

The Centre for
Applied
Archaeology





The Whitelands Leather Works, Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside

An Archaeological Building Survey of the 1868 Complex

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Summary

This report presents the results of an archaeological building survey of Whitelands Leather Works, Whitelands, Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside, Greater Manchester (centred SJ 9420 9869). The site was situated to the east of Whitelands road and to the south of the disused Huddersfield Canal. Whitelands works consisted of a four story building with adjoining single story sheds to the east. Although buildings were noted on the 1840s OS map there appeared to have been a significant rebuild dating to 1868. During the late 20th century the site was reduced in size with residential buildings constructed to the east and south of the works. The adjoining sheds were partially demolished in the late 20th century and the works was finally demolished in 2003. This survey was undertaken in conjunction with the ongoing Tameside archaeological survey.





1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report represents the results of an archaeological building survey of Whitelands Leather Works, Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester (centred SJ 951 983; *Fig 1*). The site was comprised of a works with adjoining single story sheds (GMHER/SMR 3117.1.0) and the survey work was carried out as part of the Tameside Archaeological Survey, a long-term research project funded by Tameside MBC.

1.2 The Survey Work

The survey work, which involved English Heritage-style Level 1 building survey work, followed the conventions laid down in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage 2006) and the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (Revised Edition 2001).

The work was required to provide an analysis and understanding of the evolution and function of the building complex prior to demolition. Historic research was carried out and various unpublished documentary sources, including a map regression exercise, to aid in the interpretation of the site's context, evolution and design.

There were health and safety issues encountered during the survey and certain areas were inaccessible due to the risks involved.

1.3 The Setting

The site is located on Whitelands road (B6170), to the south of the A635 (*Fig.1*). To the south of the site is the River Tame and directly to the north the Huddersfield Canal and the Manchester to Huddersfield railway line at 101m AOD. The site thus sits in the very bottom of the Tame Valley in an industrial area dominated by textile mills and transport infrastructure.







2. Historical Background

2.1 The Historical Evidence

There is very little historical evidence available for the Whitelands Leatherworks site. The mid-19th to early 20th century trade directories for Ashton-under-Lyne are largely unrevealing, even though the site is described as a leatherworks on the maps as late as 1922, suggesting that the site may have been re-used under another name later in its life. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries there was a textile mill run by the Whitelands Twist Co Ltd and founded in 1874 but this does not appear to be associated with the present site but rather a mill site a few hundred metres to the west (Nevell 1993, 173).

2.2 The Map Evidence

Thus, the main easily accessible evidence for the history of the site is represented by the map evidence. The earliest map to show the leatherworks was the 1848 Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 map (Fig.2). The site was situated to the east of Whitelands road and north of the River Tame. To the north and north east of the site was the Huddersfield Canal and a Lock. The building complex was accessed from Whitelands, through to a central yard area and the southern range of buildings. There was a second access point to the north east of the site via a bridge over the canal. The layout of the site substantially differed from that of the 20^{th} century as the northern building was irregular in shape and was arranged around a yard. To the north east was a small square building adjacent to the bridge over the canal. During this period there were two buildings to the south of the main complex, these consisted of an irregular shaped building to the west and a rectangular structure to the east.

The works appeared to have been substantially rebuilt on approximately the same footprint by 1894 (Fig 3), also indicated by the building date of '1868' over the iron lintel in the west facing elevation. The map depicted 'Whitelands Leather Works' as a large building lacking the central yard area and access road. The main works building had been extended to the south and appeared to abut the earlier buildings.

By 1909 (Fig 4) the works complex had been reduced in size, with the southern buildings demolished and a row of terraced housing constructed on that area of the site. There was some alteration to the works to the south east with new buildings adjoining the main complex.

The 1922 (*Figs 5 & 6*) map depicted a further reduction of the site with a row of terrace houses constructed to the east of the works. The square building to the north east of the site, and the eastern extent of the works complex was demolished. There were no further alterations to the site visible on the OS mapping.







