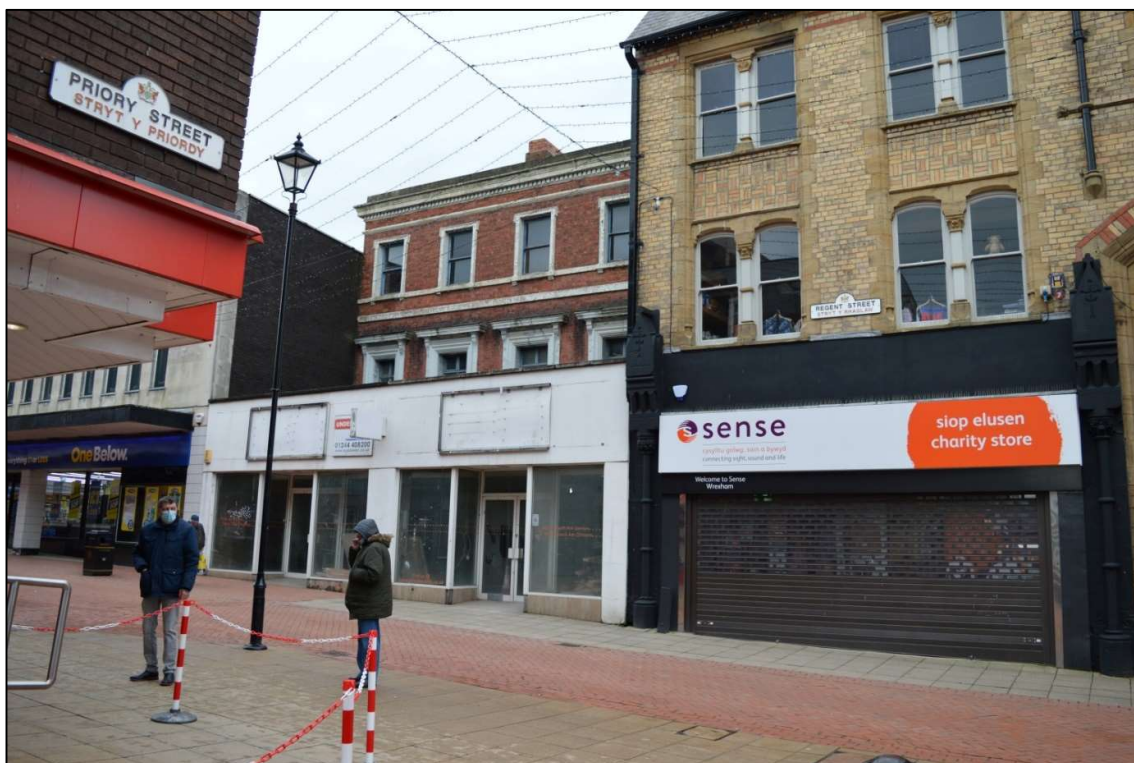


CPAT Report No. 1771

4-6 Regent Street, Wrexham

Building Survey



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS
CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Client name: I Harding
 CPAT Project No: 2508
 Project Name: 4-6 Regent Street, Wrexham
 Grid Reference: SJ 3340 5037
 County/LPA: Wrexham
 Planning Application: P/2020/0672
 CPAT Report No: 1771
 HER Enquiry No: N/A
 Event PRN: 140355
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25/01/2021	25/01/2021	25/01/2021

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 with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

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Summary

In January 2021 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust carried out a programme of building recording at 4-6 Regent Street, Wrexham in connection with a planning application for the conversion of the building into a series of flats. The work involved detailed photographic recording and the compilation of a descriptive record of the building at a stage where the internal wall coverings had been stripped back, revealing details of the construction and phasing of the building.

The original building was of a single, brick-built phase, probably dating to around the middle of the 19th century, with a hipped roof and other features potentially indicating that this had been detached and free-standing at the time of its construction. In the 20th century the ground floor had been opened out and many of the original walls removed when it was converted into a retail outlet and extended, both forward to the street frontage and to the rear. The upper two floors of the original building remained and were supported on steel and concrete pillars which now carry the load. The condition of the walls in places indicate that there had probably been some differential settling that will need to be assessed to ensure the building remains structurally sound.

Crynodeb

Ym mis Ionawr 2021, bu Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Clwyd-Powys yn cynnal rhaglen cofnodi adeilad yn 4-6 Stryd Regent, Wrecsam mewn cysylltiad â chais cynllunio i drosi'r adeilad yn gyfres o fflatiau. Roedd y gwaith yn cynnwys cofnodi ffotograffig manwl a llunio cofnod disgrifiadol o'r adeilad pan roedd gwaith wedi cyrraedd y cyfnod o dynnu haenau waliau mewnol, gan ddatgelu manylion yr adeiladwaith a chyfnodau'r adeilad.

Roedd yr adeilad gwreiddiol wedi'i adeiladu o frics mewn un cyfnod, mae'n debyg yn dyddio o ryw ganol y 19^{eg} ganrif, gyda tho â bargodion a nodweddion eraill o bosibl yn awgrymu bod hwn wedi bod ar wahân ac wedi sefyll ar ei ben ei hun ar adeg ei adeiladu. Yn yr 20^{fed} ganrif, roedd y llawr gwaelod wedi'i agor allan ac roedd llawer o'r waliau gwreiddiol wedi'u tynnu pan gafodd ei drosi'n siop a'i estyn, ymlaen i'r ochr ar y stryd ac yn ôl i'r cefn. Roedd dau lawr uchaf yr adeilad gwreiddiol wedi goroesi ac roedd pileri dur a choncrit nawr yn cario'u pwysau. Roedd cyflwr y waliau mewn mannau'n awgrymu rhywfaint o setlo differol y bydd angen ei asesu i sicrhau bod yr adeilad dal yn strwythurol gadarn.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. In January 2021 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) were invited by D S Jones and Co Architectural and Planning Consultants of Coedpoeth, acting on behalf of Harding Commercial, to conduct a programme of building recording at 4-6 Regent Street, Wrexham (Fig. 1: NGR SJ 3340 5037). The archaeological recording of the building was carried out in connection with an application for planning permission (P/2020/0672) to Wrexham Council for the conversion of the building into a series of flats.



