

The Turl Bar Turl Street Oxford



**Historic Buildings Investigation
and Recording**

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Turl Bar, The Mitre Hotel, Oxford

Historic Building Recording and Investigation

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The Turl Bar, The Mitre Hotel, Oxford

Summary

In July 2011 Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook a small programme of building recording at the Turl Bar, to the rear of the Mitre Hotel on Turl Street, Oxford.

Although the Mitre Inn itself is a Grade II listed building of national significance the Turl Bar forms a less historic extension constructed in c.1925-6 on the site of the coaching inn's former stables. The building is still of some interest due to the wider significance of the complex and also because it is of some architectural merit in its own right being constructed in a period style. The building also incorporates a small section of earlier timber framed wall which appears to have survived from a former building on the site and this has been recorded in the current work. The frame was examined after the partial removal of modern plaster and evidence suggested that it was an in-situ fragment of historic wall rather than a modern construction reusing old ex-situ timbers. A contemporary account of the construction of the building from the 1920s states that the new building incorporated 'the interesting relic of one of the original stable walls, with timber framing and plasterwork' so presumably this is the fragment exposed in the current project.*

The recording in the current study has included an element of watching brief, undertaken after the removal of modern surfaces and this aspect of the investigation has not identified any other surviving fragments of building which pre-date the 1920s construction.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 In July 2011 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a small programme of building recording works at the Turl Bar, within the Mitre Hotel in Oxford. The work was commissioned by Lincoln College and was undertaken due to the historic significance of the building and as a condition of planning approval for a development at the site (planning ref: 10/02652/FUL). The development will see the conversion of the existing ground floor to educational and social facilities related to the existing student accommodation on upper floors.
- 1.1.2 A brief (OCC 2011) was issued by David Radford, the Oxford City Archaeologist, detailing the local authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition. OA produced a written scheme of investigation (OA 2011) detailing how it would meet the local authority's requirements for work. This was approved by David Radford. The project also included below-ground excavation and watching brief works related to various elements of the project and a report on these works has already been issued.
- 1.1.3 The Turl Bar itself is not listed but the main Mitre Inn is listed Grade II* and another part of the complex facing onto High Street is listed Grade II.

1.2 Aims and objectives

- 1.1.1 The overall aim of the project is to investigate and record for posterity the buildings on the site prior to their alteration. A second aim is to make that record publicly accessible through a report (a public document) and a project archive deposited with a public institution.

1.3 Scope of works and methodology

- 1.3.1 The building recording principally concentrated on those areas of the ground floor of the building which were impacted by the development and particularly an area of wall which was identified in OA's previous assessment of the building as being older than the main Turl Bar. This small section of wall was retained in the development.
- 1.3.2 The archaeological recording was undertaken broadly at Level 2 as defined by English Heritage in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice*.
- 1.3.3 The main recording was undertaken in two visits after the start of soft-strip works when modern surfaces had been removed. This allowed a more detailed assessment of previously obscured areas.
- 1.3.4 The photographs, notes and other material will be labelled, collated and added to the archive material from the related below-ground archaeological part of the project. This archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museums Service with the accession number 2011.120.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

- 1.1.2 The Turl Bar lies at the junction of the High Street and Turl Street within Oxford City Centre. The Turl Bar forms part of a complex of buildings which have developed in a

number of phases and which are listed Grade II*, or Grade II on the High Street. The principal structure within this complex is the Mitre Inn, a building of exceptional historical significance and the Turl Bar is located to the rear of the Mitre Inn along with a courtyard that is accessed from Turl Street.

- 2.1.1 The historical background below is adapted from the OA Historic Building Assessment (OA 2009) which covers the Mitre Hotel building complex. Detailed references are contained within that document.