3. Building Description

3.1 Introduction

The works building was four stories in height with a basement level and subsidiary sheds to the east (Fig. 7). The detailed ground floor plan depicts the body of the works as 6m wide, widening out to 9m at the southern end and a maximum length of 40m (Fig. 8). The building was gable ended, with a pitched slate roof and a water tower projecting from the eastern slope of the roof. The building was irregular in shape, as the north facing elevation partially followed the north west to south east angle of the canal. The west facing elevation had a slight curve towards the southern end of the building and the east facing elevation was adjoined by two pitched roof sheds, which were irregular in shape. The interior of the building had been stripped of most machinery and features. The basement was not accessible.

3.2 The Exterior of the Works

Western Elevation

The west facing elevation was constructed from machine made red brick in English Garden Wall Bond (EGWB). Four entrances were visible, two situated to the south, one to the centre and one to the north of the building (Fig. 10). The southern entrance had a cast iron lintel bearing the name 'Whitelands Leather Works 1868', with a corrugated door curtain (Fig. 11). Under the second bay ground floor window was a smaller doorway. To the north was a similar corrugated door curtain. The ground floor window of the sixth bay from the south was higher in elevation, with the central doorway located directly beneath it. The building was eleven bays long, with the basement windows in-filled with brick and the ground floor windows in-filled with breeze blocks (Fig. 12). The windows had stone lintels and sills; the lintels used for the basement windows had a slight curve. The eaves consisted of a brick cornice returned at the gable, which served as a gutter (Fig. 10).

Southern Elevation

The south facing elevation was constructed from EGWB in red brick, with a single doorway (Fig. 13).

Northern Elevation

The north facing elevation was irregular, with a change in angle and a recess to allow for a cylindrical chimney vent (Fig. 14). There was a single doorway to the west of the wall.

Eastern Elevation

The east facing elevation was eleven bays long, with a notably wider distance between the third and fourth bays from the north. These last three bays were recessed,





with a slanting change in the brickwork after the third bay (Fig. 15). The windows of the ground floor were in-filled with brick, those on the second floor and most of the third and fourth floors were in-filled with breeze blocks. Beneath the seventh bay, from the north, was a three story flat roofed extension which housed an external staircase (Fig. 16); this appeared to be a later addition. There were three entrances also situated to the south, centre and north of the building. The southern entrance was an open doorway with a cast iron lintel (Fig. 17). The central entrance, situated to the north of the external staircase was in-filled with brick (Fig. 18). The entrance to the north opened out into Shed 1 (Fig. 19). To the east of the building were two sheds, one to the north (Shed 1) and one to the south (Shed 2).

3.3 The Works Interior

Ground Floor (Fig. 9)

To the south and north of the ground floor were entrances, both with corrugated door curtains (Fig. 20, northern entrance). Where visible the ceiling supports consisted of RSJs orientated east west. Areas of the floor level were elevated by c.0.50m (Fig. 19). Stairway provided access to the basement level and the second floor. Apart from a leather punching machine (Fig. 21) there were no other fittings or features associated with the use of this area.

Second Floor (Fig. 22)

The northern extent of the second floor was an open area with no fittings or features, apart from the stairs to the ground and third floors (Fig. 23). The southern end of this floor had been partitioned into various small offices and workshops (Figs. 24 & 25). The offices were located to the west of the room and several work benches and other fitting to the west.

Third Floor (Fig. 26)

The third floor was also devoid of any work associated fittings or features. This floor consisted of a single large room, with a stair to the fourth floor situated against the eastern wall adjacent to the opening into the external staircase (Fig.27). To the north was a hatchway to the second floor (Fig.28). The ceiling beams were supported by various forms of brick pilaster. Thick brick pilasters were noted near the centre of the room on both sides. These thick pilasters primarily supported the beams along the eastern wall (Fig.29 & 30), to the west two corbelled pilasters were located at the southern end of the room (Fig.31). The wooden ceiling was supported by RSJs.

Fourth Floor (Fig. 32)

The fourth floor did not contain any fittings or features relating to its use. Part of the floor to the north of the room was missing (Fig. 33). The room was accessed via a single stairway from the third floor. The slate roof was supported by Kingpost trusses (Fig. 34), which also partially supported the base of the water tower (Fig. 35).