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Fig. 1: Location of 4-6 Regent Street

- 1.2. The work had been recommended by Mark Walters, who provides advice to Wrexham Council on archaeological matters, owing to the potential historic interest of the building. The suggested condition was as follows:

No development shall take place until a programme of building recording and analysis, equivalent to an Historic England Level 2 building survey, has been secured and implemented, in accordance with a brief issued by the local planning authority and a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The survey will be completed by a professional archaeological contractor. The programme of building analysis and recording must meet the standards

laid down by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in their Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures.

- 1.3. The work involved detailed photographic recording and the compilation of a descriptive record, which was undertaken in January 2021, at the stage of the development where the internal wall coverings had been stripped back, revealing details of the construction and phasing of the building and allowing these to be assessed and reported on prior to their masking by modern wall coverings.

2 Historical Background

- 2.1. This section provides a brief summary of the history of the study area and its immediate surroundings, to enable the findings of the assessment to be placed in a wider context.
- 2.2. Wrexham was first referred to as Wristlesha in 1161, the present form appearing about 25 years later. The Old English *wryhta* signifying 'workman' or 'handicraftman' gave rise to a personal name, *Wryht(a)* and in this instance was combined with *ham(m)* meaning 'homestead' or 'village community'.
- 2.3. It is believed that at some time prior to 1161 the castle 'de Wristlesham' was built. This Norman castle has been equated with the motte at Erddig (PRN 101235) just over a kilometre to the south of Wrexham. The medieval town was founded sometime before 1220, the date at which St Giles' church was constructed, and is believed to have grown around the residence and maerdref of a 12th-century Welsh lord on the north bank of the Gwenfro.
- 2.4. By the early 14th century there was a thriving community at Wrexham, the records revealing 52 tenements held by 44 tenants. Several markets are documented which attest to its early importance as a trading centre. The population in the 14th century was predominantly Welsh in origin. In the 15th century, if not earlier, its economy was boosted by the development of iron and coal mining in the immediate vicinity. A tanning industry is also thought to have existed at this time.
- 2.5. During the medieval period the settlement centre spread from the first tenement plots close to the church in a northerly direction as far as Lambpit Street. The main medieval market is considered to have occupied the High Street where the width of the street is noticeably wider than elsewhere. It is probable even during this early period that east of the churchyard was an open area, known in the mid-18th century by which time the workhouse had been built on it as Wrexham Green. Dwellings lined the streets leading from the High Street, but little settlement seems to have occurred south of the Gwenfro. In 1562 the town hall is mentioned at the corner of Hope Street and High Street, opposite which lay the market cross, and a Free Grammar School was instituted in 1603. In 1643 a quarter of the town around the market area was destroyed by fire.
- 2.6. The prosperity of the town in the post-medieval period is reflected in the construction of a number of large residences for the wealthy industrial families on the outskirts of the town centre and some of these are evident on John Wood's map of 1833. The part of Regent Street (then just a continuation of Hope Street) that is occupied by the development property lies on the edge of the town to the north-west in 1833, but whether it is one of those buildings depicted by Wood seems unlikely. It has been noted that many of these large houses, known as Plasau, were destroyed in the 19th century and it is probable that 4-6 Regent Street is one of the buildings that took their place.

- 2.7. The property at 4-6 Regent Street lies 30m within the north-west extent of the area considered to represent the core of the medieval/post-medieval settlement and within the Wrexham Town Centre Conservation Area, designated in March 1974 and amended in April 2007.

3 Building Survey

- 3.1. The building survey was conducted on 18 January 2021, in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) (2020) Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures. The results of the survey and the locations and direction of the photographs are illustrated in Figs 76 and 77 at the end of this report. For convenience the building is considered to be aligned east/west though it is actually nearer to west-north-west/east-south-east.

General

- 3.2. The original building at the core of 4-6 Regent Street was built of brick and on three floors with a hipped roof. The south side of the building (Fig 72) was designed to provide a more impressive appearance, with a parapet at both roof and first floor level and decorative stone window surrounds and string courses adding to the overall appearance. This side faces onto Regent Street but was set back from the frontage, which implies it predates those buildings to either side and was originally free-standing; the roof design may support this suggestion. To the rear the building is of simpler functional appearance, with no ornament (Fig 75).
- 3.3. An internal east/west wall divided the building into front and rear halves and a brick stack in each half carried the chimneys from ground floor level, also serving to define the separation of both the front and rear halves into two unequal-sized rooms. A stair was provided at the north-west (Fig 16) and north-east corners, though the former is of a different design and its defining wall is not very well tied into the north wall of the building (Fig 20) which suggests it was either an afterthought or a later insertion. The north-east stair (Figs 36, 57) is clearly original and has a spiral appearance with landings supported by brick arches (Fig 67) that would have allowed more light into the building.
- 3.4. There seems to have been some consideration of the implications of the weight of the structure as the bonds used in the brickwork are different in the lower section to those of the upper two floors. Near ground level, it seems that the building was constructed in 'English bond', comprising alternating layers of headers and stretchers, which would have provided a stable construction. Above, however, the building was built in 'English Garden Wall bond', where the rows of headers were separated four or five rows of stretchers. This method may have been chosen to speed up the construction where structural integrity was seen as being less important.

Ground floor

- 3.5. The original interior structures of the ground floor had been removed to create a retail space and their load-bearing capacity replaced by a series of steel and concrete beams (see Fig 52). The topmost portion (less than 1.0m in height) of the internal wall and chimney structures largely survived above the inserted beams. Most of the east and west outer walls of the building also remained but only fragments of the north and south walls. In association with the internal redevelopments, modern extensions to both the front and rear had been used to increase the available floor space, probably in the later 20th century.

- 3.6. What appeared to be a blocked window (Fig 47) was found in the west wall, again implying that the building was originally designed to be free-standing. Unfortunately, the east wall was hidden behind modern brick facing and it was not possible to determine if there was any additional supporting evidence on that side. In the wall extending north from the north-west corner of the original building, a blocked doorway (Fig 56) was observed which tends to imply that there was some form of yard to the rear of the building, to which the door may have given access.

