



Albion Mill, Factory Hill, Lancaster, Lancashire

Archaeological Building Investigation



Oxford Archaeology North

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(Construction) Ltd**

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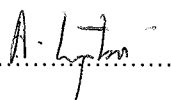
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SUMMARY

Thomas Armstrong (Construction) Ltd and Impact Housing Association Ltd have received planning consent (Application No 12/01005/FUL) for a proposed redevelopment of a former industrial site on the north-western fringe of Lancaster city centre. The development proposals necessitate the demolition of existing buildings, which include a multi-storey block that represents the vestiges of the former Albion Mill textile-manufacturing complex (centred on NGR 348195 462075).

Albion Mill was established in the 1820s as a cotton and silk spinning mill, and was one of several important textile-manufacturing sites in the town that were built adjacent to the Lancaster Canal during the first half of the nineteenth century. By the 1870s, output from the mill was focused on the production of coconut matting and, in the 1930s, it was used for dyeing and weaving. However, the mill had fallen into disuse by the 1960s, and the majority of the buildings were demolished subsequently to enable residential development.

In order to mitigate the ultimate loss of the surviving building, the Lancashire County Archaeology Service, which provides planning advice to Lancaster City Council, recommended that an archaeological building investigation of the multi-storey mill block was carried out prior to its demolition. In the light of this advice, Lancaster City Council attached a condition to planning consent that required an appropriate level of archaeological building investigation to be undertaken.

In March 2013, Thomas Armstrong (Construction) Ltd commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake the required scheme of building investigation. The survey was carried out in September 2013, and was commensurate with an English Heritage Level 1-type survey.

The survey concluded that the earliest surviving fabric dated to the first half of the nineteenth century, forming part of a building that is depicted on Ordnance Survey mapping of 1849. This was possibly a two-storey building, although it was rebuilt and extended in the second half of the nineteenth century, probably following its purchase by new owners in 1870. The north wall on the ground floor of the remodelled structure, together with a substantial internal spine wall, represents the only fabric surviving from the original building. The remodelled building had almost certainly been intended for storage and warehousing purposes, although the presence of a cast-iron safe on the first floor suggests that it had also housed office accommodation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Andrew Feddon, Vaughan Jones and Stuart Bainbridge of Thomas Armstrong (Construction) Ltd for commissioning and supporting the project. Thanks are also expressed to Doug Moir, Planning Officer (Archaeology) with the Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS), for his advice and guidance.

The archaeological building investigation was carried out by Chris Wild and Ian Miller. The report was compiled by Chris Wild, and the illustrations were produced by Mark Tidmarsh. The report was edited by Ian Miller, who was also responsible for project management.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Thomas Armstrong (Construction) Ltd and Impact Housing Association Ltd have received planning consent (Application No 12/01005/FUL) for a proposed redevelopment of a former industrial site on the north-western fringe of Lancaster city centre. The development proposals allow for the erection of 14 new houses and 12 flats, with associated external works, which will necessitate the demolition of existing buildings. These include a multi-storey block that represents the vestiges of the former Albion Mill textile-manufacturing complex, together with a single-storey range that was extended in the twentieth century.
- 1.1.2 Albion Mill is a non-designated heritage asset recorded that is recorded on the Lancashire Historic Environment Record (PRN 4646). It was established in the 1820s as a cotton and silk spinning mill, was producing coconut matting by the 1870s and, in the 1930s, was used for dyeing and weaving. However, the mill had fallen into disuse by the 1960s, and the majority of the buildings were demolished subsequently to enable residential development.
- 1.1.3 In order to secure heritage interests, the Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS), which provides planning advice to Lancaster City Council, recommended that the surviving element of the former Albion Mill complex merited an archaeological building investigation in advance of demolition to mitigate the loss of the structure. In the light of this recommendation, Lancaster City Council attached a condition to planning consent for the proposed development (Condition 8):
- ‘No works shall take place on the site until the applicant, or their agent or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of building recording and analysis.
- Reason: To ensure and safeguard the recording and inspection of matters of historical importance associated with the building.’
- 1.1.4 In March 2013, Thomas Armstrong (Construction) Ltd commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake the required scheme of building investigation. Following consultation with LCAS, it was recommended that a building investigation commensurate with an English Heritage Level 1-type survey would form an appropriate record (English Heritage 2006a). The survey was carried out in September 2013.

1.2 SITE LOCATION

- 1.2.1 The study area comprises a 0.35 hectare site situated approximately 0.5km to the north-west of Lancaster city centre (Fig 1). The site is bounded to the north by residential properties fronting onto Albion Street, to the east by the Lancaster Canal, and to the south by housing that occupies a higher level and overlooks the study area (Plate 1). The principal access to the site (centred on NGR 348195 462075) is from the west, via Factory Hill, although additional access is afforded to the northern part of the site via Hinde Street.
- 1.2.2 The site is characterised by the dramatic changes in level across the site and has existing retaining walls on the eastern boundary to the canal, and across the centre of the site east to west. The site has a steep overgrown bank to the south with residential properties overlooking the site. The site contains three existing buildings, two industrial units, and a multi-storey block. Only one of the buildings has been in use over the last few years, and serves as the offices for Thomas Armstrong (Construction) Ltd. Due to the topography, the site is overlooked from the canal towpath and dwellings to the north and south.



Plate 1: Aerial view looking east across the site, with arrow marking the subject building

1.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 Albion Mill was built during the period 1821-5 by William Jackson, a silk and cotton spinner (Price 1983, 94). The mill was also referred to as Factory Hill Mill and Canal Side Mill (Baines 1825, 37). Similarly, William Jackson is listed as a cotton manufacturer on St Leonard Gate in a directory for 1834, which probably refers to Albion Mill (Pigot 1834, 284). It was one of several textile mills erected adjacent to the Lancaster Canal in the early nineteenth century which, by the 1860s, formed a belt of canal-side industry that stretched from Queen Street to Ridge Lane (Price 1995). This development included Ridge Lane Mill, which was built a short distance to the north of Albion Mill in 1836-7.
- 1.3.2 Albion Mill is annotated as a silk and cotton factory on the Ordnance Survey first edition 1:1,560 map of 1849, which was surveyed in 1844-5 (Plate 2). This detailed map shows the factory complex to have comprised several buildings, with the principal manufacturing block occupying the south-eastern part of the mill complex, adjacent and parallel to the Lancaster Canal, which presumably supplied the mill's steam engine with a constant supply of water for condensing purposes. A range of ancillary buildings are shown to have occupied the northern part of the site, along the northern side of the central mill yard. The footprint of the existing multi-storey block in the present study area is shown to have been occupied by a shorter building. A row of houses situated to the south of the mill yard, between the main manufacturing block and the ancillary buildings, appear to represent back-to-back workers' dwellings.