Water Tower

The water tower projected from the eastern side of the roof. This consisted of a red brick structure with an iron holding tank and single window, with an arched lintel on the east facing elevation (Fig. 16). An external ladder was visible against the south facing elevation of the tower (Fig. 10)

3.4 Subsidiary Structures (Fig. 7)

To the east of the works were the remains of a subsidiary building which had a gabled roof, supported by king post trusses. The sheds were separated by a brick wall, which abutted the external staircase (Fig. 36). There was no obvious access between the two sheds.

Shed 1

The concrete floor of the northern structure was covered with both building rubble and vegetation. To the west the shadow of the roof was visible above the ground floor windows and doorways, with the roof beams supported by brick pilasters (Fig. 18). The external walls were constructed of EGWB and were thickly painted in white and blue. As mentioned the central doorway and windows were in-filled with either brick or breeze blocks. The south facing elevation had been partially demolished, which reduced the height of its three windows (Fig. 37). These windows had stone lintels, only visible from the north and were in-filled with a mixture of red brick and breeze block.

Shed 2

Structurally the southern shed was similar to the northern, with EGWB walls, brick pilasters and a concrete floor that was partially obscured by demolition rubble and other debris. This area contained two classic cars in a very poor state of repair (*Figs.* 38 & 39). The southern elevation contained two windows (*Fig.* 40) and the northern elevation appeared featureless (*Fig.* 41). To the north west of the area was the external brick stairwell, which had a doorway in the south facing elevation.

Canal/Towpath Wall (Fig. 7)

The towpath wall was orientated north west to south east and formed the northern boundary of the site. This wall ran from Whitelands road to the terrace houses located to the east of the site. The towpath wall had been substantially altered, with various phase breaks and rebuilds. The eastern extent of the wall had been constructed using handmade bricks, with the lower courses in EGWB and the upper extent with no discernable bond (Fig. 42). This part of the wall abutted the backyard boundary wall of terrace house 13. The eastern part of the wall contained a stone lintel at head height (Fig. 43). The lower central part of the wall was in-filled using machine pressed red brick in EGWB; above this were the possible remains of a brick blocked window and a phase break (Fig. 44). The western extent of this section of wall consisted of handmade brick in EGWB, abutted by a diagonal row of mortared sandstone masonry (Fig. 42). The south facing elevation of the wall consisted of randomly coursed





sandstone and roughly constructed brickwork, which appeared to extend to the phase break noted above (Fig. 45).

The central section of the towpath/shed wall primarily consisted of red brick in EGWB (Fig. 46). This section of wall had been partially demolished, which cut through the three windows set into this part of the elevation. The windows were evenly spaced, with stone lintels and were in-filled with a combination of brick and breeze block.







4. Discussion

4.1 Interpretation and Phasing

The works complex dates to themed-19th century and was in production by 1848 (*Fig.* 2). The works had been enlarged by 1868, suggesting a main period of rebuilding in the 1860s, with further alterations to the works represented by reductions in size dating to the early 20th century.

4.2 Phase 1: Pre 1860s

There was little to suggest that any of the works complex dating to this period remained. The towpath wall may have been the only exception with the stretch of wall constructed of handmade brickwork possibly dating to the earlier half of the 19th century (Fig. 43).

The works was arrayed around a central yard, as suggested by the typical layout of a leather working site and near the River Tame and the canal, consistent water supplies. These factors could suggest some continuity in the use of the site as a leather works from this period.

4.3 Phase 2: Mid to late 19th century

Although the 1894 OS map depicts substantial differences to the main works building, the subsidiary structures indicate some continuity with the early works complex.

The structural iron lintel inscribed with 'Whitelands Leather Works 1868' and changes to the southern extent of the main works does indicate that either a major rebuild took place or that the existing works was remodelled.

The complex depicted on the 1894 map provides evidence that the sheds and subsidiary buildings extended to the east of the main building. The adjoining sheds would appear to have been a remnant of this more extensive range of buildings.

