

New Civic Offices
Wellington Street
Woolwich
Greater London



Building Recording



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Wellington Street, Woolwich, Greater London

Historic Building recording

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Wellington Street, Woolwich, Greater London

Historic Building Recording

SUMMARY

A large section of Woolwich town centre is currently undergoing a long term, phased redevelopment which includes the construction of new commercial, residential and retail buildings as well as a new civic building. Oxford Archaeology has been commissioned by Greenwich Borough Council to produce a Level I building record of a group of buildings facing onto Wellington Street which have been demolished in Phase I of the redevelopment. The buildings had already been demolished prior to the commission but a series of photographs of the buildings have been supplied to Oxford Archaeology and therefore this report is based on these photographs.

The buildings were not listed and were not of great historical or architectural significance but they were on a major road close to the centre of Woolwich and they would therefore have been well-known to local people. In addition the buildings provided interesting examples of architectural styles from several different periods. In particular the Director General Public House dated from the mid 19th-century, when Wellington Street was originally established, whereas the large neighbouring civic building provided an interesting example of early 20th-century public architecture. A plan showing Second World War bomb damage has confirmed that at least one of the buildings on the site was constructed to replace a group of previous buildings which were destroyed by enemy bombing.

This project has also allowed a brief examination of trade directories to show the occupants and uses of the buildings (and former buildings) on the site. This has shown a variety of uses of the buildings including confectioners, newsagent, florist, printers, photographers and opticians.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) have been commissioned by Greenwich Borough Council to produce a Level I record of a group of buildings on the south side of Wellington Street in the centre of Woolwich, Greater London. The work relates to a major redevelopment of a large area including the construction of a new civic building, a supermarket, various other retail units and a large number of residential units. The development has a phased programme and the buildings covered in the current work have been demolished in Phase 1 (new Civic Centre).

1.1.2 OA have previously undertaken an Environmental Impact Assessment for the site (April 2006) and are also currently undertaking below-ground archaeological evaluation on behalf of Greenwich Borough Council during Phase 1 of the project.

1.1.3 The work has been requested as a condition of planning approval by London Borough of Greenwich. Unfortunately, the buildings had already been demolished

when OA was commissioned so no site recording of the buildings was possible. However a series of photographs of the buildings were taken by the client prior to demolition and these have been supplied to OA by the client. English Heritage and London Borough of Greenwich have therefore agreed that a Level I building recording report can be produced from these photographs to satisfy the planning condition.

1.2 **Aims and objectives**

- 1.2.1 The principal aim of the work has been to produce for posterity a record of the buildings which have been lost in the current redevelopment. The record (this report) will be deposited in a publicly accessible archive.

1.3 **Methodology**

- 1.3.1 The recording has been undertaken at Level I (as defined by English Heritage in *Understanding Historic Buildings: a Guide to Good Recording Practice* (EH, 2006). Level I is a relatively low level, usually used when a number of buildings are being rapidly recorded in a single phase. It frequently only covers the exteriors of the buildings (although can sometimes include the interior) and is generally only photographic and descriptive in nature.

- 1.3.2 As the buildings had already been lost prior to OA's commission the description of the buildings contained in this report are based on photographs supplied to OA which had previously been taken by the client. As part of the project the Greenwich Heritage Centre at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich has been visited to undertake some limited historical research. This has included a number of trade directories to determine what the buildings on the site were used for and examining photographs showing the buildings. The findings of previous historical research undertaken during the Environmental Impact Assessment undertaken in 2006 on this site (and on several other projects within the vicinity) has also been included in this report. Further evidence has been gained from studying aerial photographs from Google Earth.

- 1.3.3 In addition Peter Guillery from English Heritage has been contacted and he has confirmed that a series of photographs were taken of the Director General Public House by Derek Kendall from English Heritage as part of the Survey of London. In addition he has also confirmed that the National Monuments Record holds a record of the former council office buildings adjacent to the Director General made some years ago as part of a thematic survey of London's town halls by Joanna Smith.