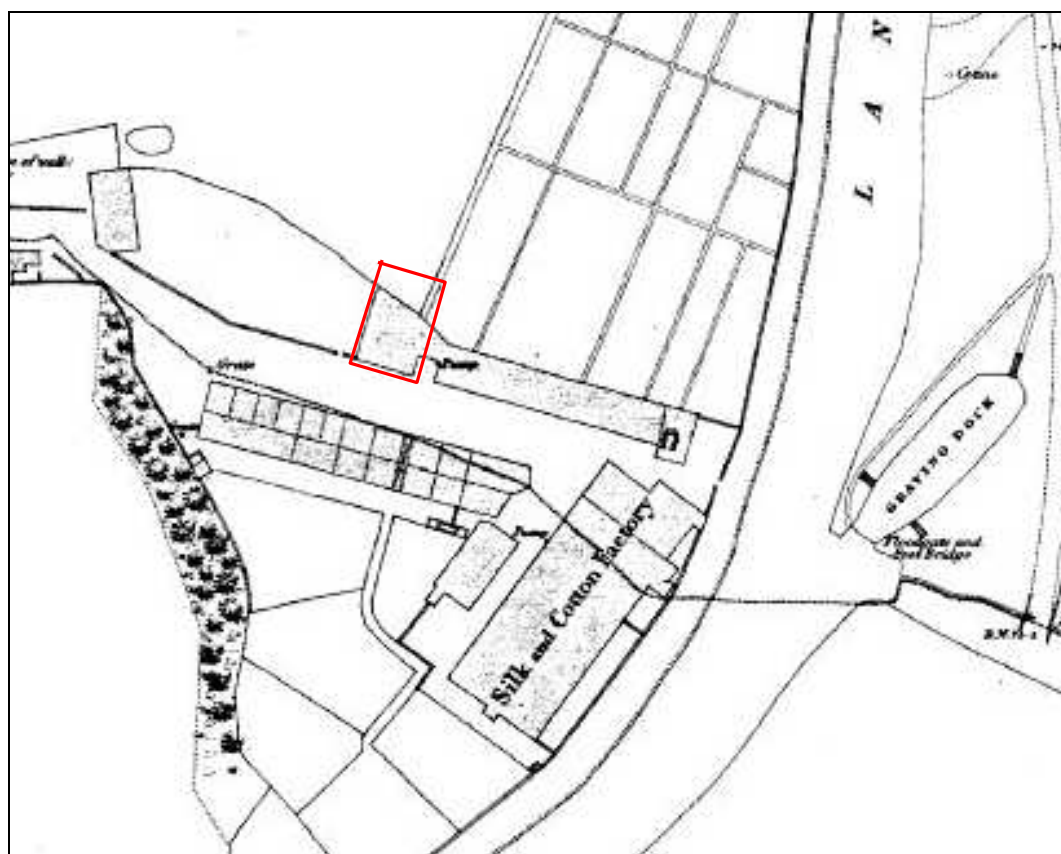


Plate 2: Extract for the Ordnance Survey 1:1056 map of 1849, with the approximate footprint of the study building outlined

- 1.3.3 The mill was sold in November 1870 to Richard Preston (*Lancaster Guardian* 3 December 1870), though for what use is uncertain. However, by 1875, it was occupied by William John Sly, the largest manufacturer of matting in Lancaster (Fleury 1891, 123). In 1877, William Sly and Thomas Wilson, both of Albion Mills in Lancaster, obtained a patent for ‘an improved manufacture of fabrics to be formed of cocoa, manilla, sisal, alloe, or esparto fibres, and improvements in looms for weaving such improved and other fabrics formed of coarse threads of other materials’ (*London Gazette* 26 October, 1877). William Sly is also recorded in 1894 as trading in coir-yarn, or twisted fibre used by farmers for cordage purposes.
- 1.3.4 Albion Mill is named on the Ordnance Survey 1:500 map of 1892 (Plate 3). This shows the mill complex to have been expanded and remodelled slightly. A new manufacturing block, possibly a weaving shed, had been built immediately to the south-west of the main block, and similarly occupied a canal-side location. The range to the north of the mill yard (annotated as Factory Hill) had been rebuilt entirely, and the multi-storey building that occupies the site presently had been erected. A large drying ground is also shown to the north of the buildings, suggesting that the bleaching and/or dyeing of goods was also carried out on the site.