The Mitre Inn Complex

- 2.1.2 The Mitre (then called Bicester's Inn) was acquired by Lincoln College as part of the benefaction of the Bishop of Lincoln, Thomas Rotherham, who in 1475 gave the College the Chantry of St Anne in the nearby All Saint's Church, with its urban properties, then worth £10 a year. The Chantry had been founded by Nicholas of Bicester presumably a descendant of William. Little is known of Bicester's Inn, described in his will as a 'messuage with shops, cellars and solars'. The fine vaulted cellar is of a kind found in Oxford and other towns being used as a wine tavern, and may have been part of this inn, or a separate property of St. Bartholomew's Hospital (and later Oriel College).
- 2.1.3 The Mitre may have taken its present name in 1475, but it does not seem to be recorded before the inn sign was licensed in 1605; in any case the reference would be to the founder Richard Fleming (or Rotherham) as the Bishop of Lincoln and the college arms which depict his mitre.
- 2.1.4 Parts of the building on the Turl Street corner and further north up Turl Street, were separately leased before being incorporated in the Mitre. On the corner Mrs Ledwell leased an encroachment from the city in 1716 which included a 12½ x 3 ft 'bulke' on the High, a tapering 44 ft strip on the Turl, and land under the High for a cellar built by Mrs Ledwell (23 ft N-S x 19 ft E-W). A later lessee of 'No. 1 Turl Street' was Charles Foster, who then combined this with the Mitre.
- 2.1.5 Logan's map of 1675 shows the area under a long building which is likely to be stables.
- 2.1.6 Like all inns the Mitre was a place of resort, entertainment and public business in the 17th-18th centuries. The inn was known as a haunt of Catholic recusants in the 17th century, and became one of the principal coaching inns in the 18th century, and until the coming of the railway. It appears frequently in the diaries of Antony Wood and Thomas Hearne, and seems to have been a favourite drinking place for fellows of All Souls, three of whom frightened the landlady to death in 1683. The stables burnt down in 1726, but with no further damage.
- 2.1.7 The lease of 1855 implies that some rebuilding had been undertaken behind the main inn premises on Turl Street. On the north side a tenement had been 'lately built' on the site of the stable and hayloft, two others to the south of that had been sold to Richard Mallam and Thomas Blakeney, saddler, and finally the 'kitchen lately used as a coach house' was now the premises of Thomas Taylor, printseller; all these were excluded from the Mitre lease.

The Turl Bar

- 2.1.8 The L-shaped block, comprising the Turl Bar on the ground floor and student accommodation on the upper floors, dates mostly from the 1920s and contains Arts and Craft fittings of some interest and character. The range has the date 1926 cast on the external rainheads. The south range has been built on the footprint of what was probably the former stables. The east-west wall to the north end of the current public bar in the

Turl Bar pre-dates the 1920s building and appears to belong to an earlier barn or outbuilding on this site of 17th or 18th century date.

- 2.1.9 It is very interesting to read an account of the history of the Mitre in *Round About 'The Mitre' at Oxford* by RAH Spiers. This was first published in 1926 and the section relating to the Turl bar is reproduced below.

'Unfortunately, owing to further extensions being necessary in 1926, the old stables in the rear of the Hotel were pulled down to make room for a New Wing, whilst the Mitre Tavern or 'Turl Room', and new Billiard Rooms were added, the former being carefully constructed and decorated with panelling and timber-work of the seventeenth century character, incorporating in the construction the interesting relic of one of the original stable-walls, with timber framing and plaster-work. The Tavern contains a number of objects of the Oxford coaching days, including the coach horn in its wicker case, the horse-spreaders, coach lamps and two old brass tobacco boxes in the form of automatic slot machines, such as are still to be found in a few of the old coaching inns, the box-lid being released by a spring.'

3 DESCRIPTION

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 As referred to above the current recording has focused on those parts of the building which are being directly affected by the development works. However, it would be useful to include an outline description of the overall building and therefore this is included almost word-for-word from OA's 2009 assessment of the Mitre complex. This is then followed by a more detailed description of the findings of the current study.

3.2 General description of building

- 3.2.1 The Turl Bar is an L-shaped block at the north-west corner of the Mitre Inn complex comprising the Turl Bar on the ground floor and student accommodation on the upper floors. The block consists of a west range of two floors, the first floor being within a slate clad mansard roof and a north range of timber-framing and render of three-storeys with a pitched roof and central gable over a canted bay.
- 3.2.2 The block dates from the 1920s and the date 1926 is cast on the rainheads. The west range has been built on the footprint of the former west range which probably housed the stables and the north range is on the footprint of other buildings in the outer courtyard.
- 3.2.3 The north block is clearly an imitation of historical timber-framing with pegged square framing and straight braces. The original fittings throughout the block are in an Arts and Crafts style being of good quality and with reference to historical examples these include the windows which have iron casements with leaded panes; some with bulls eyes, swan neck stays and shaped turnbuckle catches and the doors of three vertical panels with furniture consisting of upright iron handles and latches.
- 3.2.4 The west side of the mansard roof in the west range is occupied by a corridor which has had modern 'velux' type roof windows fitted throughout its length, the rooms off this corridor as the other student rooms in this block largely retain their original 1920s fittings with the addition of modern fittings such handbasins, ceiling lights, cupboards noticeboards etc.
- 3.2.5 The Turl Bar occupies the ground floor of both ranges and mostly dates from the 1920s with the timber-framing exposed on the interior. The kitchen is a recent insertion into the north range and there is one section of wall which is a survival from an earlier building.