First floor

- 3.7. The removal of the interior of the ground floor meant that the east and west stairs started at first floor level though there was a small step down in the west stair to provide access to a modern extension to the rear of the building. This comprised a corridor (Fig 42); an additional room (Fig 43); and linking these, a small room where a stair (Fig 44) provided access from the ground floor. The bottom of the east stair had been similarly cut away (see Fig 54) and a stairway inserted at first floor level which provided access to the rear of the property at ground floor level.
- 3.8. The rooms to the rear (5 and 8) and the east and west stairs were linked by a series of doorways, effectively forming a corridor between the two stairs (Fig 27). The two front rooms (6 and 7) were not linked and access was only from the east and west stairs, respectively. There were four fireplaces at this level, one to each room, though all had been blocked in relatively recent times.
- 3.9. Room 6 was unusual in that its east wall had a marked curve (Fig 40), which suggested a special function but could not be explained by the surviving structure. Originally, rooms 5 and 6 and rooms 7 and 8 were linked but the respective doorways (Figs 34 and 26, respectively) had been blocked, probably at different times in the building's history. This implies that the original layout had been redesigned on a number of occasions. It seems likely, therefore, that some of the other doorways were later insertions but it was not possible to confirm this suspicion.
- 3.10. The removal of the internal coverings of the wall which links the southern chimney structure with the front of the building had revealed some cracking of this wall (Fig 25), suggesting that there had been differential settling between the two when the interior of the ground floor was removed.

Second floor

- 3.11. As with the first floor, the plan of the second floor comprises four rooms centred on the two chimney structures, though in this case the two rear rooms (1 and 4) are not linked and access was gained from the east and west stairs. What seems to have been an inserted doorway linked Room 1 and 2, but the original access to the two front rooms was clearly via doorways from the respective stairs, where the door heads were arched. Later modifications meant that the east door (Fig 9) had been blocked and the head of the west door (Fig 13) blocked up while still allowing access. The two front rooms were directly linked by a doorway to the north of the chimney. All four fireplaces on this level had been blocked up but each had retained its hearth stone on the floor in front (see Fig 10).
- 3.12. Again, cracking of the wall which links the southern chimney structure with the front of the building was revealed by the removal of its internal covering (Fig 12). This further supports the suggestion above that there had been differential settling between the two when the interior of the ground floor was removed.

Roof space

- 3.13. The roof space could not be accessed at the time of the visit, but owing to the removal of the ceiling material the roof structure could be observed through the joists (Figs 17-19, 70, 71). The roof had a hipped design with its long axis running approximately east/west and was supported on four timber roof trusses each aligned north/south and linked by purlins.
- 3.14. The details and measurements of the trusses could not be determined owing to the lack of direct access, so the trusses are reproduced as an approximation on Fig. 2, which shows that Trusses 1 and 4 were a king-post design. Trusses 2 and 3 were effectively cut down half trusses of the same appearance, where the horizontal tie-beam did not extend across the full width of the building and was instead supported by the central east/west dividing wall.
- 3.15. Apart from the major timbers in the framing, much of the remainder of the roof structure appeared to have been renewed in treated softwood, probably at some time in the second half of the 20th century as they were covered by roofing felt; this may have occurred when the fireplaces were blocked. Although it could not be conclusively observed, the roof appeared to be slated, with ceramic tiles on the ridge and edges of the hipped sections. Cast iron gutters and downpipes could be seen to the rear, though such detail was hidden behind the parapet which fronts the roof on the south.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1. Nos 4-6 Regent Street was clearly constructed as a single building, most likely around the middle of the 19th century when Wrexham town centre was undergoing expansion and redevelopment. It is suggested here, though not conclusively proven, that it was originally free-standing with a yard space to the rear. Later in the 19th century it was hemmed in by the adjoining buildings to east and west and these projected further to the south onto the street frontage which meant that 4-6 was set back from it; this may indicate that it once had a small garden to the front.
- 4.2. This gap between 4-6 and the street frontage was filled in when the interior of the ground floor was completely redesigned to provide an open space for retail use, which necessitated the insertion of steel and concrete beams to support the structure that remained above. In this process, there seems to have been some differential settling of the building which led to cracks forming in the internal dividing wall that links the front wall of the building with the southern chimney structure. The nature of this will need to be assessed to ensure the building retains its structural integrity.
- 4.3. The building lies within the Wrexham Conservation Area and adds to its character, so any external alterations will need to be considered sympathetically. It should be mentioned here though that a relevant consideration is given in the description of the Conservation Area, where it is noted that "...of recent years a number of new and independent businesses have been established within the area and some sensitive refurbishments have re-introduced character and brought empty buildings back into use through much needed repair and maintenance. However, greater investment is required to improve the condition of the historic environment of the town and restore a sense of vitality."
- 4.4. The building also falls within the historic core of the town, where sub-surface traces of the early occupation of the town may have survived. Although there is likely to have been disturbance from previous development and the insertion of the retail space, any works below

ground floor level have the potential to reveal evidence relating to the medieval and early post-medieval town.

5 Sources

Unpublished sources

Silvester, R.J., Martin, C.H.R., and Watson, S., 2013. *Historic Settlements in Wrexham County Borough*. CPAT Report No. 1186.

Websites

<http://old.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/pdfs/museum/footprints/wrexhamap.pdf>

(transcript of Wood's plan of Wrexham 1833)

http://old.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/pdfs/planning/wtc_assessment.pdf

(Wrexham Conservation Area character assessment)

Cartographic sources

1900 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 2nd edition Denbighshire 28.12

6 Archive deposition Statement

- 6.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the CIfA *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2020). The archive is entirely digital and will be deposited jointly with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust and the National Monuments Record (RCAHMW).