4.4 Phase 3: Late 19th to early 20th century

By 1920 the works had been substantially reduced in size, with the older southern range of buildings demolished and a row of terrace houses constructed. The subsidiary buildings to the south eastern extent of the works complex had been remodelled.

4.5 Phase 4: Early 20th century

The eastern extent of the sheds was demolished leaving the site in the general configuration which survived until its demolition in 2003.





4.6 The Archaeology of Leather Working

The Whitelands Leatherworks appears to have been a purpose-built leather processing site founded in the mid-19th century. The manufacturing of leather involves the preparatory process of tanning, when the raw skin or hide is converted into a stable material that will not putrefy. Then currying, in which the leather is converted into a material suitable to be worked with. In England these processes were usually conducted by separate specialists (Rynne 2006, 303).

The preparatory process would involve soaking the hides in tannic acid, which consisted of lime with a high alkaline content. This process would loosen hair and other organic material so that the tanner could scrape the hide clean without damaging the grain of the leather (Rynne 2006, 303). The cleaning process could take some time, with the hide repeatedly spread over a wooden beam and scraped and then returned to a lime pit until ready for tanning (Trinder 1992, 745). Tanning liquor consisted of vegetable matter, usually tree bark, which was produced at 'bark mills', where it would be finely ground. From the mid-1800s hot water, often provided by steam engines, would be used to draw tannin out of the bark to create tannin liquor. These liquors where made in various strengths, for use throughout the stages of tanning. Initially a weak solution would be used and the hide immersed for a couple of months, this process would be repeated over two years with the solution increased in strength through time. Pits were used as tanks to hold the tanning solutions, with the hides suspended from poles across the top of the pits (Rynne 2003, 304). Upon the completion of the tanning process the hides were rinsed and smoothed before being taken to drying lofts.

In the finishing process, 'currying', the hides were dampened in warm water and then softened using heavy mallets. The faces of the leather were then scoured before being smoothed out. Once smoothed the currier would cut the leather to the required thickness on a curriers beam. Warm dubbing and fish oils were then used to make the leather supple and waterproof. Other process such as dying or chemical finishes could be used to colour the leather.

A typical tannery complex would consist of an enclosed courtyard, where bark stores, the bark mill and drying lofts would be situated. If currying was also undertaken currying sheds and beam houses would also be present. The associated pits for the lime and tanning would be placed under the cover of lean-to structures (Rynne 2006, 305; Trinder 1992, 745). The main consideration for situating tanneries would be a consistent water supply and access to raw hides, with enough space to accommodate lime and tanning pits which could extend over several acres of land by in the case of larger tanneries (Rynne 2006, 306).

By the 1800s the application of steam power and new chemical compounds such as Chromium were being used to modernise procedures. By 1818 band knife machines was used to stretch out irregularly shaped skins, and in 1856 a machine was developed that could split hides into layers (Trinder 1992, 745). The Whiteland Leatherworks would thus seem to fall into this mechanisation period.