- 3.2.6 The old wall is a small section of transverse wall at the north end of the bar in the south range. It consists of timber framing and whitewashed infill (detailed further below)
- 3.2.7 Otherwise the block is largely as built with some later changes to room layouts and insertion of modern shower rooms, roof windows in the corridor and some modern fittings in the bedrooms.

3.3 Current recording

- 3.3.1 The ground floor of the main areas recorded divide into 6 rooms or areas.
- 3.3.2 **Area 1** (G18 in previous OA rep) is towards the southern end of the Turl Bar's west range and it is a room with a rough character and does not appear to have been much used in recent years (Pl.6). The north wall is of painted brick while the other walls are rendered. There are various exposed pipes, the frame from a storage rack and visible ceiling joists. Against the south wall there is a boiler.
- 3.3.3 **Area 2** (G17 in previous OA rep) includes two rooms accessible via a small lobby adjacent to the door in the east wall. These rooms appear to have remained in use until the recent closure of the bar (Pl.7). The larger room is to the east and it has tiled walls together with tubes and fittings which appear to be from former beer kegs. The smaller room has plastered ceilings and walls and it has light plant probably related to the kegs in the adjacent room.
- 3.3.4 **Area 3** (south half of G15 in previous OA rep) is a large single room housing one of the two main bars and at its northern end is the fragment of surviving historic wall (detailed further below). The walls were clad in timber-frame cladding but these have been removed in the current project to reveal concrete block to the west wall and modern brickwork to the south wall. At the centre of the south wall is a Tudor style 1920s stone fireplace (Pl.20). Prior to the current work the ceiling comprised visible dark joists with plaster between and this has been recently removed to confirm that the floor is entirely 20th century. It comprises tall joists and the plaster was secured by chicken wire (Pl.21-22). The area has attractive arts and crafts style windows with iron-framed side-hung opening casements with leaded panes.
- 3.3.5 **Area 4** (north half of G15 in previous OA rep) is at the junction between the northern and western ranges of the building and it houses the second main bar area. This area also has mock timber framed cladding on the walls but this has been removed in the current work and it is interesting to note that beneath the cladding in the north wall are older wall tiles (Pl.18-19). The tiles are 20th century in date, possibly mid 20th-century, but it shows that this area must previously have been a kitchen or similar service room prior to the addition of the timber cladding. At the south-eastern corner of this area is an entrance lobby with modern timber-frame partitioning.
- 3.3.6 **Area 5** (G16 in previous OA rep) comprises a series of service rooms with tiled partition walls and a public corridor along the southern edge with timber frame cladding (Pl.23). These rooms would all have been kitchens and storage areas. OA's 2009 report states that the kitchen was a recent insertion and that it replaced a former bar/servery area.
- 3.3.7 **Area 6** is at the eastern end of the north range and houses the public WC's for the Turl Bar. This area is being removed in the current works to allow the construction of a new staircase (Pl.4).
- 3.3.8 **Historic wall**