Archive summary

CPAT Event PRN: 140355

74 digital photographs, CPAT film no 4853 (Appendix 1 and see Fig. 77 for locations)

Appendix 1 Photographic survey



Fig 2: Arch (partly blocked) at top of east stair (CPAT 4853-0001)



Fig 3: Top of east stair with window to rear (CPAT 4853-0020)



Fig 4: Blocked fireplace with hearth stones in Room 1 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0003)



Fig 5: Window in Room 1 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0004)



Fig 6: Doorways in Room 1 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0005)



Fig 7: Windows in Room 2 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0006)



Fig 8: General view of Room 2 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0007)



Fig 9: Blocked arched doorway and ?later doorway in Room 2 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0008)



Fig 10: Blocked fireplace with hearth stone in Room 2 on second floor. Also shows wall cracks (CPAT 4853-0009)



Fig 11: Windows in Room 3 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0010)



Fig 12: Blocked fireplace with hearth stone in Room 3 on second floor. Also shows wall cracks (CPAT 4853-0011)



Fig 13: Partly blocked arched doorway in Room 3 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0012)



Fig 14: Blocked fireplace with hearth stone in Room 4 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0013)



Fig 15: Window in Room 4 on second floor (CPAT 4853-0014)

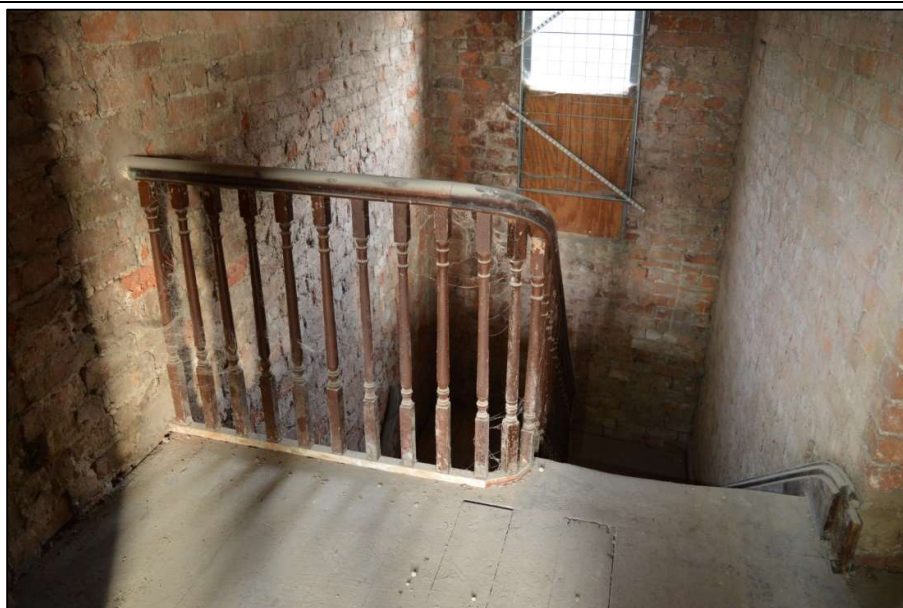


Fig 16: Top of western stair on second floor (CPAT 4853-0015)



Fig 17: Ceiling timbers with Truss 4 behind in roof space (CPAT 4853-0016)



Fig 18: Ceiling timbers with Trusses 1-3 behind in roof space (CPAT 4853-0017)



Fig 19: Ceiling timbers with Trusses 3 and 4 behind in roof space (CPAT 4853-0018)



Fig 20: Poorly tied-in and possibly inserted wall (to right) on east side of west stair (CPAT 4853-0019)



Fig 21: West stair detail (CPAT 4853-0020)

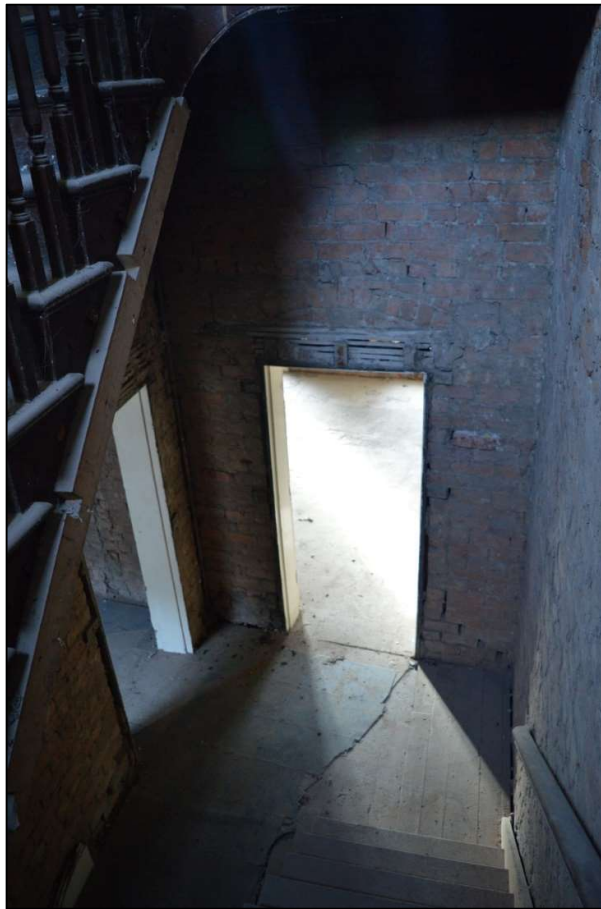


Fig 22: First floor landing of west stair (CPAT 4853-0021)