Appendix 1: Photographic Catalogue

Photo Number	Fig.	Description	Viewpoint	Format
001	34	General shot of third and fourth floors	S	Digital
002		General shot of kingpost trusses, with base of water tower visible	S	Digital
003	29	Detail shot of pilaster and beam between third and fourth floors	SE	Digital
004	26	General shot of west facing elevation of third floor	SE	Digital
005		General shot of east facing elevation of third floor	SW	Digital
006	30	Detail shot of corbelled brick support for RSJ beam, third floor	SW	Digital
007	28	Detail of pilaster and beam on the west facing elevation, third floor	SE	Digital
008	27	Detail of hatch, third floor	SW	Digital
009		Detail of doorway to staircase, third floor	NE	Digital
010	33	Detail of kingpost truss, fourth floor	NW	Digital
011	32	General shot of northern end of room, fourth floor	NW	Digital
012		General shot across rear yard to canal	NE	Digital
013	44	Detail shot of towpath/shed wall	NE	Digital
014		Detail of partial cross wall 'Elliots Bricks Limited', fourth floor		Digital
015		Detail of staircase, within the eastern extension		Digital
016	22	General shot of northern end of room, second floor	NE	Digital
017		Detail shot of stairway and west facing elevation	NE	Digital
018	23	General shot of central and southern extent of the second floor	SE	Digital
019		Detail of hatch, second floor		Digital
020		Detail of wall elevation, second floor		Digital
021	24	General shot, southern end of second floor	S	Digital
022		Detail of lintel and brick arch, second floor		Digital
023	21	Detail of wall elevation, ground floor		Digital
024	21	Stairway to basement level		Digital
025	20	Leather punching machine, ground floor	a	Digital
026	1.4	Stairway to second floor	S	Digital
027	14	East facing elevation of northern end of works	NW	Digital
028	1.5	East facing elevation of works, detail of lower floors	W	Digital
029	15	General shot of east facing elevation, central area of building, showing the water tower	SW	Digital
030	17	Detail of east facing elevation, central area of building, ground and first floor	W	Digital
031		Detail of yard wall, south facing elevation	NE	Digital
032		Detail of ground floor blocked window and	\mathbf{SW}	Digital



building shadow, east facing elevation

033	10	Detail of building entrance in the west facing elevation, showing 'Whitelands Leather Works. 1868' raised on an iron lintel	SE	Digital
034	12	General shot of south facing elevation of works	NE	Digital
035		General shot of west facing elevation and water tower	NE	Digital
036	9	General shot of the works	NE	Digital
037	11	Detail shot of west facing elevation	SE	Digital
038		Detail of a hatch		Digital
039	36	General shot of south facing elevation in partially demolished sheds	NW	Digital
040	40	Detail shot of north facing elevation in partially demolished sheds	S	Digital
041	35	General shot of north facing elevation in partially demolished sheds	S	Digital
042	19	Detail shot of interior of main entrance	NW	Digital
043		Detail shot of doorway and RSJs	NW	Digital
044	18	Detail of doorway to demolished sheds	SE	Digital
045		Detail of elevation, ground floor		Digital
046		Detail of elevation, ground floor		Digital
047		Detail of elevation, blocked doorway, ground floor		Digital
048		General shot of south facing elevation, southern demolished shed	N	Digital
049		Detail of east facing elevation, southern end of works	W	Digital
050		Classic car	\mathbf{W}	Digital
051		Detail of classic car		Digital
052	37	Classic car	sw	Digital
053	16	General shot of east facing elevation	\mathbf{SW}	Digital
054	39	General shot of north facing elevation, southern demolished shed	S	Digital
055	38	Classic car		Digital
056	13	North east facing elevation of towpath/shed wall	SW	Digital
057	41	North east facing elevation of towpath/yard wall	SE	Digital
058	43	Detail of towpath/yard wall	$\mathbf{S}\mathbf{W}$	Digital
059	42	Detail of towpath/yard wall	SE	Digital
060		Detail of towpath/yard wall	\mathbf{W}	Digital
061	45	General shot of towpath/yard wall	\mathbf{W}	Digital





Appendix 2: Archive Location

The following elements of the site archive are held at the offices of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, University of Salford:

- Site notes
- Measured scale drawings at a scale of 1:20, 1:50 & 1:100
- Background information
- Photographic record







Bibliography

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Nevell, M, 1993, *The History and Archaeology of Tameside*, volume 3: Tameside 1700-1930. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council.

Rynne C, 2006 Industrial Ireland 1750-1930: An Archaeology. Collins Press, Cork.

Trinder, B 1992 *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Industrial Archaeology*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Maps

OS 6in to 1 mile Lancashire sheet CV. published 1848.

OS 1:2500 Lancashire sheet CV.7, revised & resurveyed 1891-2, published 1894.

OS 1:2500 Lancashire sheet CV.7, resurveyed 1891-2, revised 1906, published 1910.

0S 1:10,000 SJ 99 NW, published 1982.