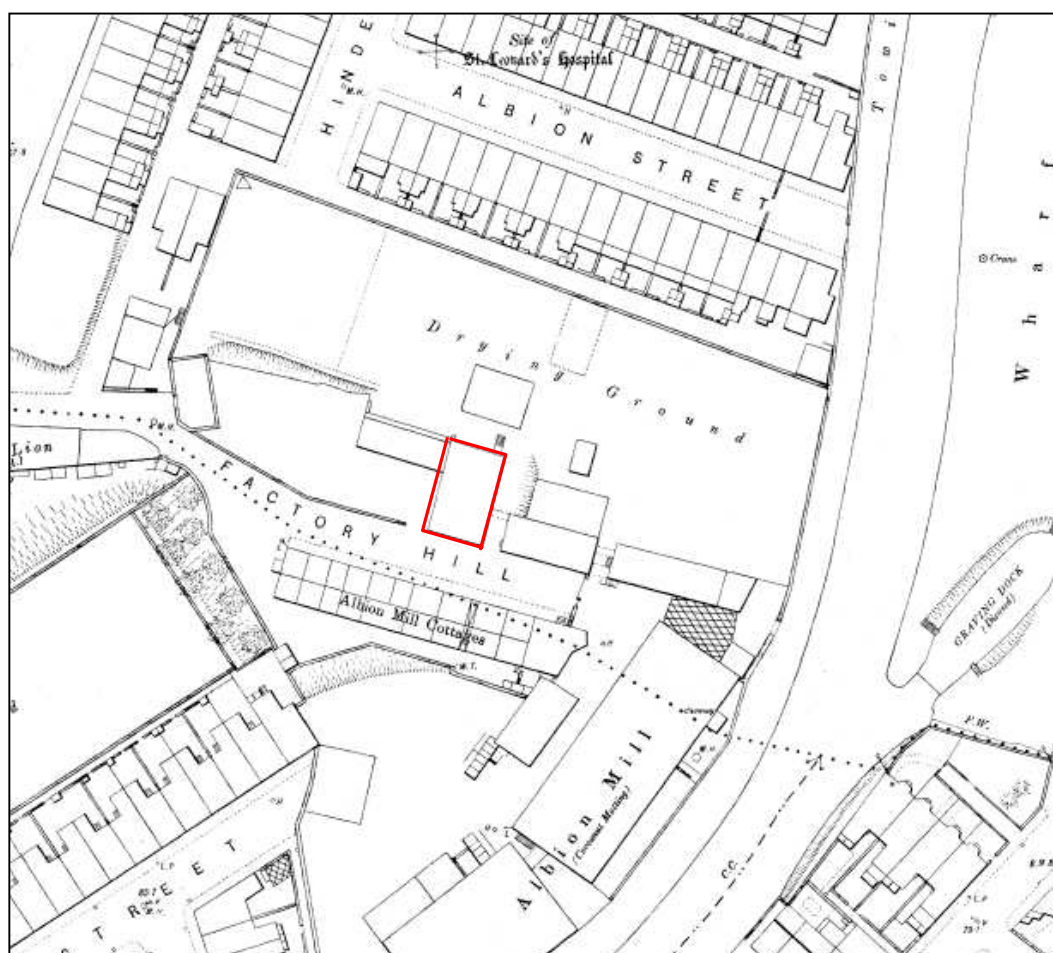


Plate 3: Extract for the Ordnance Survey 1:500 map of 1892, with the footprint of the study building outlined

- 1.3.5 WJ Sly is listed as a mat and matting manufacturer at Albion Mills in a trade directory for 1912 (Bulmer 1912, 115). However, Sly died on 21 March 1915. He is described in a newspaper article of that date as a cocoa mat and matting manufacturer at Albion Mill in Lancaster (*London Gazette*, 27 July 1915).
- 1.3.6 The mill was taken over by William Goodacre & Sons (also of Holme and Kendal) sometime between 1915 and 1924. The Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1956-7 annotates the mill complex as a weaving and dyeing factory. This firm continued the production of coconut matting, and later rugs and carpets, at Albion Mill. The firm ceased trading in 1963 (CA/WDB 64), and the site was converted for use as a small industrial estate. The main buildings adjacent to the Lancaster Canal were eventually demolished to enable the residential development of Albion Mews in the late 1980s (Plate 4).



Plate 4: Aerial view across the site of Albion Mill taken in 1988

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 BUILDING INVESTIGATION

- 2.1.1 **Descriptive record:** written records using OA North *pro-forma* record sheets were made of all principal building elements, both internal and external, as well as any features of historical or architectural significance. Particular attention was also paid to the relationship between the earliest and latest parts of the building, especially those that would show their development and any alterations. These records are essentially descriptive, although interpretation was carried out on site as required. All work carried out was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures provided by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA), and their code of conduct.
- 2.1.2 **Photographs:** photographs were taken in high-resolution digital format (15MP). The photographic archive consists of both general shots of the buildings, as well as shots of specific architectural details.

2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 A full archive of the work has been prepared to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (2006b) and the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage* (UKIC 1990). The archive will be deposited with the Lancashire Record Office on completion of the project. In addition, a copy of the report will be forwarded to the Lancashire Historic Environment Record (HER).

3. BUILDING INVESTIGATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 The former Albion Mill complex comprises two historic buildings: a multi-storey block, which formed the focus of the archaeological building investigation (Plate 5); and a single-storey range immediately to the north. The multi-storey block comprised a four-storey, stone structure occupying the north-western part of the site, fronting Factory Hill. Internally, the building above the ground floor measures 12.9 x 7.48m, with the wall having a thickness of 0.46m.



Plate 5: General view of the multi-storey block, looking north-west from Factory Hill

- 3.1.2 The original building, erected prior to the Ordnance Survey map of 1849 (Plate 2), was bounded on its northern side by a curving retaining wall, forming an asymmetrical structure. This curving wall survives extant within the ground floor of the existing building. Late re-pointing / partial rendering of the external walls obscured detail which may have demonstrated whether the upper stories of the extant structure formed part of the original construction, or were added when the building was extended by up to 6.2m on its northern side, adding a further bay, and creating a uniformly rectangular structure. Brick blocking in the east and west long walls above stone corbels carrying the ceiling beams at first-floor level (Plate 6), and the use of cast-iron brackets for the ceiling beams at second-floor level, suggest that the original structure was possibly of two-storey height, with the ceiling beams being replaced when the structure was extended to its present four-storey height.