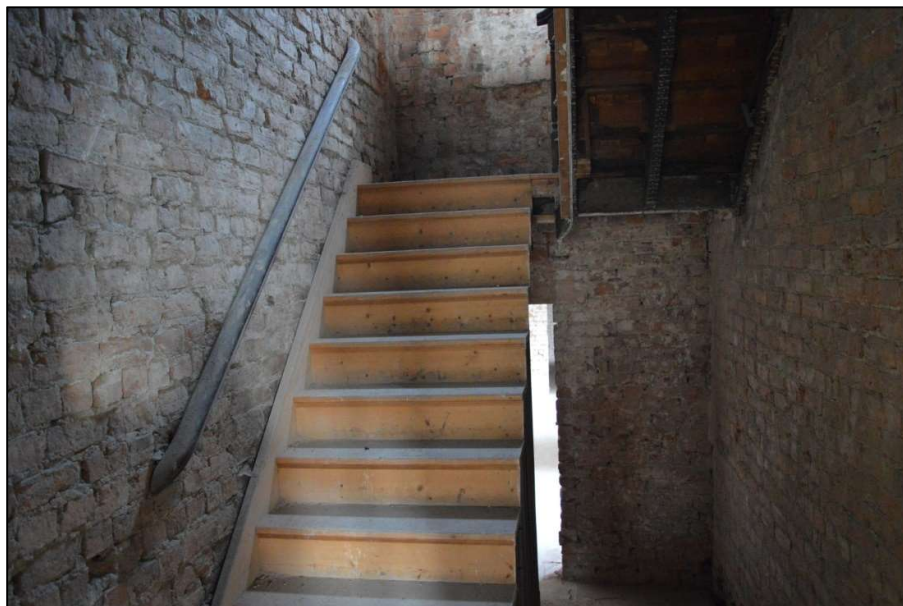


Fig 23: West stair looking up from first floor landing (CPAT 4853-0022)



Fig 24: Windows in Room 7 on first floor (CPAT 4853-0023)



Fig 25: Blocked fireplace in Room 7 on first floor. Also shows wall cracks (CPAT 4853-0024)



Fig 26: Blocked doorway in Room 7 on first floor. (CPAT 4853-0025)



Fig 27: Blocked fireplace in Room 8 on first floor and route to east stair (CPAT 4853-0026)



Fig 28: Window in Room 8 on first floor. (CPAT 4853-0027)



Fig 29: Blocked doorway in Room 8 on first floor. Also shows doorway to west stair (CPAT 4853-0028)



Fig 30: As 29. Blocked doorway in Room 8 on first floor. Also shows doorway to west stair (CPAT 4853-0029)



*Fig 31: Top of chimney breast in Room 8 on first floor showing supporting timber for the hearth stone
(CPAT 4853-0030)*



*Fig 32: As 31. Top of chimney breast in Room 8 on first floor showing supporting timber for the hearth stone
(CPAT 4853-0031)*

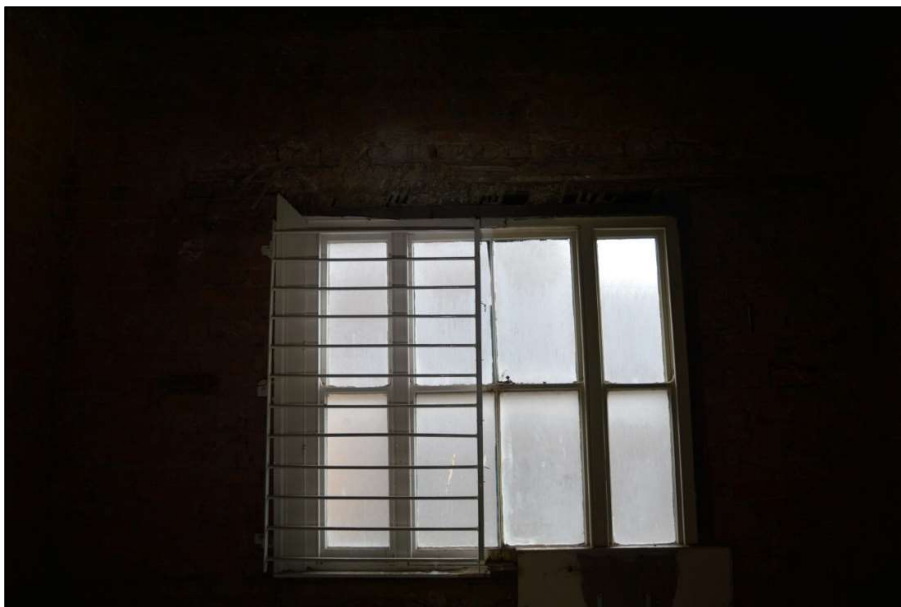


Fig 33: Window in Room 5 on first floor. (CPAT 4853-0032)

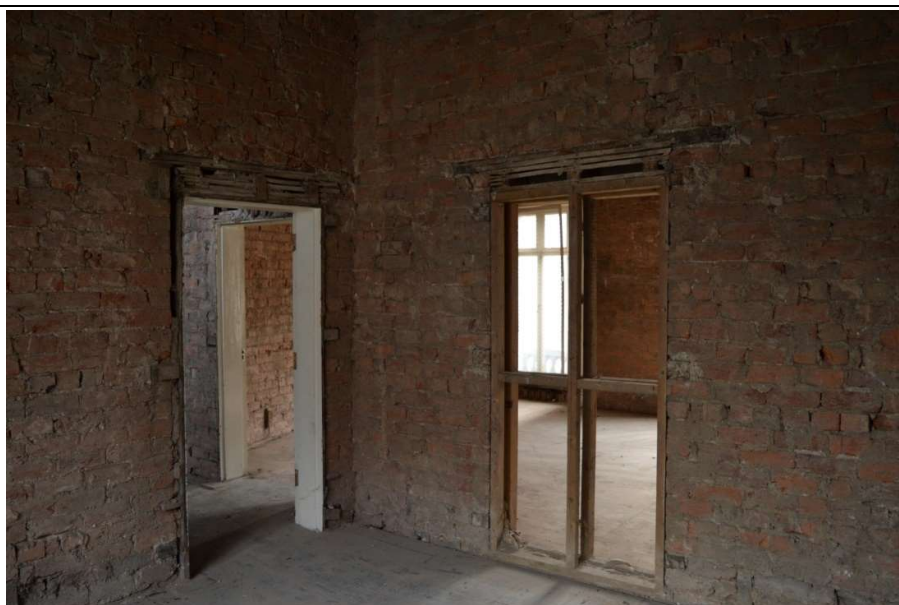


Fig 34: Blocked doorway in Room 5 on first floor (to right). Also shows doorway to east stair (CPAT 4853-0033)



Fig 35: Blocked fireplace in Room 5 on first floor. Also shows route to west stair (CPAT 4853-0034)