2 **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

2.1 **Introduction**

- 2.1.1 As stated above historical and archaeological research on the site has previously been undertaken in the preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment for this

site and also as part of other relevant studies of nearby sites. The following section provides a short summary of the findings from these reports as well as further research undertaken at the Greenwich Heritage Centre

2.2 Post-Medieval development of Woolwich

- 2.2.1 The development of Woolwich in the post-medieval period is closely linked to the establishment of a number of important military complexes in the area. A Royal Dockyard was established to the west of the town at Woolwich by Henry VIII in the early 16th century while to the north and east of the town (also facing onto the Thames) grew Woolwich Warren. This was established in the 17th century as a collection of military stores and other facilities, and it grew in the 18th and 19th centuries to become the vast manufacturing and military stores complex of the Royal Arsenal. A short distance to the south and west of the town a further group of important military establishments developed in the 18th and 19th centuries. The main one of these was the Royal Artillery barracks on Woolwich Common. The origins of this complex lie in the original formation of the Royal Artillery in 1716, whose home was at Woolwich although the current barracks were not constructed until later in the century and the Regiment didn't officially move to the site on Woolwich Common until 1805
- 2.2.2 The Artillery barracks are to the south-west of the current development site and they are now divided from the town by the main road into Woolwich from the south (Grand Depot Road and John Wilson Street). However, John Wilson Street was only established in the 20th century and a further military complex formerly connected with the Artillery barracks site to form a much larger group of military complexes stretching north-east across almost the whole of the current development site. The main part of this complex was (or became) the Grand Depot and it is shown on a plan of 1808, labelled 'Artillery Depot'. This complex principally comprised five large evenly spaced ranges. To the north-east of the Grand Depot was the Royal Engineers Barracks and a small fragment of one of the boundary walls from this complex survives today. The Royal Engineers Barracks was established in 1803 and expanded in 1814.
- 2.2.3 The Grand Depot and Royal Engineers Barracks were bounded to the south-east by Woolwich New Road and to the north-west by Love Lane. Indeed, although today Love Lane is a narrow alley in the early 19th century it was a far more important road forming the main link between the Royal Artillery Barracks and Woolwich Town Centre. Historic maps show Wellington Street was constructed sometime between 1832 and 1845 a short distance to the north of Love Lane and this rendered Love Lane largely obsolete. Wellington Street was clearly laid out as a wider, grander street more appropriate for an important route into the centre of a prestigious military town.
- 2.2.4 The new wedge-shaped parcel of land created between Wellington Street and Love Lane was laid out in narrow plots with houses and this area contains the site of the buildings in the current report. This area is the only significant part of the current

wider development site which was historically outside the outside the military establishments referred to above (Grand Depot and Royal Engineers Barracks).

2.3 Evidence of trade directories

2.3.1 Research of trade directories (particularly Kelly's directory) undertaken at the Greenwich Heritage Centre provides interesting evidence relating to the buildings on the site and the fact that we know the names of people who lived in the buildings also adds a different dimension to our understanding of the site's history.

2.3.2 The Greenwich Heritage Centre holds a considerable number of directories, particularly from the later 19th and early 20th centuries. Four directories (1893, 1902, 1912, 1922) have been studied in more detail to determine the uses and occupiers of the buildings on the site at those dates. The information from the four directories is included at Appendix II.

2.3.3 Some of the buildings are easy to pinpoint and summarise such as the Director General Pub which was listed at No.27 in each directory but the large 20th-century offices (Block B) immediately to the east replaced nine previous buildings and Block D replaced five previous buildings. Therefore the buildings that are listed between numbers 18 and 26 and between 10 and 14 Wellington Street no longer survive.

3 DESCRIPTION

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The buildings covered in the current report were located on the south side of Wellington Street, to the north of Love Lane and Peggy Middleton House. The buildings divide into five main blocks (A-E described below).

3.2 Block A: The Director General Public House (55 Wellington Street)

3.2.1 Block A was the Director General Public House and it was located at the south-western end of the row of buildings contained in this report (Plate 2-3).

3.2.2 The pub was directly opposite the Town Hall and immediately to the south-west of it was a passage created by the demolition of the adjacent building to form a later 20th-century diversion of Love Lane onto Wellington Street.

3.2.3 Darrell Spurgeon states in *Discover Woolwich and its Environs* that the Director General was originally constructed in 1863 and that it had a new front added in c.1901 with embossed tiles. Spurgeon adds that there was a large room at the back of the building which was once used for music hall performances. A plan detailing Second World War bomb damage shows that the building was not affected by war-time air raids (see Figure 4).

3.2.4 The building divided into a main rectangular plan block facing the street and several extensions at the rear. Map evidence shows that in 1893 the main block had been

constructed but none of the rear extensions. These extensions all appear to have been constructed by the 1914 map. The main range had a hipped slate-covered roof which was largely hidden behind a rendered parapet. The rear ranges divided into several distinct blocks but these also had hipped, slate-covered roofs together with projecting chimney stacks, 2-light sash windows and white-painted walls. The parapet extended along the side alley adjacent to the building but not to the rear elevation.

