-light sash window with chunky ovolo bars, lower half lost (not replaced).
- F21** 3 windows. Each 4-light, large-paned with panelling beneath. Glazing bars slender, moulded. Tall skirting, no cornice, picture rail and dado/projecting ledge at 1.4 m.
- F22** 2 windows, both 4-light sashes with original moulded ovolo bars intact. High skirting but apparently secondary. Sections of apparently primary skirting survive in cupboard. Door probably primary but with secondary covering boards over each face.
- F23** Window was 12-light sash but lower half secondary with 3 vertical lights.
- F24** Window was 12-light sash but lower half secondary with 3 vertical lights. Door boarded, probably primary. Small surviving section of skirting. 2 small secondary rooms to S (24 a + b). Early C20th windows, plasterboarded walls, no evidence of laths on studs.
- F25** Former window to S weatherboarded, sill and simple frame visible. Window to N secondary (late C19th/early C20th) casement, both casements removed, one in room. Window surround plain.
- F26** Two 12-light windows to N and S with slender ovolo bars. Large windows in very small rooms due to secondary partitioning but still windows curiously unbalanced within projection. Some bars to S window replaced by non-moulded chamfered bars. Doors plain, no beading.

## **SECOND FLOOR**

- S1** Primary door in-situ, panelled but plainer than those downstairs, 4 panels no beading. Picture frame in-situ. Secondary door to W. Built-in cupboard in NE corner, probably primary.
- S2** Probably primary corner cupboard in-situ.
- S3** Floor too dangerous to walk over. Picture rail partially in-situ. Probably primary corner cupboard in-situ.
- S4** Floor too dangerous to walk over. Picture rail partially in-situ. Cast iron fireplace surround on floor. Early C20th (?). Corner cupboard.
- S5** Primary hand rail intact, balusters largely intact. Panelling to walls intact, 1 stud exposed beneath and no evidence of laths showing walls never plastered. Simple low skirting in-situ. Simpler door surrounds.
- S6** 6-light sashes to N and S. Chunky ceiling joists.