Plate 6: Brick blocking above a stone corbel at first-floor level in the west elevation of the building

3.2 EXTERIOR

- 3.2.1 The building is of local sandstone construction, faced externally with roughly dressed and coursed blocks, and with irregular quoins to the returns, but of random rubble internally. Windows were only provided originally in the two central bays of the western façade (Plate 7), with dressed stone lintels and projecting stone sills, with those on the second floor being slightly smaller than those below. The two offset windows on the third floor appear to have been late insertions, probably dating to the conversion of the building to offices after the 1960s. At the northern end of the western façade, the wall scar of a perpendicular single-storey shed with pitched roof survived (Plate 8). This appears to have been of a contemporary build to the multi-storey block, and both are depicted on the Ordnance Survey 1:500 map of 1892 (Plate 3). Elements of the north wall of this structure survived *in-situ*, forming a retaining wall against the raised ground level to the north (Plate 9).
- 3.2.2 The eastern façade appears to have been devoid of fenestration originally, the only aperture comprising a wide, quoined doorway at the northern end at first-floor level. This afforded access, via a stone stair, to the higher ground to the east. An irregular arrangement of windows was inserted subsequently, with short re-used lengths of railway track utilised as lintels, and a mixture of flagstone and dressed stone sills (Plate 10).
- 3.2.3 The south façade had windows to each bay at first- and second-floor levels, and windows limited to the two central bays on the third floor (Plate 11). The windows differed from those in the west wall by having cast-iron lintels (Plate 12). These comprised a continuous band of cast-iron sheeting through the whole wall thickness. The south wall also incorporated a doorway into the ground floor, flanked on its eastern side by a small horizontal window, which was blocked subsequently (Plate 13).
- 3.2.4 Cast-iron lintels were also used in the northern gable (Plate 14). Here, fenestration was punctuated by a central loophole, whilst the windows of the first floor afforded light from a passageway (known as an ‘area’) below the level of yard to the north (Plate 15). A stair down from this yard, placed opposite the eastern window, is depicted on the Ordnance Survey 1:500 edition of 1892, but was blocked subsequently and replaced with a stair and bridge to a doorway inserted into the eastern bay of the north wall at second-floor level (Plate 14).
- 3.2.5 The loading loophole, which retained no evidence for having housed a powered hoist, was also remodelled at first- and second-floor level, with an external platform carried on cast-iron brackets inserted within brick blocking (Plate 15). The window below was reduced in height, with the insertion of an inverted, fish-bellied cast-iron beam as a lintel. The window to the east was remodelled concurrently with the insertion of the doorway to form a continuous horizontal window, sharing an I-section steel lintel with the doorway.



Plate 7: The western façade of the multi-storey block, viewed from Factory Hill



Plate 8: Wall scar at the northern end of the western façade



Plate 9: Remains of the north wall of the former single-storey building



Plate 10: The eastern façade, showing the doorway at the northern end



Plate 11: General view of the southern façade



Plate 12: The first-floor windows and cast-iron lintels in the southern façade

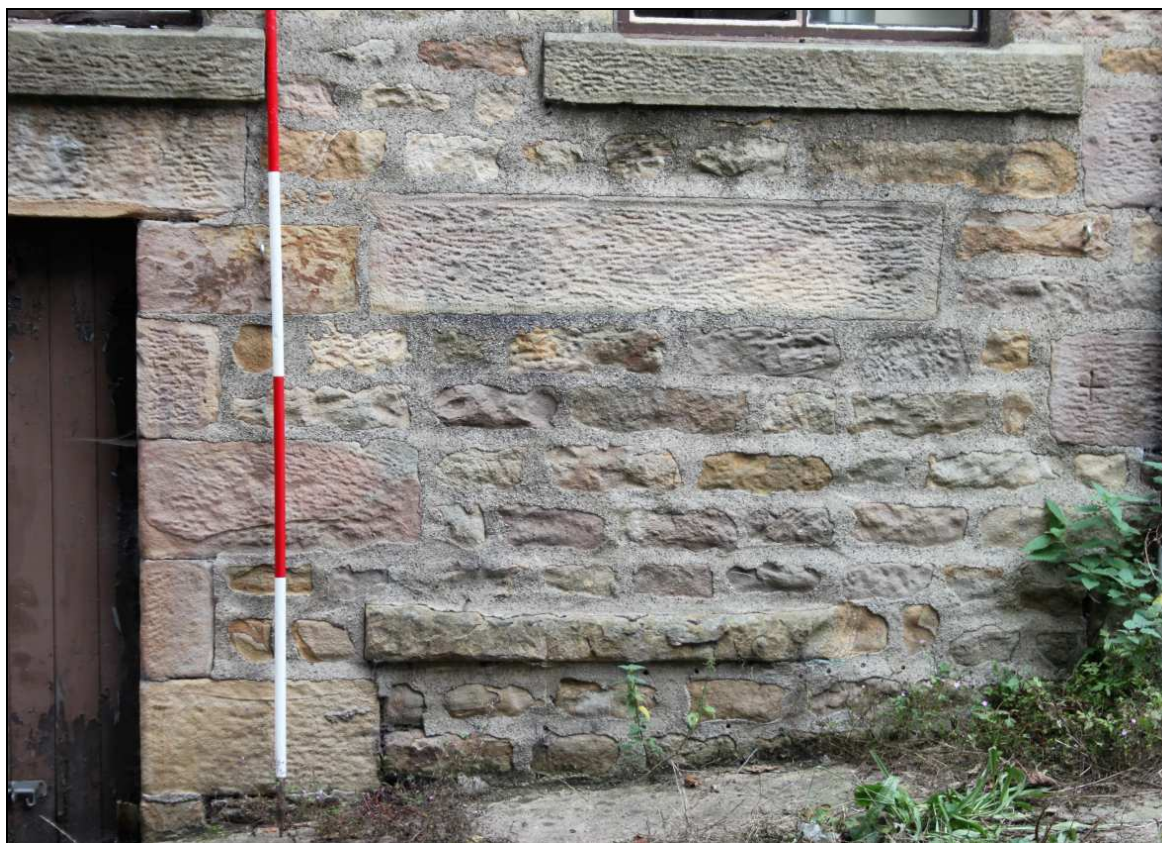


Plate 13: Detail of the blocked window at ground-floor level in the southern façade



Plate 14: The northern façade



Plate 15: The remodelled loading loop in the northern facade

3.3 GROUND FLOOR

- 3.3.1 The ground floor was subdivided by an approximately central spine wall of almost 2' (0.58m) thickness, and of similar stone construction to the exterior walls. The spine wall created two separate rooms, the western room measuring 3.56m wide, and the eastern 3.43m wide. Access to the western part of the ground floor was afforded originally by a doorway with dressed quoins in the south-western corner of the building, with two vertical windows placed to the north (Plate 16). However, this was remodelled subsequently to a window (Plate 17), with the adjacent window remodelled to form a centrally-placed doorway. The eastern part of the ground floor was accessed by a doorway in the southern gable, flanked on its eastern side by a small window, which was blocked subsequently (Plate 12).