3.2.5 The street frontage was five bays wide and was the most elaborate and attractive part of the building. At ground floor it had four doorways within a carefully designed composition. The two flanking doorways were within shallow arches which incorporated decorative mouldings at the arch springs and encaustic tiles above. These two arches were each covered by a balcony supported by curved brackets and with iron railings. The two central doorways were beneath a row of plain windows and were divided from each other by 12-light fixed windows (with bulls-eye glass) and plain tiling below. The pub sign was above this central section. At first floor there were five openings: three glazed doors (each to a small balcony) divided by two tall casement windows. The openings all had simple cornices above them and fixed shutters to either side.

3.2.6 Another feature of the building worthy of note was the south-west elevation which was covered with colourful and clearly officially sanctioned 'street art' (or graffiti). This incorporated various characters, local emblems and names.

3.2.7 A small number of photographs showing the pub's main internal rooms have been supplied to OA and these show that the interior was elaborately and attractively decorated (Plate 9). This includes several dark timber partitions with fielded panels and extensive stained glass using floral patterns. To one side of the main room there was arcading with matching arched mirrors behind and adjacent to the windows there were fixed benches and tables. The ceiling was formed of long boards (probably tongue and groove) and a principal joist was supported by a Corinthian column (probably iron). The main arrangement and decoration appear to have survived from the early 20th century.

3.3 **Block B (No.45-53 Wellington Street):**

3.3.1 Block B was the largest building in the current study site (both tallest and longest) and it dominated this part of Wellington Street. The building was almost certainly of early 20th-century date (probably the first quarter of the century) and it is understood to have formed Civic Offices for London Borough of Greenwich. Above the main door was a sign showing that the building housed the 'Chief Executive's Corporate Finance' Department. The building is shown on the Second World War Bomb Damage Plot 1939-45 (see Fig 4) and labelled as 'municipal offices'. This plan confirms the use of the building as well as the fact that it is of pre-war date and that it was not affected by war-time bombing.

- 3.3.2 The building, which would have replaced nine previous properties, was a bold architectural statement in a neo-classical style and as a public building it was clearly meant to be impressive. It's composition and detailing were carefully designed and it had elements of monumentality, particularly in the central entrance which was within a great, full height rusticated ashlar archway. Within this arch at first floor was an iron balcony (presumably for public occasions) and at second floor was a very large semi-circular window. The first floor balcony also incorporated a shield with the Woolwich Town crest/seal. The central archway was given greater prominence by a plinth which elevated this part of the building above the rest of the roof.
- 3.3.3 The rest of the street façade was clad in English bond red brick with stone dressings and at either end was a further projecting, rusticated stone bay. The building was set on a stone basement and above this there were three storeys, each of which must have had tall ceilings. There were 12 sash windows at each main floor level (six to either side of the central arch). Each one was a 12-over-12 sash and was beneath square-headed gauged brick lintels with keystone. In the stone-clad, rusticated end bays there were large 48-light windows at each floor level and between the first and second floors was a deep stone cornice which matched a similar stone parapet at the top of the elevation.
- 3.3.4 The rear of the building was much plainer with stock brick elevations, large windows (secondary replacements), no adornment and a projecting service or circulation block. The building's roof, which was only visible from the rear was slate covered and hipped and it would have had an M-shaped profile.
- 3.3.5 Among the photographs supplied to OA have been a number which show various internal rooms and spaces within Block B. These suggest that the attention shown to detailing the front facade was also continued through at least parts of the interior (ie the public and higher status rooms). The photographs include several showing timber-panelled rooms with built-in cupboards and an attractive corner fireplace with Art Deco detailing to the hearth, a marble surround and decorative timber mantel with integral mirror. A number of corridors are shown with glazed screens to divide them from offices, with decoratively ribbed glass, and parquet floors. large, empty, open plan offices are also shown (probably secondary creations) with a lower level of detailing.

3.4 **Block C: (42-44 Wellington Street)**

- 3.4.1 Block C was a row of three properties which almost certainly survived from the original establishment of Wellington Street in the mid and later 19th-century. The building was most recently occupied by 'Japan Ocean Trust' in its south-western two bays and by the Greenwich Public Service Unions in the north-eastern bay. An undated photograph (probably 1970s or 1980s) held at the Greenwich Heritage Centre shows that the Kentish Independent Newspaper was formerly based in the south-western two bays and that Carl's Cafe was in the north-eastern bay. It is

interesting to note that the Kentish Independent was also listed at this location in trade directories of 1912 and 1923.