**FIGURE 1** Site location

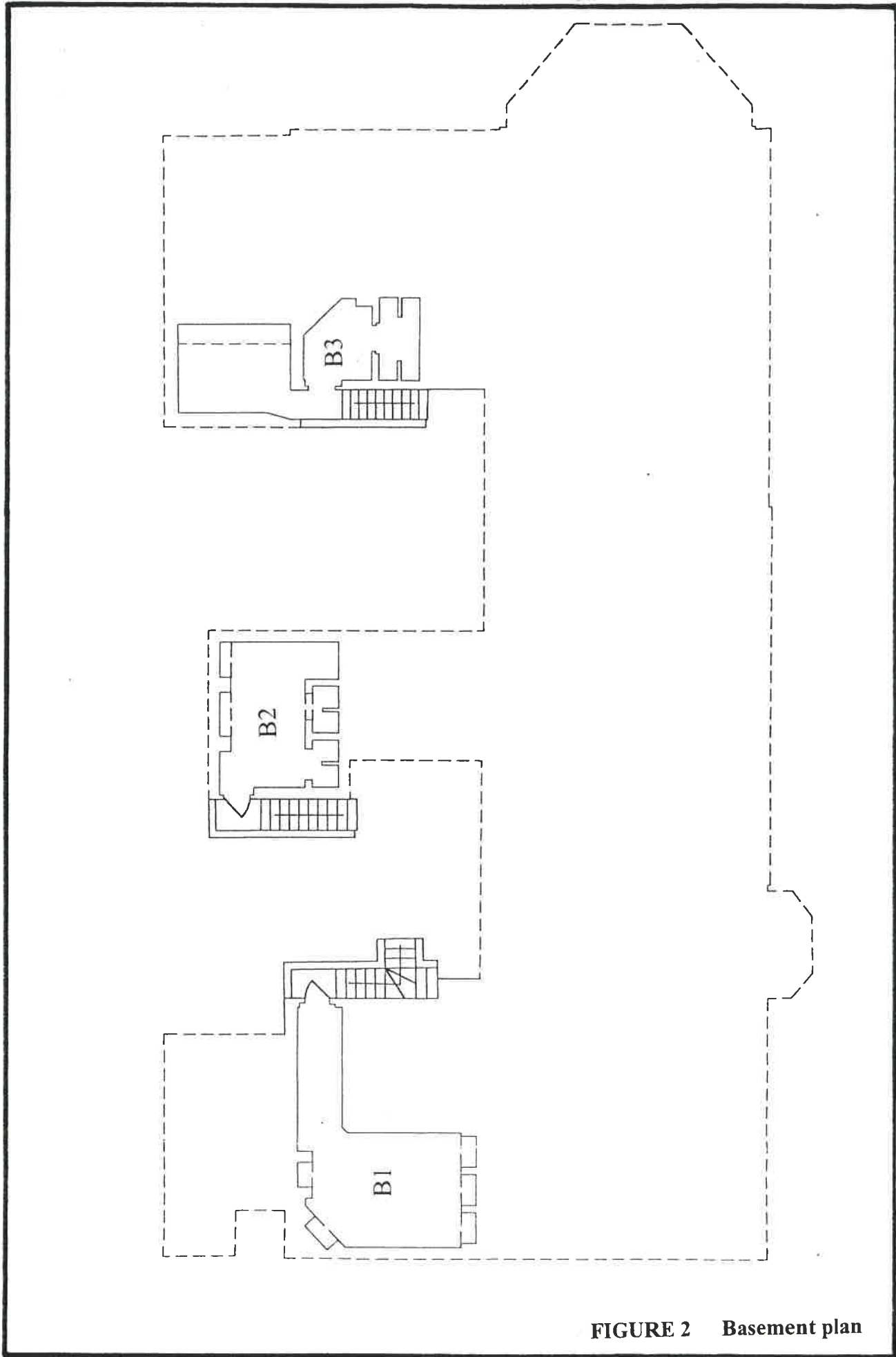


FIGURE 2 Basement plan



FIGURE 3 Ground floor plan (secondary additions shows in black)

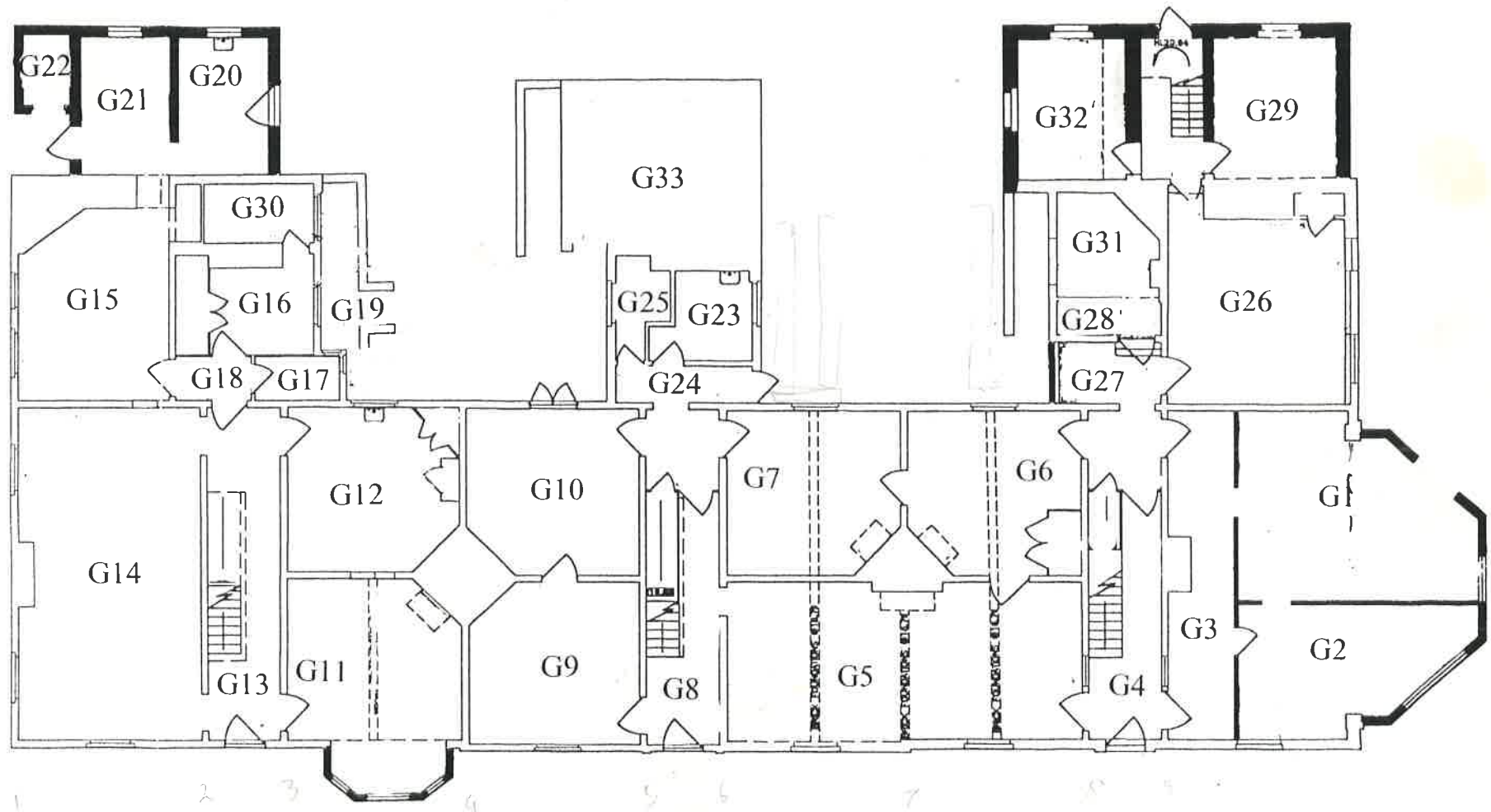
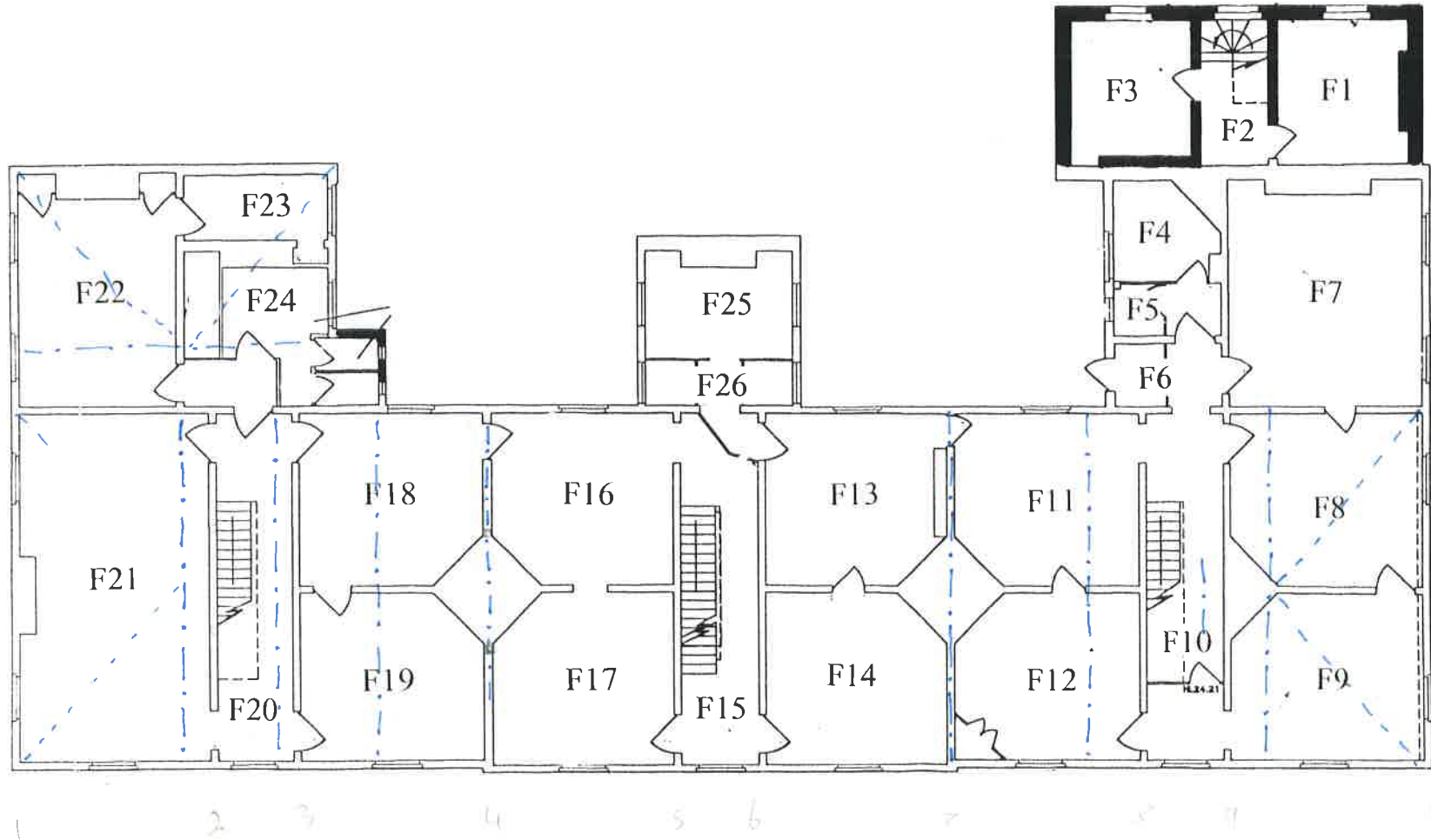