Plate 16: The doorway providing access to the western part of the ground floor

- 3.3.2 Whilst there did not appear to have been any direct communication between the western and eastern parts originally, a doorway was inserted through the spine wall in the twentieth century, facilitating access between the two rooms. Access to the first floor from the western part of the ground floor was also afforded via a steep timber stair (Plate 18). This was possibly contemporary with the expansion of the building in the 1870s, but may be slightly later.
- 3.3.3 The original flooring in the western room was stone flags. This was covered subsequently with timber boards, and was probably contemporary with the insertion of the timber stair. It is unclear whether the eastern part of the ground floor, which was at a slightly higher level, had a similar floor inserted, as it was covered latterly with a concrete screed (Plates 19 and 20).
- 3.3.4 The ceiling joists were band-sawn and whitewashed, and were carried by the central longitudinal spine wall. There was no evidence for any form of fire-proofing having been employed.



Plate 17: The southern end of the western room on the ground floor, showing window in blocked doorway



Plate 18: The western room on the ground floor, showing the central spine wall and inserted doorway

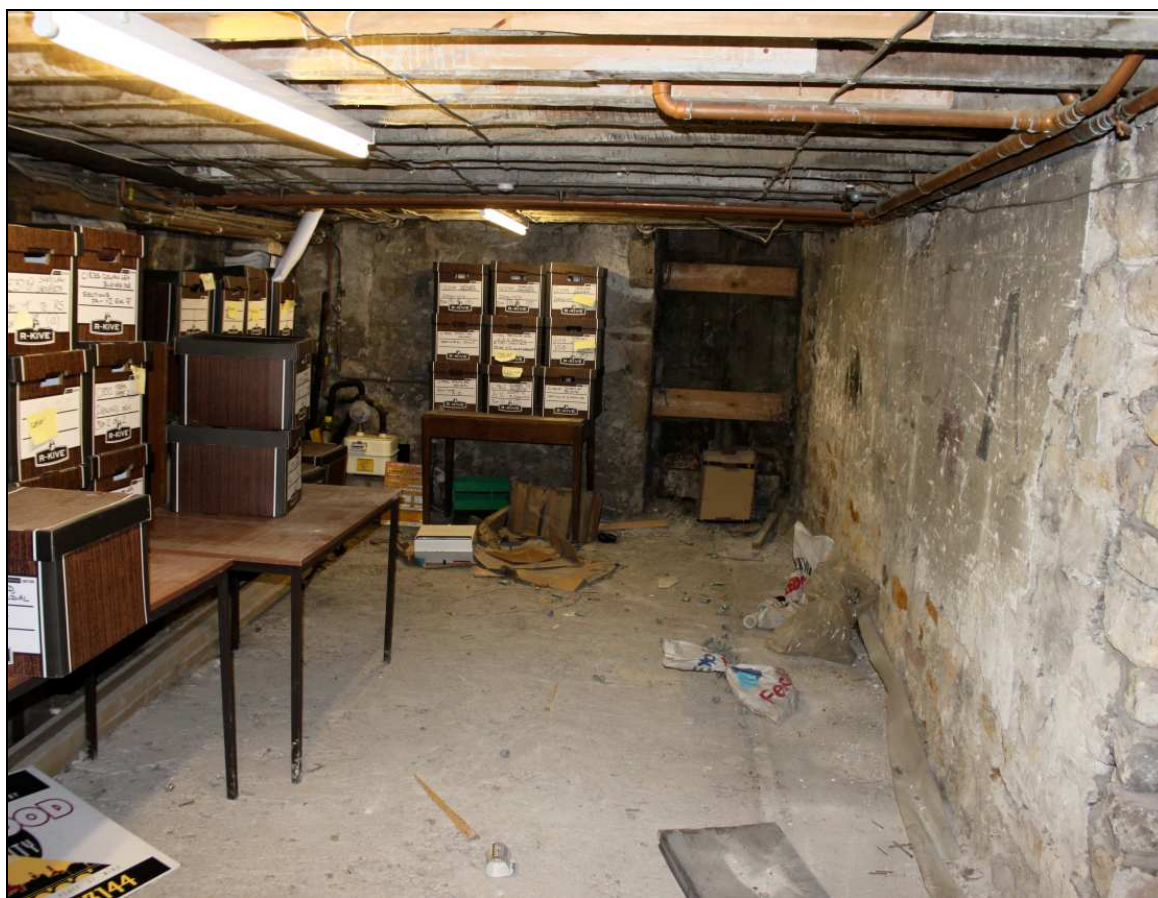


Plate 19: The southern end of the eastern room on the ground floor



Plate 20: The northern end of the eastern room on the ground floor

3.4 UPPER FLOORS

- 3.4.1 Internally, the floors overlying the ground floor had been heavily remodelled during the second half of the twentieth century, probably during the conversion of the building to offices (Plate 21). This remodelling included the insertion of stud partition walls throughout the building, suspended ceilings and a new staircase. One of the partitions on the ground floor was backed with coconut matting fibres, which may have been produced within the complex, and perhaps indicates that some partitioning of the building had been undertaken whilst it was still in use for textile-manufacturing purposes. A substantial cast-iron safe, manufactured by Thomas Perry & Sons of Bilston, was incorporated into a partition wall on the first floor (Plate 22). This leading firm of iron-founders and manufacturers of armour plate produced safes from the mid-nineteenth century until 1925.
- 3.4.2 The modern wall coverings obscured any evidence for the position of the original stair. However, given the lack of original fenestration and the position of the principal access, it was probably placed adjacent to the east wall.
- 3.4.3 The large-scantling ceiling beams all appear to date from the expansion of the structure in the second half of the nineteenth century, and were circular-sawn with lambs-tongue chamfers. At first-floor level, these were carried on dressed, angled sandstone corbels (Plate 23), whilst at second-floor level the ceiling beams were housed in projecting cast-iron brackets (Plates 24 and 25). At third-floor level, however, the beams were carried on roughly hewn stone corbels, which projected only marginally beyond the wall face (Plates 26 and 27).
- 3.4.4 The upper beams formed the tie beams of queen post trusses (Plate 28), the straining beams of which carried timber upper king ties. Each queen post was braced on the outer side, above the lower of two trenched and butt-ended purlins. All joints were marked with Roman numeral carpenter's marks on their northern face (Plate 29), with a continuous sequence running from the eastern principal rafter on the southern tie beam throughout this truss, and through those to the north.
- 3.4.5 The Welsh slate roof represented a modern replacement. The roofing material used for the original structure is unknown, although it may have comprised sandstone flags. Several modern skylights had been inserted into the roof in the later twentieth century.
- 3.4.6 The guttering was carried on square projecting corbels, which lapped around the southern gable to allow for downpipes to be placed at either end of the southern façade.