3.4.2 The war-time Bomb Damage Plot (Fig 4) shows that the western of the three properties was not affected by bombing but the central and eastern properties each suffered 'general blast damage'.

3.4.3 The street frontage building was three storeys tall and had a pitched roof aligned with the street together with three gables which project above and add interest to the 'public' elevation. Immediately beneath these gables was a stone string course. At ground floor the front was relatively modern and had been altered since the photograph referred to above (from the 1970s or 80s) but above this the elevation appears little altered from its original construction, probably in the later 19th century. Above the ground floor the facade was of Flemish bond red brick but there was a rendered bay to each of the three properties. Each bay had four 6-over-6 sash windows (two at each floor level). Those at first floor had a quatrefoil decoration over them while those at second floor had a shallow arch. The lower sashes appear to have all been replaced. Between the windows was a simple row of decorative vent grilles.

3.4.4 Although the ground floor had been much altered to allow the construction of the later 20th-century fronts there did remain three moulded stone brackets.

3.4.5 The rear extensions were constructed of dark yellow stock bricks and they had slate-covered hipped roofs. The block to the north-east was two storied and extended south as far as the site boundary whereas the larger block to the south-west was three storied and stepped in from the boundary. These two ranges had sash windows and they appear to have been contemporary with each other.

3.5 **Block D:**

3.5.1 Block D was a large mid 20th century building (probably 1950s) which would have replaced five previous buildings on the site (No.s 10-14 Wellington Street). The war-time Bomb Damage Plot (Fig 4) shows that the previous five buildings suffered severely during the war and clearly the site was fully cleared to allow the construction of Block D. The bomb-damage plan shows that the central three of the five properties suffered 'total destruction' (presumably a direct hit) while the two flanking properties were 'damaged beyond repair'.

3.5.2 Block D comprised a large range at the front of the plot and a square-plan structure at the rear. The two buildings were from a single phase and they were connected by a narrow link building. Each building was four storeys tall (with a basement) with flat roofs and the rear block, together with the rear of the front block, are constructed with yellow stock bricks.

3.5.3 The front facade had a simple but attractive post-war modernist design. It was divided into nine bays with posts clad in moulded stone articulating the elevation and dividing each bay. The bays comprised large glass windows and panels at each

floor level of light green vertical boards. Although the elevation was four storeys tall this detailing was only applied to the lower three floors, presumably to give the appearance of the building being lower than it actually is. The third floor was divided from the lower part of the elevation by a shallow projecting canopy and above it the elevation was plainer with regular windows and brickwork.

3.5.4 There was a central entrance with a cantilevered roof over it and a set of stairs providing access from the street over the light-well to the basement.

3.5.5 The buildings would almost certainly have been offices and are likely to have had a civic purpose.

3.6 **Block E:**

3.6.1 Block E was a five bay wide building of post-1950 date (probably 1960s) which replaced two properties of similar size which appear to have been pulled down in the post-war period. The Bomb Damage Plot (Fig 4) shows that during the Second World War the two previous buildings were 'Seriously damaged but repairable at cost'.

3.6.2 Block E is the structure for which we have the poorest photographic record. The best photograph that we have is one held at the Greenwich Heritage Centre which probably dates from the 1960s. Another one taken more recently and supplied to OA as part of the current work confirms that prior to demolition the basic external form of the building had altered little from the earlier photograph and that its final use was as 'Café Funkateria' (at ground floor).

3.6.3 The photograph held at the Greenwich Heritage Centre shows that at this date the western half of the building was occupied by the Club Sports Supplies Ltd while there was a newsagents in the east half.

3.6.4 The building was three storeys tall with a brick front and a flat roof. At ground floor the street façade was glazed with a modern front while above this there were five plain casement windows at each floor level. The central windows were narrower than the side ones and these may have been from a central corridor between separate flats or offices on each floor to either side of the building. The photograph possibly from the 1960s shows three ground floor doors immediately adjacent to each other: two of these would presumably have allowed access to the ground floor shops while the central one must have allowed access to the upper floors.

4 **CONCLUSION**

4.1.1 A large part of Woolwich Town centre is currently being redeveloped with the replacement of Peggy Middleton House and the construction of several new residential, retail and commercial buildings.