FIGURE 4 First floor plan (secondary elements shown in black)



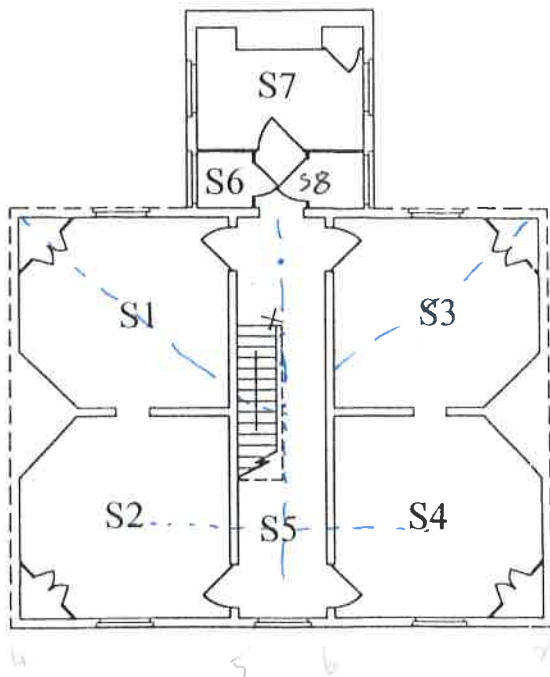


FIGURE 5 Second floor plan



1



2



3



4



5



8



11



7



10



6



9



13 15



12 14



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