- 3.3.9 *Introduction:* The most significant feature recorded in the current project has been the section of timber-framed wall which was highlighted in OA's 2009 report as apparently being older than the rest of the 20th-century building.
- 3.3.10 *Description:* The partition is orientated east to west and is located towards the northern end of the Turl Bar's southern range, adjacent to the main entrance into the building. It has been incorporated into a small modern bar servery with a hatch opening between the northern and southern rooms (Areas 3 and 4).
- 3.3.11 Although the section of wall is being retained in the development the current work has included the removal of modern render and this has made the frame more visible.
- 3.3.12 The frame comprises four studs, a main horizontal rail extending over the posts and two smaller mid height rails. Each of these members are old timbers and it appears that they form a surviving in-situ fragment from an historic timber framed wall rather than being an entirely rebuilt 20th-century wall re-using old timbers. The alignment of the wall is slightly different to that of the current 20th-century building and structurally the two are separate; an RSJ spans the building just above the older frame. The render is all modern and fixed onto wire mesh; no historic plaster survives. The condition/survival of the frame is poor with many areas cut to allow modern pipes/ducts to pass. The main studs are relatively slender (c.11 cm squ) and would have been part of a partition or wall frame rather than principal structural members.
- 3.3.13 *Interpretation:* Although the frame was partly obscured by the mesh it was possible to gain a reasonable understanding and the current work and strengthened the suggestion made in the 2009 assessment that the framing is probably of 17th or 18th-century date. The frame was carefully examined after the partial removal of modern plaster to determine whether it was an intact fragment of historic wall or a modern construction reusing old timbers and as stated above the evidence pointed towards it being a partially surviving historic relic. The framing is not of high quality work but it is jointed rather than nailed.
- 3.3.14 As detailed above in the historical background it is reported that the 1926 works incorporated a timber-framed relic of one of the original stable walls so presumably this frame is that structure (See Fig 5 and Plates 9-16). It is reported that the stables burnt down in 1726 so it may well be that wall post-dates that event.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1 The Mitre Inn in Oxford is a Grade II* listed building of exceptional significance and the Turl Bar, which has been recorded in the current works, forms part of this complex. The Turl Bar is a 20th-century structure having been constructed in the 1920s as part of an extensive modernisation of the hotel when the Mitre ceased its historic function as a coaching inn. The new bar appears to have been constructed on the site of the former stables and it was designed with a Tudor style to complement the historic interest of the adjacent buildings.
- 4.1.2 The Turl Bar is not listed in its own right but it is of some local interest both for its attractive historic character (albeit entirely a 20th-century imitation) but also for a fragment of timber framed wall which appears to have survived from a previous building on the site.

Jonathan Gill

April 2012





APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Published Sources

Spiers RAH *Round About the Mitre at Oxford* (1926)

Unpublished Sources

OA The Mitre Inn and Associated Buildings Historic Building Assessment Client Report (2009)

OA Mitre Inn, Turl Bar WSI for excavation, building recording and watching brief.

OCC Brief for an archaeological Excavation Historic Building Recording and Watching Brief (2011)

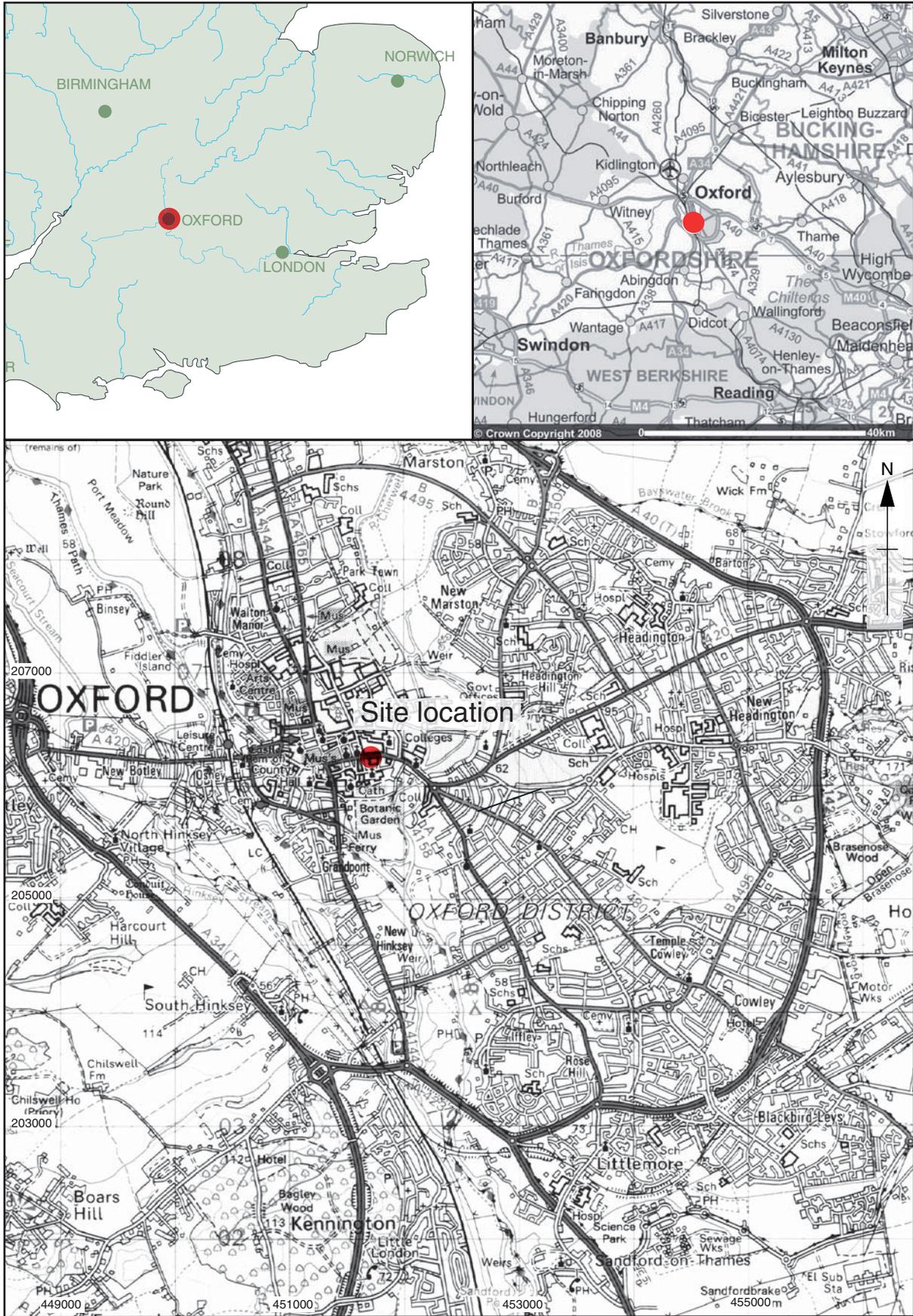
APPENDIX B. THE TURL BUILDING: ROOM SUMMARY