Edina Digimap Collections (http://www.edina.ac.uk/digimap/)

OS 1:10,560 Lancashire sheet CV.7, 3rd Revision, published 1922.

OS 1:10,000 SJ 99 NW, published 1964.







Illustrations



Figure 1. Site location map. OS 1:10,000 SJ 99 NW, published 1982.

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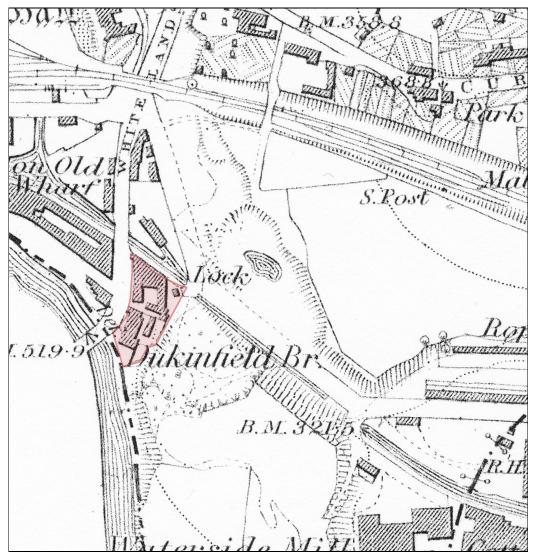


Figure 2. Site location on OS 6in to 1 mile Lancashire sheet 105. published 1848. Study area outlined in red



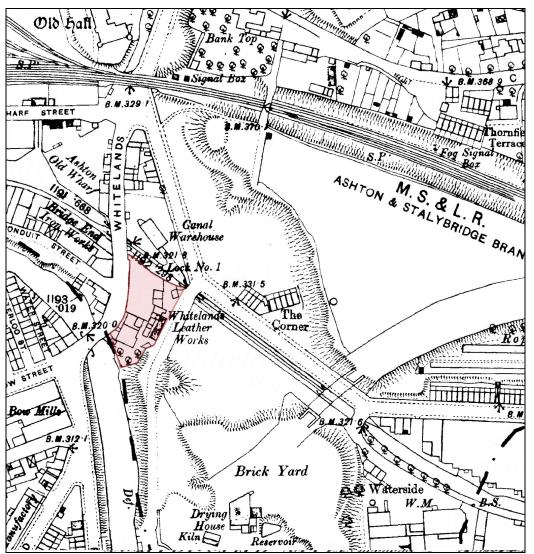


Figure 3. Whitelands Leather Works on OS 1:2500 Lancashire sheet CV.7, revised & resurveyed 1891-2, published 1894.



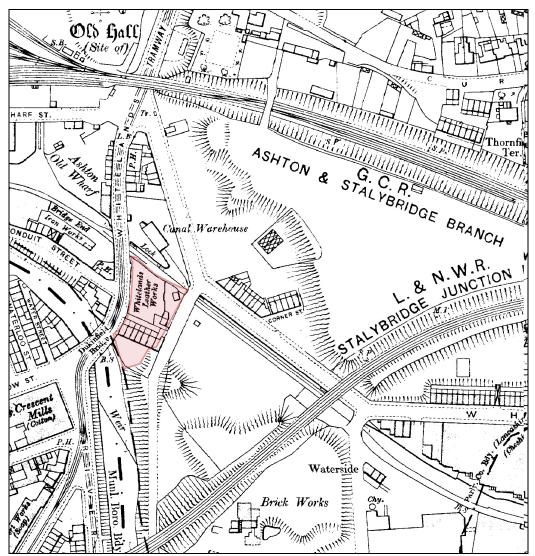


Figure 4. Whitelands Leather Works on OS 1:2500 Lancashire sheet CV.7, resurveyed 1891-2, revised 1906, published 1910