Fig 36: East stair looking up through the supporting arch from the first floor landing (CPAT 4853-0035)

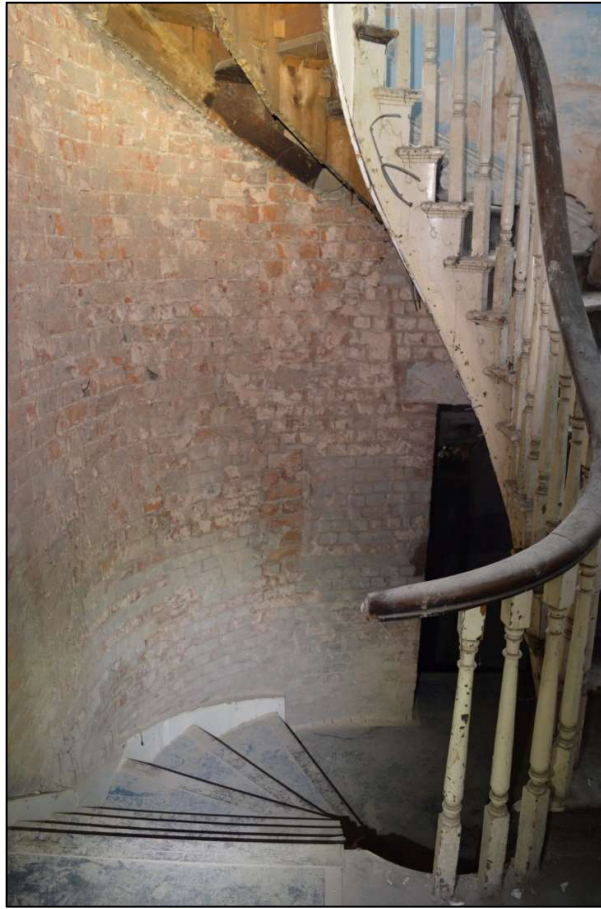


Fig 37: East stair looking down from the first floor landing (CPAT 4853-0036)



Fig 38: Windows in Room 6 on first floor. (CPAT 4853-0037)



Fig 39: Blocked fireplace and door in Room 6 on first floor. Also shows wall cracks (CPAT 4853-0038)



Fig 40: The curved east wall of Room 6 on first floor, doorway to east stair (CPAT 4853-0039)

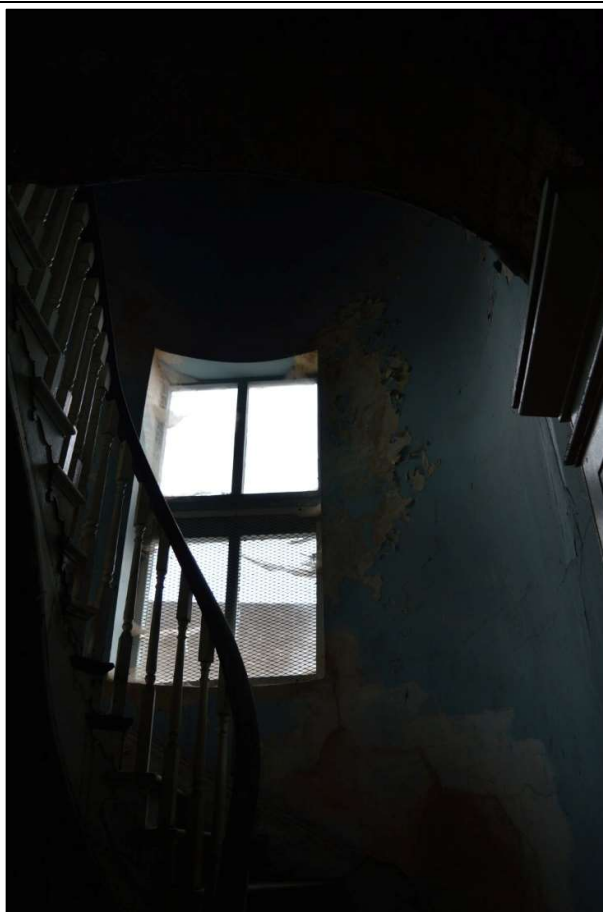


Fig 41: Looking up from first floor landing of east stair (CPAT 4853-0040)



Fig 42: Modern extension connecting to rear of first floor from west stair (CPAT 4853-0041)



Fig 43: Rear part of modern first floor extension (CPAT 4853-0042)

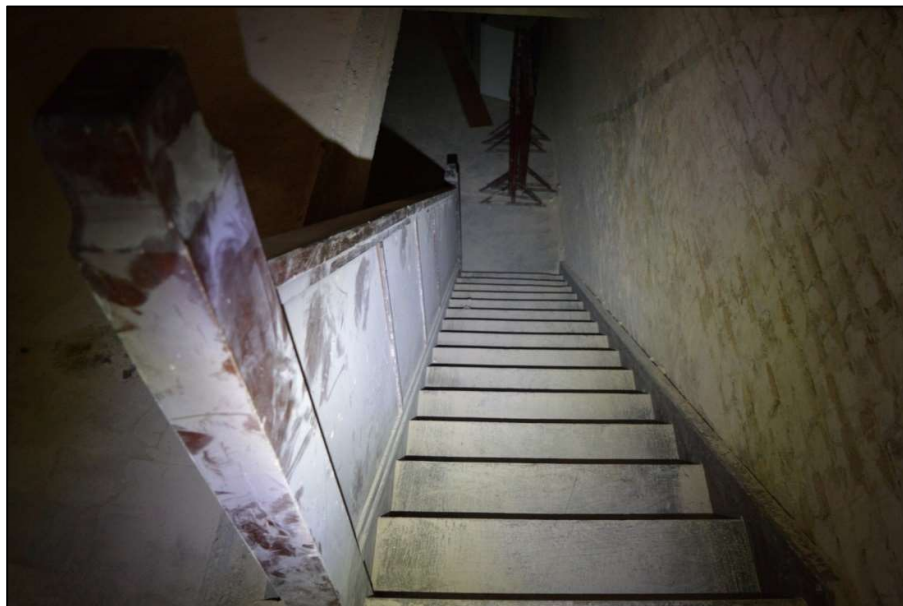


Fig 44: Stair down from modern first floor extension to ground floor (CPAT 4853-0043)