Plate 21: View along the main corridor on the first floor



Plate 22: Ceiling beam on first floor supported on dressed, angled sandstone corbel, above cast-iron safe



Plate 23: Detail of angled sandstone corbel set into the east wall on the first floor



Plate 24: General view of empty office on the second floor



Plate 25: Detail of cast-iron bracket supporting the ceiling beam on the second floor



Plate 26: The south-western corner of the third floor, showing large scantling timber beam supported by a stone corbel



Plate 27: Detail of the timber beam and stone corbel on the third floor



Plate 28: One of the three queen-post trusses supporting the roof



Plate 29: King ties and carpenters' assembly marks on the roof truss

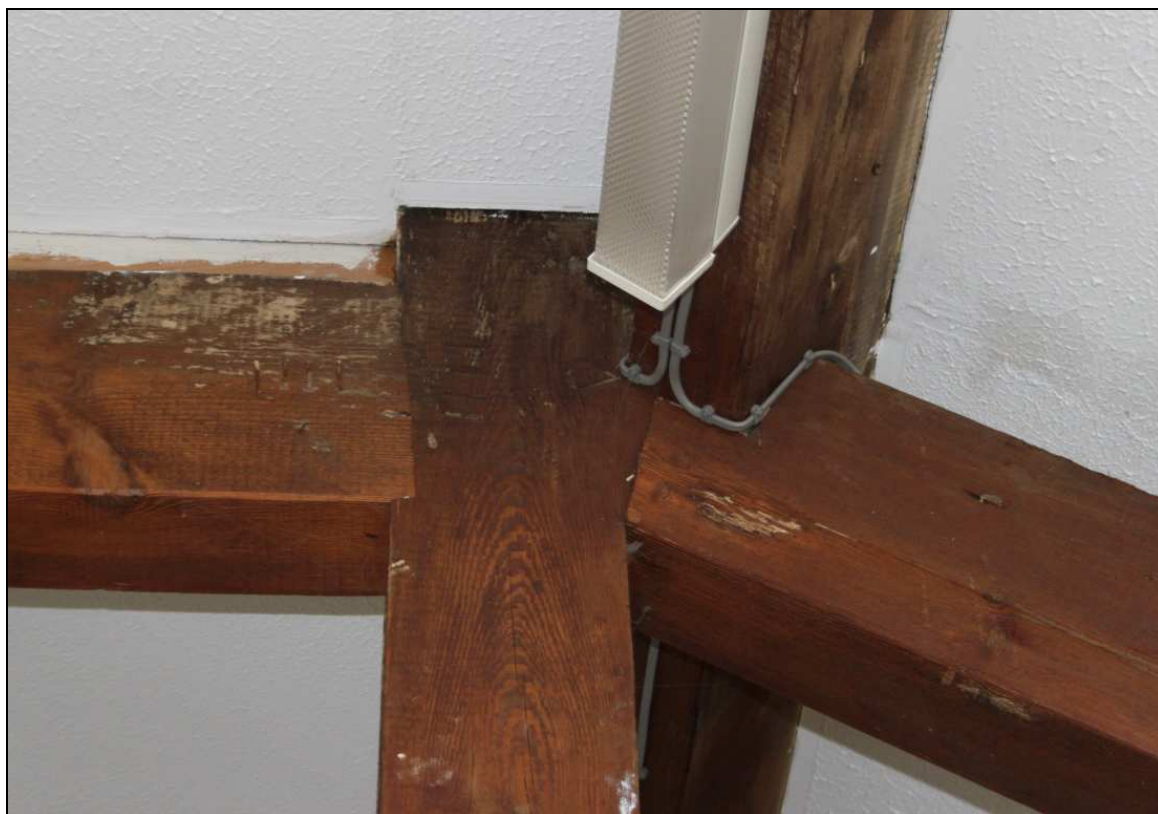


Plate 30: Detail of joint on the roof truss

3.5 SINGLE-STOREY RANGE

- 3.5.1 A single-storey range lying to the north of the multi-storey block represented a twentieth-century addition to Albion Mill, and incorporated at least two phases of development. A photographic record of the exterior elevations of this building was compiled, although access was not available to the interior. However, this was partially visible through a window aperture, and had clearly been stripped of all internal fixtures and fittings.
- 3.5.2 A small rectangular building is depicted in this area on Ordnance Survey maps published in 1892 (Plate 3) and 1913. However, the next edition of Ordnance Survey mapping, surveyed in 1931 and published in 1936, shows this structure to have been replaced with a larger, L-shaped building (Plate 31); the same layout is depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1939. By 1956-7, however, an extension had been added to create the rectangular block that occupies the site currently.



Plate 31: The Ordnance Survey map of 1936, marking the footprint of the single-storey range

- 3.5.3 The original L-shaped block was of coursed rubble construction, with quoins (Plate 32). The short projected wing forming the south-eastern corner of the range contained three large windows with stone surrounds in the south elevation, although these had been infilled with cinder blocks (Plate 33). The east gable had similarly been blocked and finished in render, although it may originally have been open-fronted.