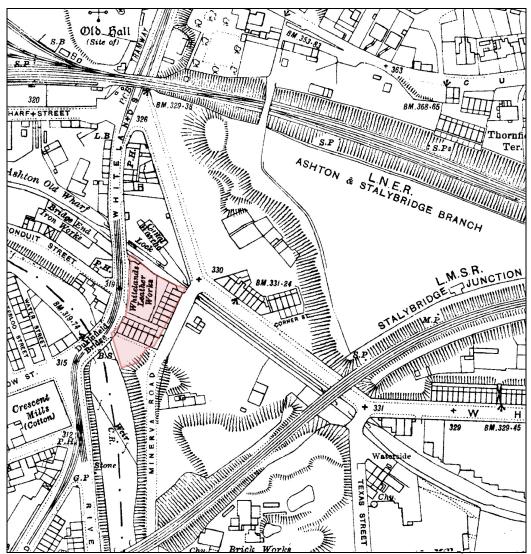


Figure 5. Whitelands Leather Works on OS 1:10,560 Lancashire sheet CV.7, 3rd Revision, published 1922



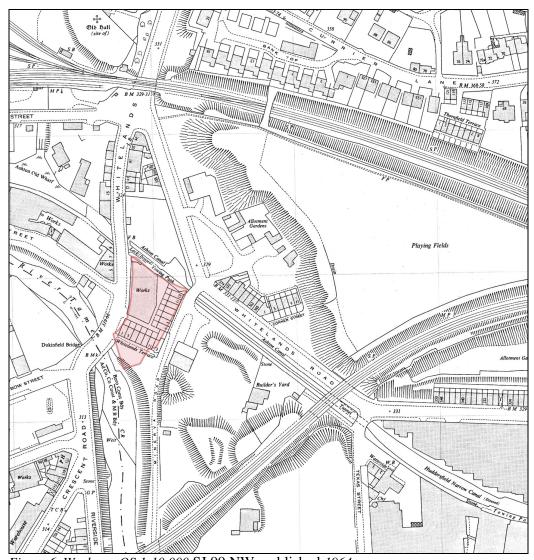


Figure 6. Works on OS 1:10,000 SJ 99 NW, published 1964.
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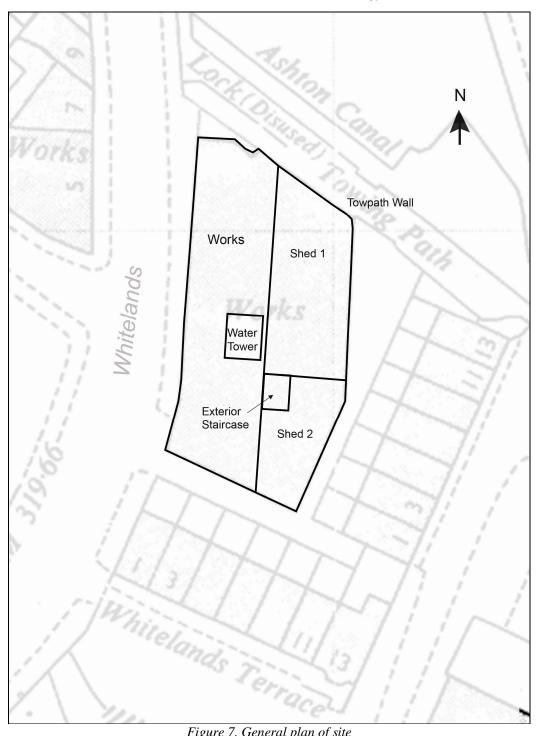