Fig 45: Stair up from modern first floor extension level to first floor of original building (CPAT 4853-0044)



Fig 46: General view of ground floor (CPAT 4853-0045)



Fig 47: Blocked window in original west wall of ground floor (CPAT 4853-0046)



Fig 48: First floor supporting joists from below. Also shows original east wall (to left) of ground floor with modern brick facing of its lower part and the surviving upper part of the south wall (to right) of the original building (CPAT 4853-0047)



Fig 49: Bottom of the east stair looking up from the ground floor (CPAT 4853-0048)



Fig 50: Bottom of the east stair, showing how it was truncated (CPAT 4853-0049)



Fig 51: The inserted steelwork supporting the centre of the building from below. Also shows the surviving upper part of the south wall of the original building (to left) and the beams supporting the southern of the two chimney stacks (CPAT 4853-0050)



Fig 52: As 51. The inserted steelwork supporting the centre of the building from below. Also shows the surviving upper part of the ground floor south wall of the original building (to left) and the beams supporting the southern of the two chimney stacks (CPAT 4853-0051)



Fig 53: Timbers of the east stair looking up from the ground floor to the first floor landing (CPAT 4853-0052)



Fig 54: View looking up from the ground floor to the first floor landing of the east stair showing how it was truncated (CPAT 4853-0053)



Fig 55: The inserted steelwork supporting the centre of the building from below. Also shows the surviving upper part of the east/west cross wall (to left) on the ground floor (CPAT 4853-0054)



Fig 56: Doorway to rear of original building where the brick seems to be re-used. The blocked doorway in the wall behind might indicate there was an earlier yard wall to the rear of the original building (CPAT 4853-0055)



Fig 57: View looking down the east stair from the second floor landing (CPAT 4853-0056)



Fig 58: Window in Room 1 on the second floor (CPAT 4853-0057)



Fig 59: Windows in Room 2 on the second floor (CPAT 4853-0058)



Fig 60: Windows in Room 3 on the second floor (CPAT 4853-0059)



Fig 61: Window in Room 4 on the second floor (CPAT 4853-0060)

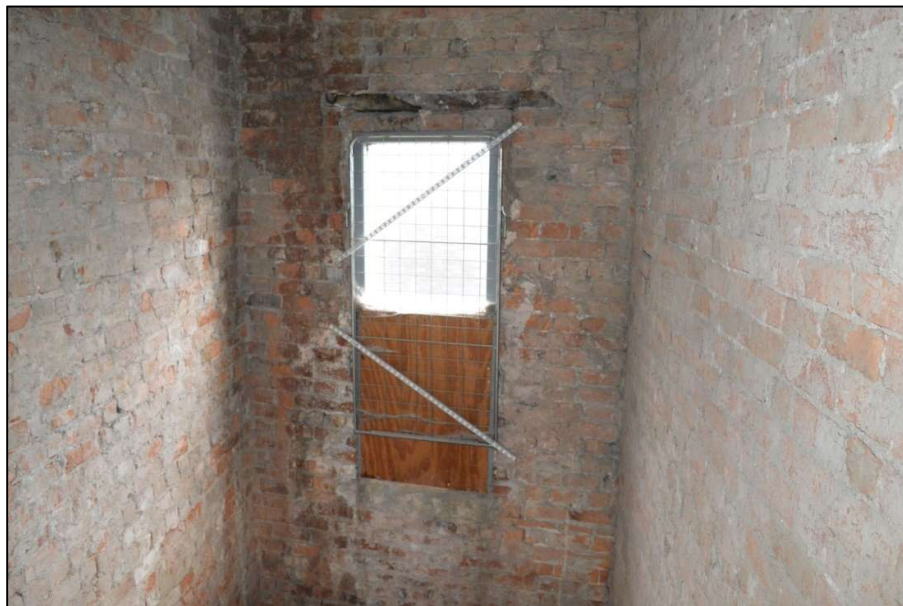


Fig 62: The window illuminating the west stair from the second floor landing (CPAT 4853-0061)



Fig 63: Windows in Room 7 on the first floor (CPAT 4853-0062)



Fig 64: Window in Room 8 on the first floor (CPAT 4853-0063)



Fig 65: Window in Room 5 on the first floor (CPAT 4853-0064)



Fig 66: Windows in Room 6 on the first floor (CPAT 4853-0065)



Fig 67: The arch above the first floor landing of the east stair (CPAT 4853-0066)



Fig 68: Looking down the east stair from the first floor landing. Shows where the east stair was truncated by the modern insertion of steps down (centre) to the rear of the building (CPAT 4853-0066)



Fig 69: The east side of the arch above the first floor landing of the east stair (CPAT 4853-0068)



Fig 70: Ceiling timbers with Truss 4 behind in roof space (CPAT 4853-0069)



Fig 71: Ceiling timbers with Truss 4 behind in roof space (CPAT 4853-0070)



Fig 72: The view of the remaining part of the original building from Regent Street CPAT 4853-0071)



Fig 73: The view of the remaining part of the original building from Regent Street with the modern extension on the ground floor (CPAT 4853-0072)



Fig 74: The rear view of the first and second floors of the original building from Argyle Street CPAT 4853-0073)



Fig 75: The rear view of the first and second floors of the original building from Argyle Street. The sloping structure to lower left is where modern steps down to the rear of the building were inserted into the east stair at first floor level (CPAT 4853-0074)