4.1.2 As part of this development a series of buildings facing onto Wellington Street have been demolished to allow for the construction of a new civic centre. None of the

buildings were listed or of great historical significance but they would have been well known local structures in a prominent location including a public house, shops and council buildings. In addition some of the buildings were attractive structures of some architectural interest and due to this a programme of building recording has been undertaken to mitigate against their loss. In particular the Director General Public House and the adjacent council offices were clearly structures of some architectural pretension which contributed to the street scene and from which we can learn more of the development of Woolwich town centre.

- 4.1.3 Unfortunately the buildings had been demolished prior to OA being commissioned so a detailed record was not possible but from the photographs provided it has been possible to provide a description of the structures.

Jonathan Gill
May 2008

APPENDIX I BIBLIOGRAPHY**Published Sources**

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Maps sources

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Ordnance Survey 25 inch map (1894)

Ordnance Survey 25 inch map (1914)

Bomb damage Plot 1939-45

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Oxford Archaeology *Woolwich Peggy Middleton House Site - Love Lane. Environmental Impact Assessment Baseline and Impact Assessment, Archaeology* (April 2006)

Kelly's Directory, Woolwich, Plumstead, Shooters Hill, Charlton 1922/3

Kelly's Directory of Woolwich, Plumstead, Shooters Hill, Charlton, 1912

Kelly's Directory of Woolwich, Plumstead, Shooters Hill, Charlton, 1902

Kelly's Directory of Woolwich, Plumstead, Shooters Hill, Charlton, 1893

APPENDIX II EVIDENCE OF TRADE DIRECTORIES

No. on Wellington St	Kelly's Directory 1893	Kelly's Directory 1902	Kelly's Directory 1912	Kelly's Directory 1922/3
No. 8 Block E	Ind Coope Brewery	Ind Coope & Co brewery	Mrs Dann - confectioners	Miss Phyllis Dann Confectioner
No. 9 Block E	Charles Harris fancy repository	De Russett	Charles Harris	William Albert Ellingsworth and United British Insurance Company
No. 10 Site of Block D	John Eads		Robert Heaven	Mrs F Dawn
No. 11 Site of Block D	Ambrose Fenn - plumber	Ames & Son - tailors	Ames & Son - tailors	Molyneux JJ& Co - printers
No. 12 Site of Block D	Thomas Ames - tailor		Herbert George Griffin	Herbert George Griffin
No. 13 Site of Block D	Thomas Hinkley - corn dealer	William Rose - corn contractor	Mrs Mary Hicks - fruiterer	Mrs Mary Hicks - fruiterer
No. 14 Site of Block D		James Higgins Taylors	George Buckland - florist	George Manchester - florist
No. 15 Block C	Henry Court - dining rooms		Sidney Harrison - newsagent	Edward Nye - Newsagents
No. 16 Block C	George Baker		George W Neves - Printer (Kentish Independent & Kentish Mail printing works	George W Neves - Printer (Kentish Independent & Kentish Mail printing works - 'oldest local paper')
No. 17 Block C	George Elliot		Scottish Legal life Assurance Society 17a - W Deans	Verity Hudson - Optician
No. 18 (site of Block B)	John Sharpe	Henry Whithers	Henry Whithers - Portmanteau maker	
No. 19 (Site of Block B)	Charles Foss	George Prior	George Prior	Mrs Prior
No. 20 (Site of Block B)	Charles Peters	William Stevenson Beal	Fred Humphris	
No. 21 (Site of Block B)	William McKnight - tailor	Charles Levy - watch maker	Mrs E Horseman - confectioner	Mrs M Gwyther - confectioner
No. 22 (Site of Block B)	George Davies - photographer	George Davies - photographer	Mrs Davies	Mrs Davies
No. 23 (Site of Block B)	Samuel Priddy	Miss Ellen Coote - dress maker	George Akehurst - carrier	Harry Smith
No. 24 (Site of Block B)	William Moulden	Charles Franckeiss	Cornelius W Buckley	Cornelius W Buckley
No. 25 (Site of Block B)	Nicholson Brown - Gov emigration agent	Mrs Elise Brown, registry office for servants	Mrs Elise Brown, registry office for servants	Mrs Elise Brown, registry office for servants
No. 26 (Site of Block B)	Harry Tucker	William Thomas White	Henry J Smith	
No. 27 (Block A)	Director General pub - George Henry Church	Director General pub - Mrs Church	Director General pub	Director General pub - Mrs Emma Jane Minter

* NB the modern numbering of the properties on Wellington Street has been significantly altered in the 20th century. Therefore the final address of Block A was 55 Wellington Street and Block B was 45-53 Wellington Street.