This room inventory is taken from OA's 2009 assessment report on the wider Mitre Hotel complex. Refer to Figure 4 for ground floor room numbers

The Turl Building		
OA No	Room No	Room summary
G15		<p>Function: public bar.</p> <p>Character: L-shaped ground floor of Turl building with bar in S section and kitchen and lavatories in N. Timber-framed walls and ceiling and stone fireplace in imitation of historic fabric. Arts and Crafts style windows with iron-framed side-hung opening casements with leaded panes, swan-neck stays and shaped turnbuckle catches and doors of three vertical panels with upright iron handles and latches. One section of timber-framed wall from earlier building incorporated internally at north end of bar.</p> <p>Significant features: early timber-framed wall. 1920s Arts and Crafts style windows and doors and their furniture.</p> <p>Main alterations: recent insertion of partition walls to divide off kitchen (G16).</p>
G16		<p>Function: kitchen.</p> <p>Character: recently inserted timber-framed partitions to fit in with 1920s imitation historic timber-framing. Interior of kitchen not seen.</p> <p>Significant features:</p> <p>Main alterations: kitchen is a recent insertion replacing a former bar/servery area.</p>
G17		<p>Function: storeroom/boiler room.</p> <p>Character: plain room with various pieces of ?heating plant, painted and rendered walls and painted brick wall on N.</p> <p>Significant features:</p> <p>Main alterations:</p>
F35		<p>Function: corridor.</p> <p>Character: corridor on first floor of Turl bar 1920's, nothing of age or note. S section has sloping W wall within mansard roof with modern skylights fitted.</p> <p>Significant features:</p> <p>Main alterations: modern skylight/windows.</p>
F36-41	10-14a	<p>Function: student accommodation.</p> <p>Character: first floor student rooms in S wing of the Turl block, these are within a mansard roof with dormer windows on E. Good cross-windows with iron-framed side-hung opening casements with leaded panes, swan-neck stays and shaped turnbuckle catches. Doors of three vertical panels with upright iron handles and latches.</p> <p>Significant features: Arts and Crafts style windows and doors and their furniture are of interest.</p> <p>Main alterations: modern fixtures and fittings; built in cupboards and handbasins etc.</p>
F42-46	06/09/12	<p>Function: student accommodation.</p> <p>Character: first floor student rooms in N wing of the Turl block. Similar to rooms in S wing but these are not in roof. The windows have leaded iron-framed casements, swan-neck stays and turnbuckle catches but are of 2 or 3 lights rather than cross windows, the two central rooms have canted bays. Doors of three vertical panels with upright iron handles and latches. The W end room F42 has been recently created from a former lobby and two small rooms (stores or lavatories).</p> <p>Significant features: Arts and Crafts style windows and doors and their furniture.</p> <p>Main alterations: modern fixtures and fittings such as handbasins etc</p>



S43		<p>Function: corridor.</p> <p>Character: corridor on second floor of Turl building, 1920's, nothing of age or note. Door to fire escape at E end.</p> <p>Significant features:</p> <p>Main alterations: shower and lavatory on W are partitioned from former room.</p>
S44-47	45-48	<p>Function: student accommodation.</p> <p>Character: second floor student rooms in N wing of the Turl block. Similar to rooms on first floor below. The windows have leaded iron-framed casements, swan-neck stays and turnbuckle catches but are of 2 or 3 lights rather than cross windows, the two central rooms have canted bays.. Doors of three vertical panels with upright iron handles and latches. The W end room and shower and lavatory have been recently remodelled.</p> <p>Significant features: Arts and Crafts style windows and doors and their furniture.</p> <p>Main alterations: modern fixtures and fittings such as handbasins etc.</p>