- 3.5.4 The short wing had its own pitched roof of modern materials, aligned parallel with that fitted to the adjacent long block. This was similarly of coursed rubble construction, with a steel sliding door for vehicular access inserted in the east elevation. Two large windows with stone sills and lintels to the north of the sliding door appeared to be original features (Plate 34).
- 3.5.5 The west elevation of the long block contained two windows of a similar size, together with four smaller windows and a raised-level loading door in the north-western corner (Plate 35). This presumably serviced road vehicles accessing the mill complex from the north, via Hinde Street.
- 3.5.6 The fabric of the mid-twentieth-century extension that formed the south-western corner of the building range comprised machine-pressed brick set on a stone foundation (Plate 36). The south elevation contained five large, six-light windows with timber frames, stone cills and concrete lintels. Four of the five windows had been infilled with cinder blocks.



Plate 32: The single-storey buildings to the north of the multi-storey block



Plate 33: The south elevation of the projecting wing



Plate 34: East-facing elevation of the long block



Plate 35: The rear, west-facing elevation of the single-storey buildings



Plate 36: The west-facing elevation of the brick-built extension

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ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Location of Albion Mill

Figure 2: Photograph location plan

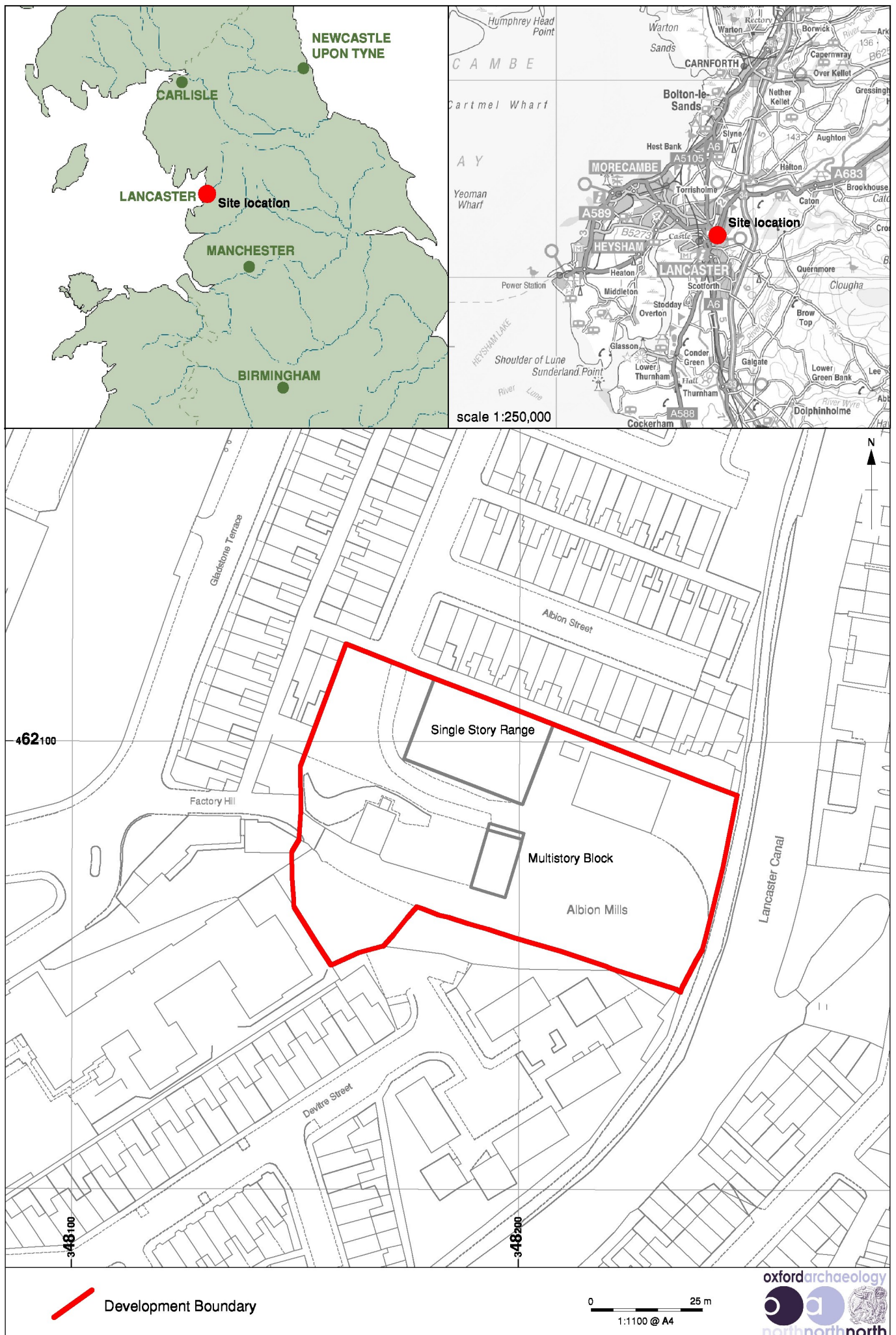
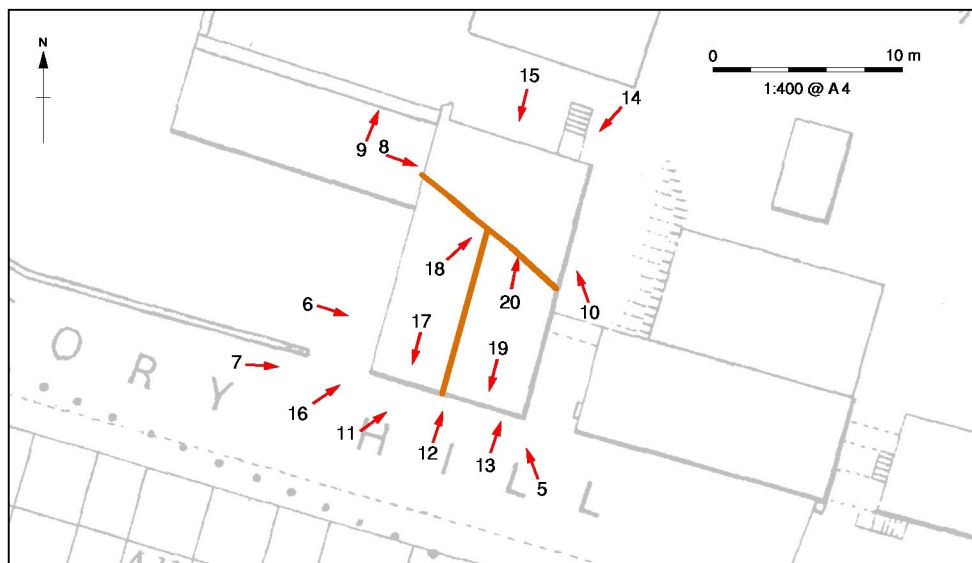
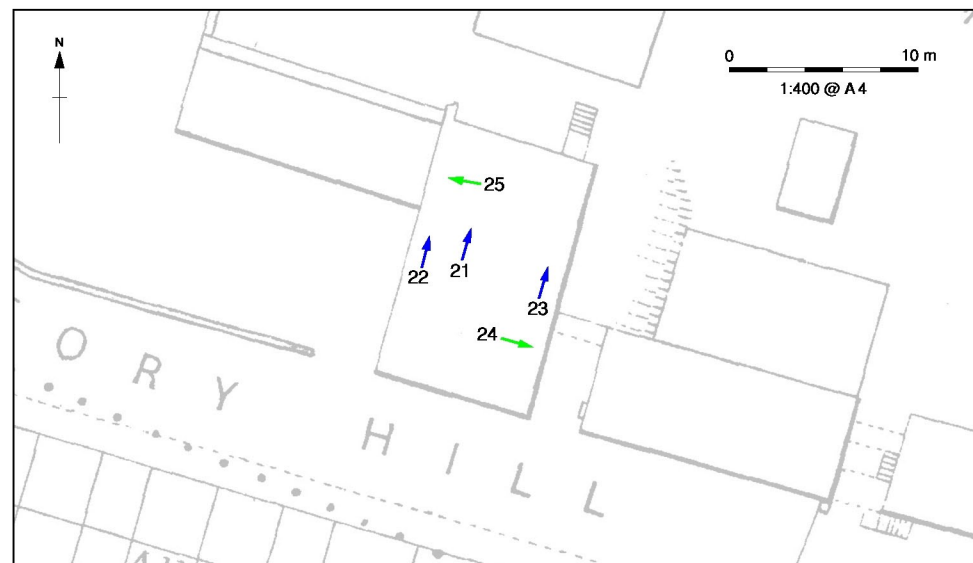