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

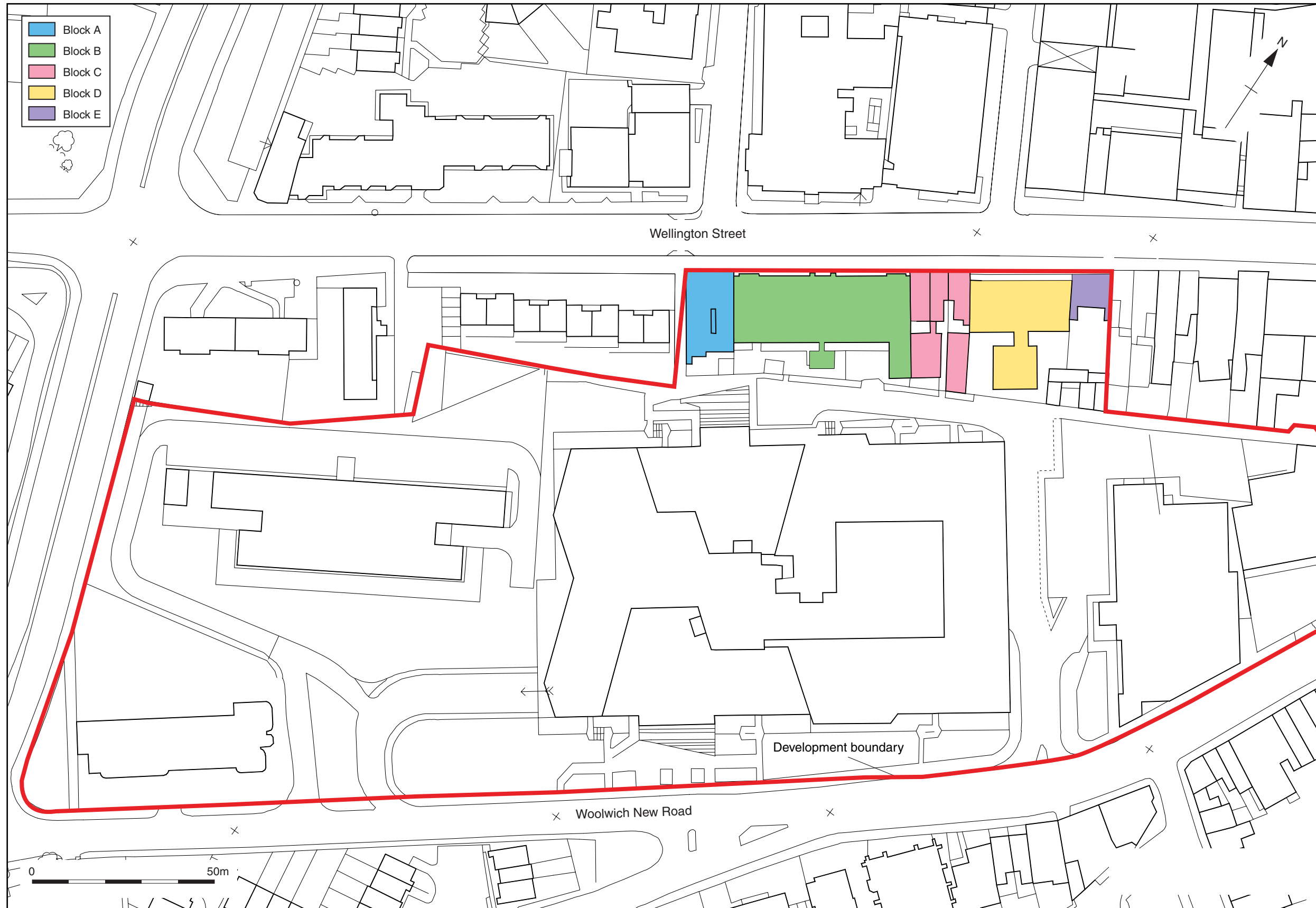


Figure 2: Site plan showing buildings recorded (based on survey drawings by HLM ARCHITECTS)