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Figure 1: Site location

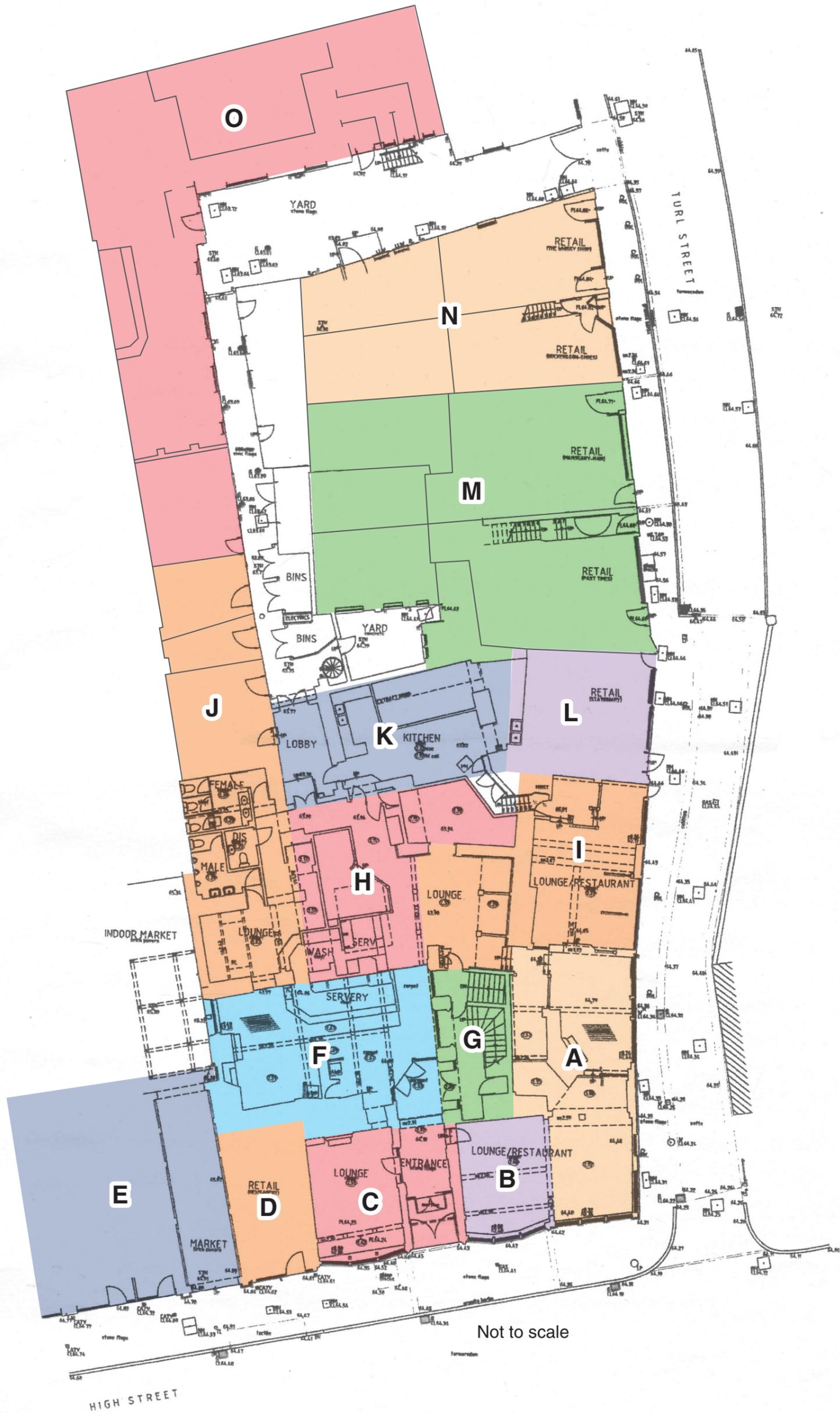


Figure 2: Block Plan of Mitre Inn complex from previous OA study. Turl Bar labelled O



Figure 3: Ground floor plan of Mitre complex (refer to Appendix B for OA room numbers)