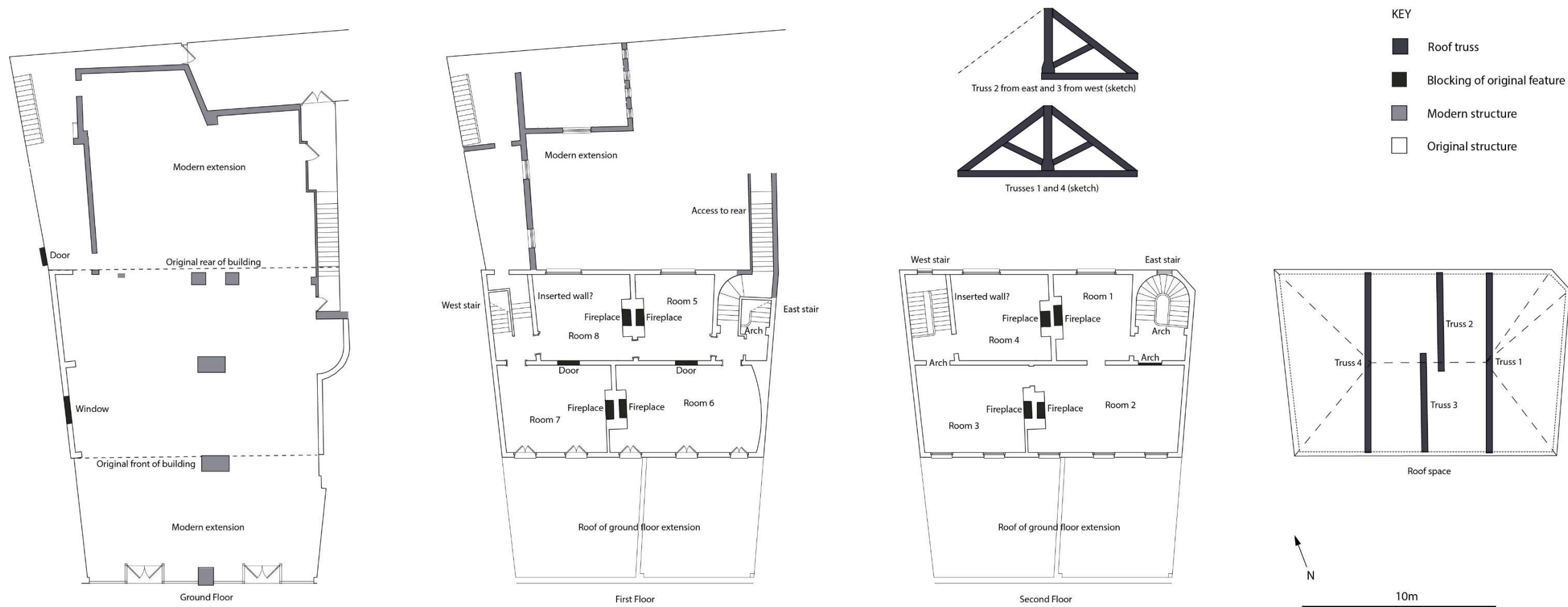


Fig. 76: Plan of the floors in the property, showing architectural detail revealed. Room numbers refer to those in the text of the report

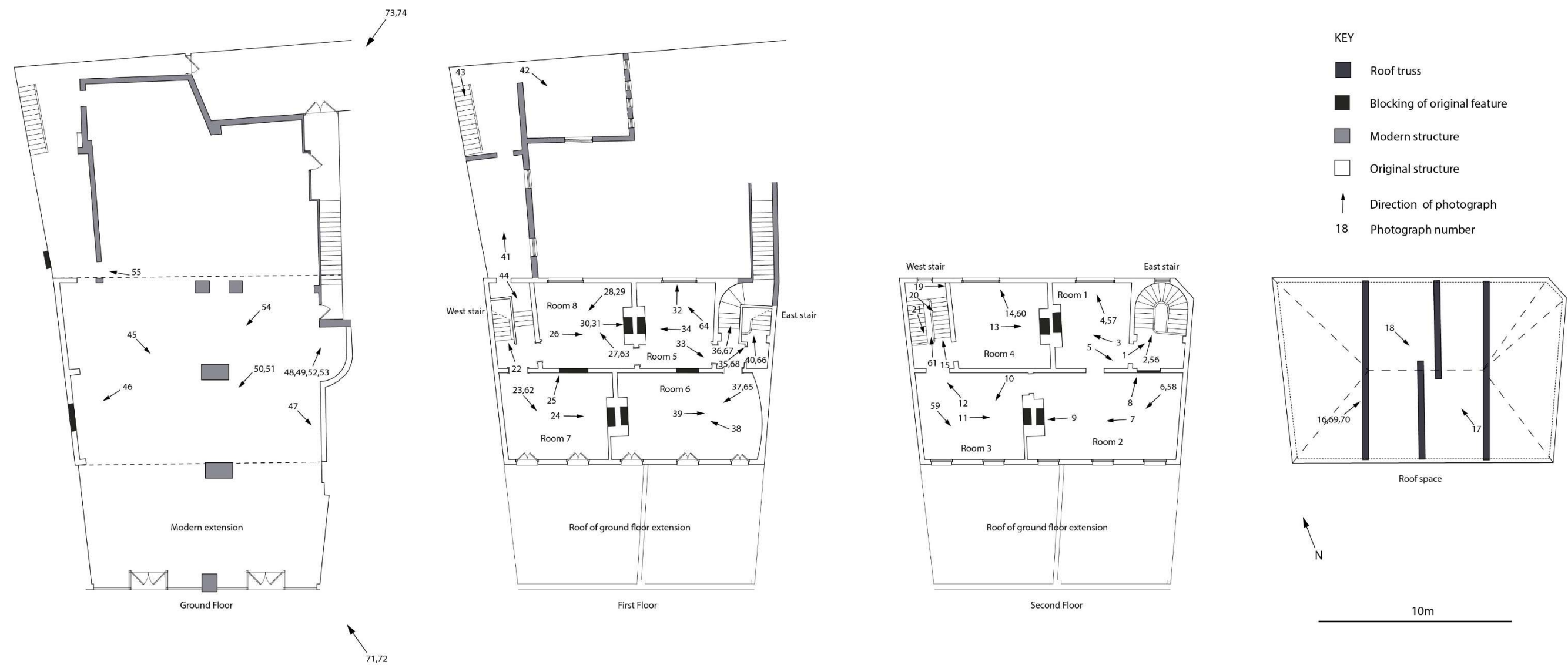


Fig. 77: Photographic locations and directions