Figure 3: 1894 Ordnance Survey map

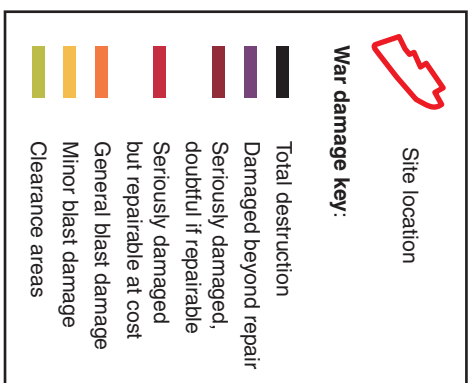
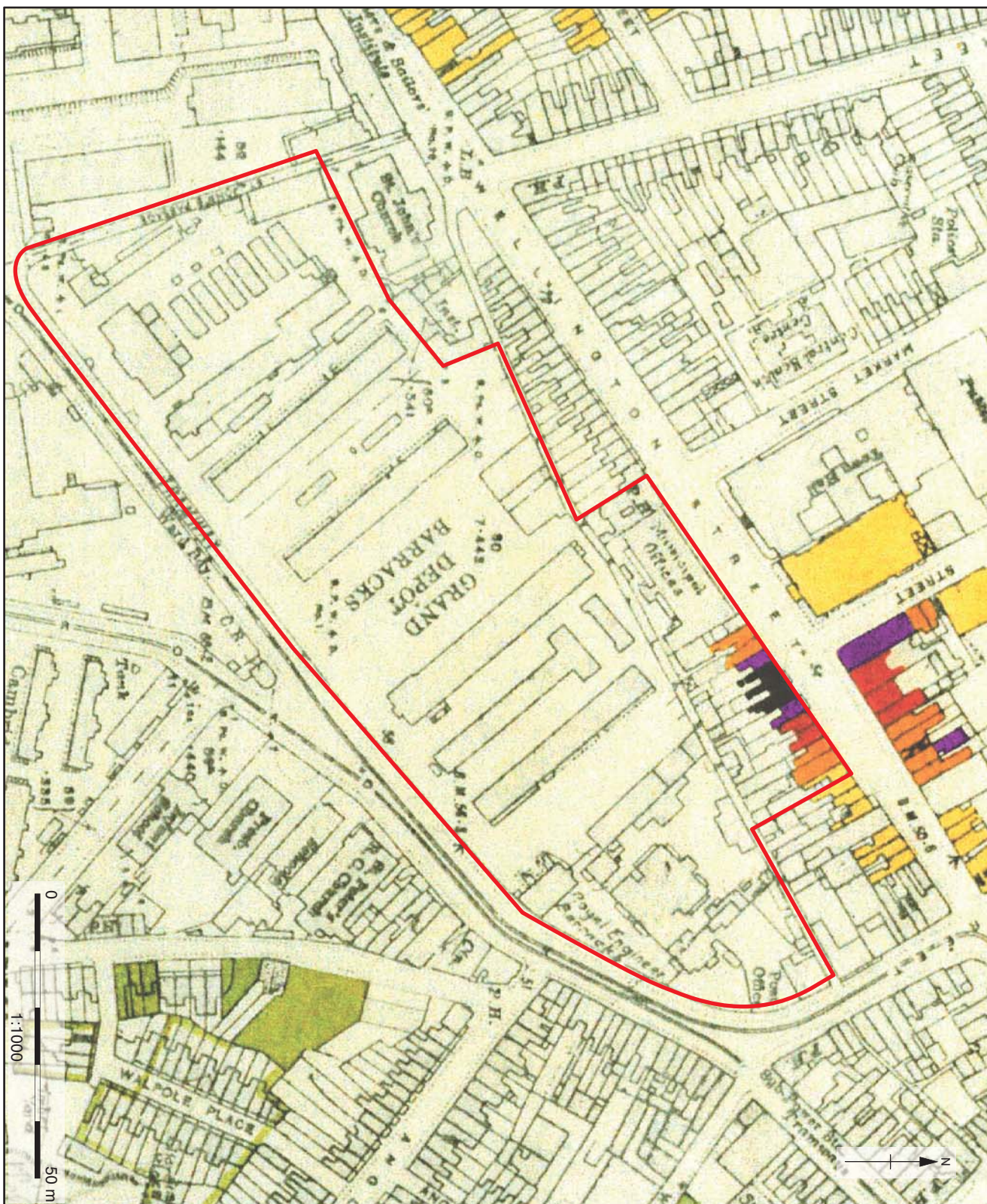