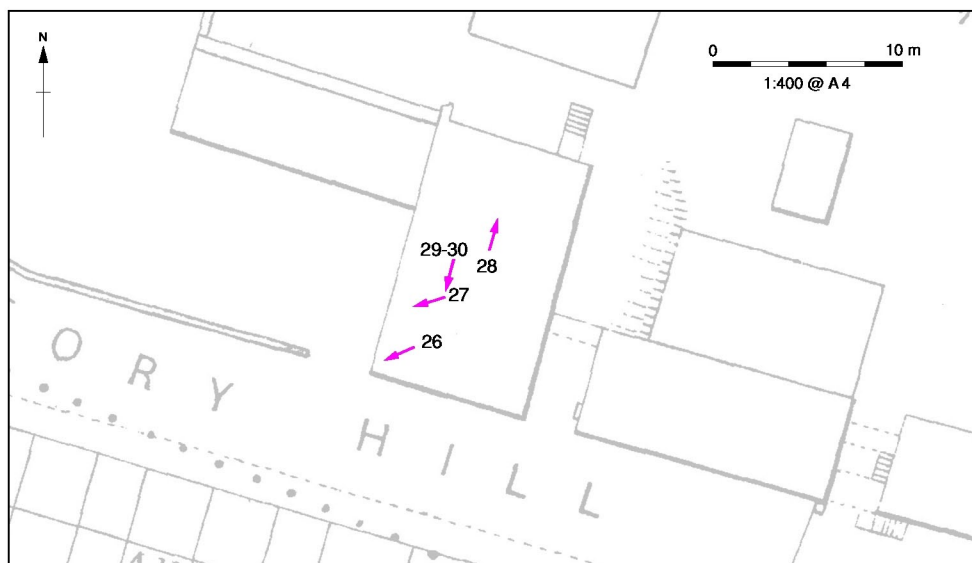
Figure 1: Site location



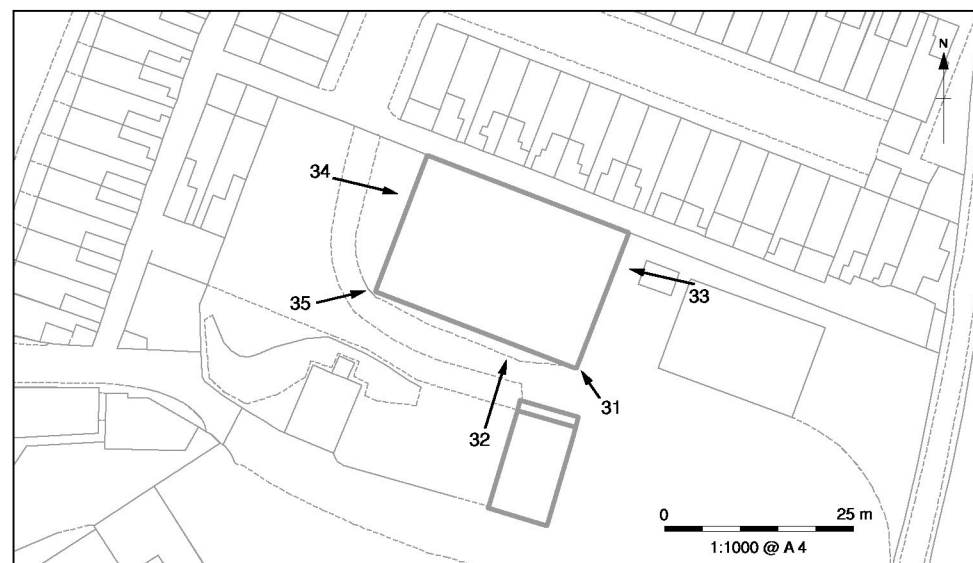
Ground Floor of Multistory Block



First and Second Floor of Multistory Block



Third Floor of Multistory Block



Ground Floor of Single Story Range

Photographic location, direction and plate identification



Figure 2: Photograph location plan