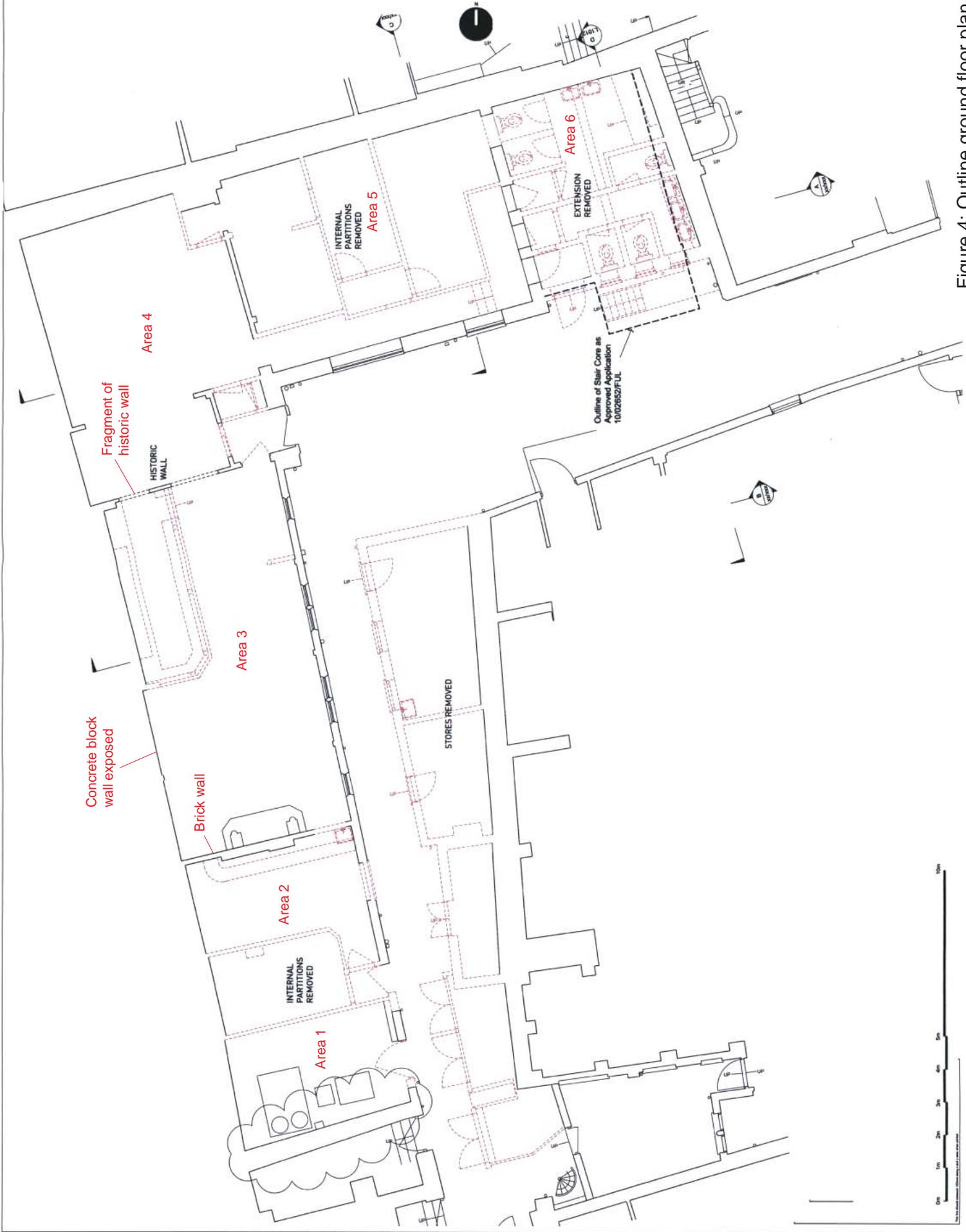


Figure 4: Outline ground floor plan of the Turf Bar

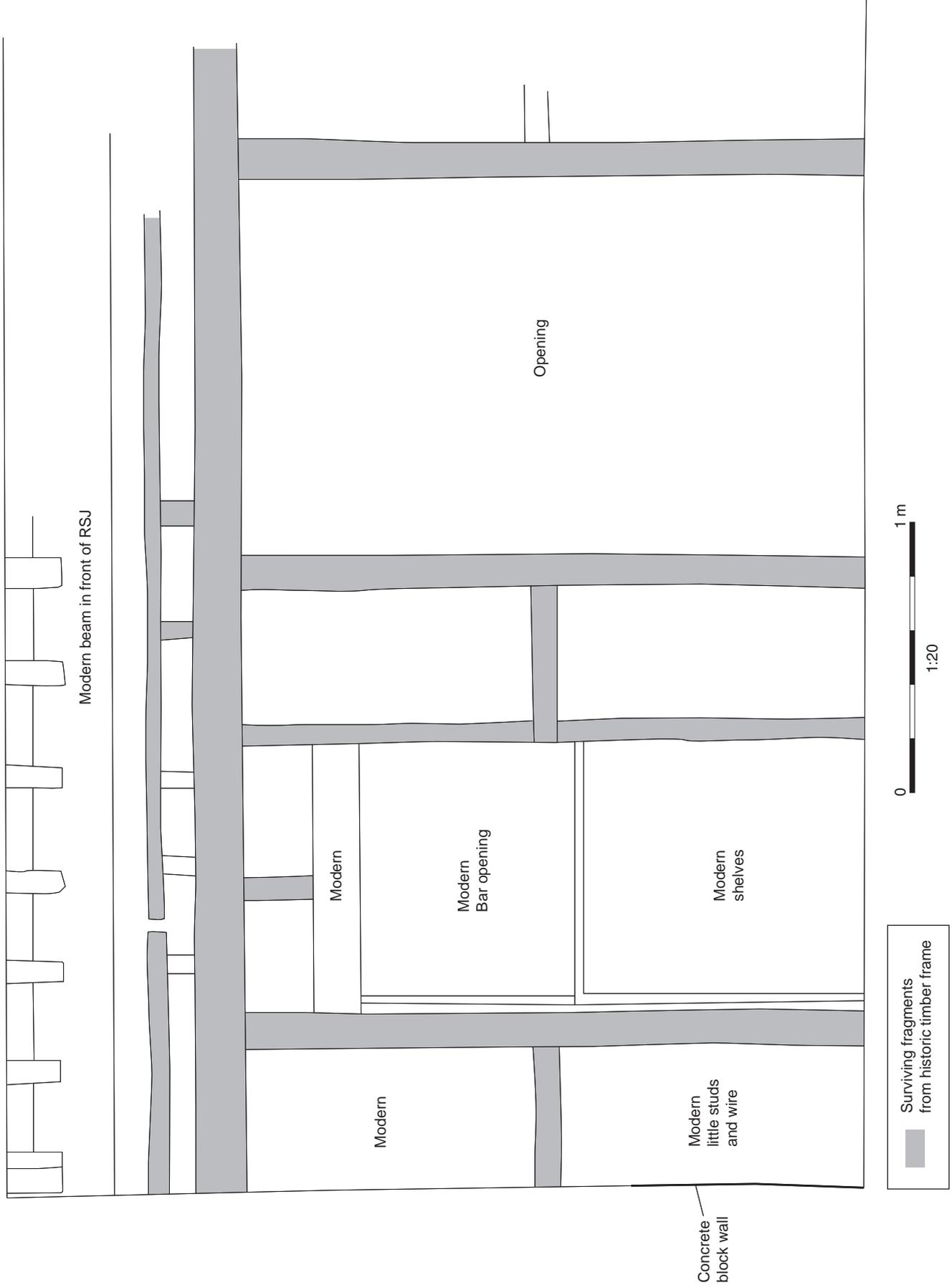


Figure 5: South Elevation of Historic Section of Wall



Plate 1: View of junction between two main ranges of Turl Bar



Plate 2: Southern range of Turl Bar



Plate 3: Northern range of Turl Bar



Plate 4: Eastern end of north range



Plate 5: Southern range



Plate 6: Area 1



Plate 7: Area 2



Plate 8: Window latches in North Range



Plate 9: Interior looking south showing fragment of historic wall (taken in 2009)



Plate 10: Interior looking south at start of current work



Plate 11: Fragment of historic wall



Plate 12: North side of historic frame after partial clearance of 20th-century plaster



Plate 13: North side of frame



Plate 14: Detail of frame



Plate 15: South side of frame



Plate 16: South side of frame



Plate 17: Area 4 (taken in 2009)



Plate 18: Area 4 during current work



Plate 19: Area 4 and 5 after removal of partition



Plate 20: Fireplace at south end of Area 3



Plate 21: Ceiling in Area 3 prior to works



Plate 22: Ceiling in Area 3 after soft strip



Plate 23: Corridor in north range



Plate 24: Entrance lobby in Area 4 looking towards south-east.



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