Figure 4: Inset of Bomb Damage Plot 1939-45 showing current development site

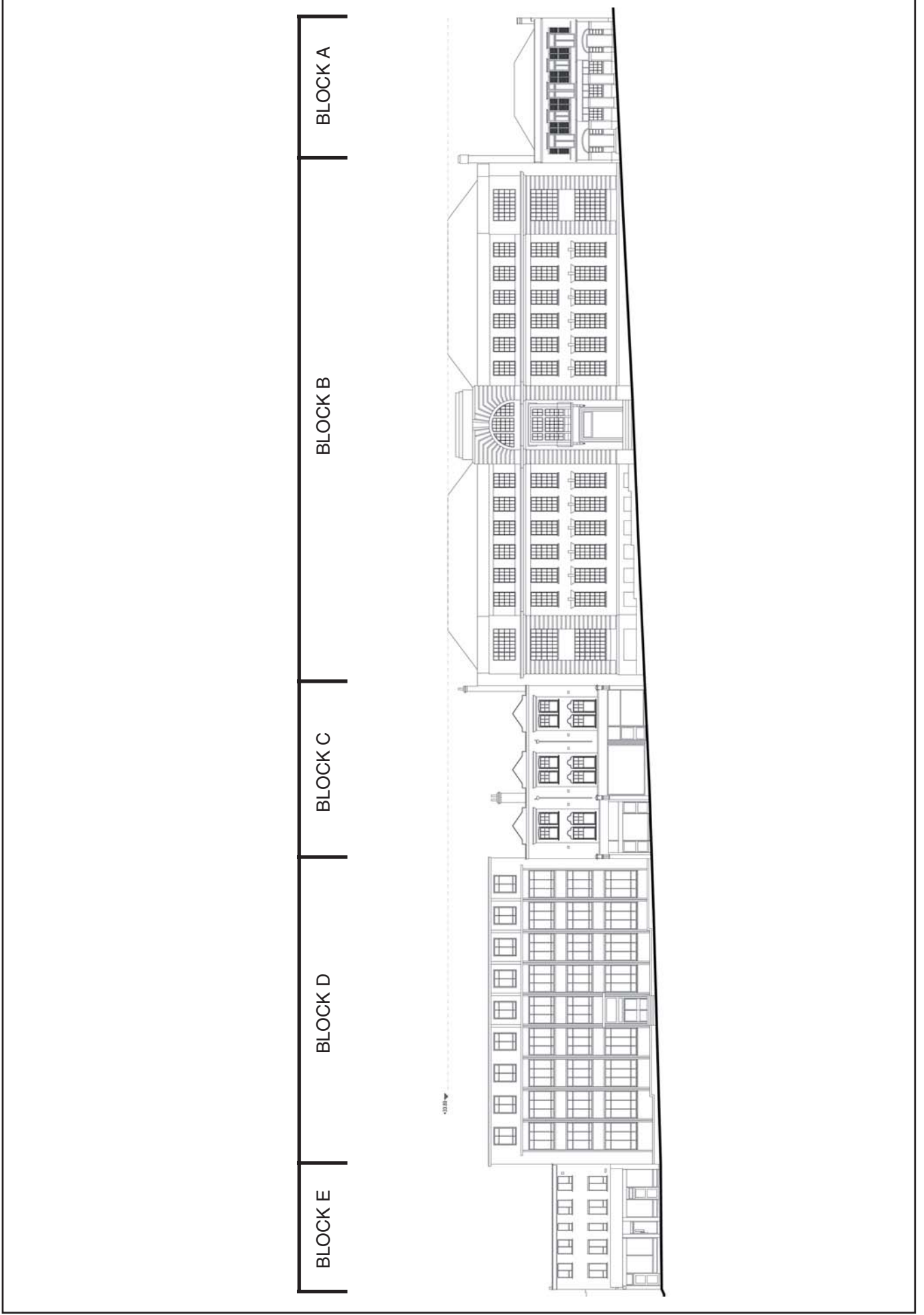


Figure 5: Wellington Street elevation showing buildings recorded (based on survey drawings by HLM Architects)



Plate 1: Wellington Street from the west



Plate 2: Director General pub (Block A)



Plate 3: Front elevation of Director General (Block A)



Plate 4: Street art to alleyway on west side of Block A



Plate 5: Block B



Plate 6: Rear of Block B



Plate 7: Front of Block C



Plate 8: Block D and Block E (to left side)



Plate 9: Interior of Director General Pub



Plate 10: Office within Block B



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