Figure 7. General plan of site



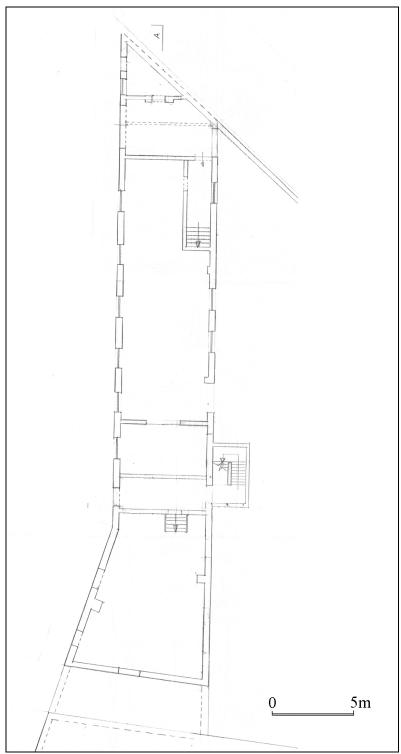


Figure 8. Whitelands Leather Works detailed floor plan



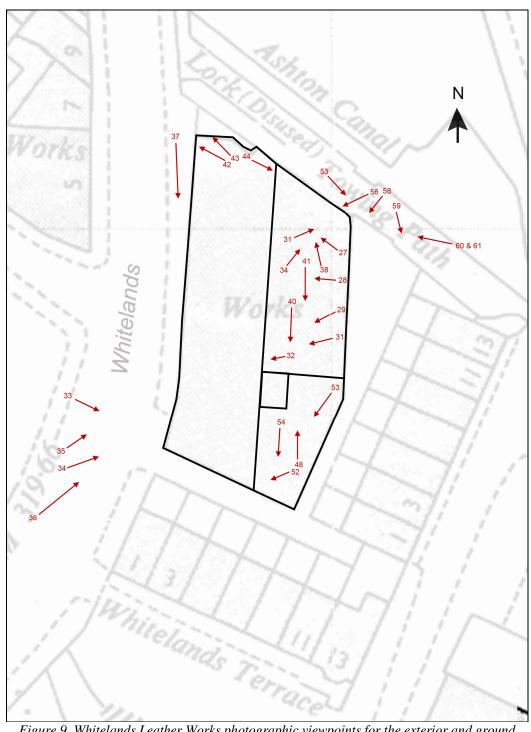


Figure 9. Whitelands Leather Works photographic viewpoints for the exterior and ground floor plan





Figure 10. General view of the works and water tower, from the south east



Figure 11. Detail of building entrance in the west facing elevation, showing 'Whitelands Leather Works. 1868' raised on an iron lintel







Figure 12. Detail shot of west facing elevation



Figure 13. General shot of south facing elevation of works







Figure 14. North east facing elevation and towpath/shed wall





Figure 15. East facing elevation of northern end of works



Figure 16. Central section of east facing elevation, showing the water tower





Figure 17. General shot of east facing elevation





Figure 18. Detail of east facing elevation, central area of building, ground and first floor



Figure 19. Detail of doorway leading to demolished Shed 1





Figure 20. Detail shot of interior of main entrance



Figure 21. Leather punching machine, ground floor



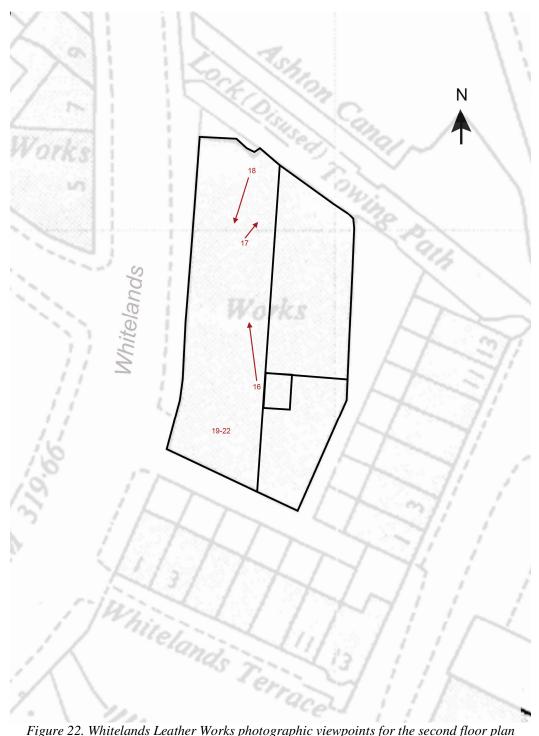


Figure 22. Whitelands Leather Works photographic viewpoints for the second floor plan





Figure 23. General shot of northern end of room, second floor



Figure 23. General shot of central and southern extent of the second floor







Figure 25. General shot, southern end of second floor



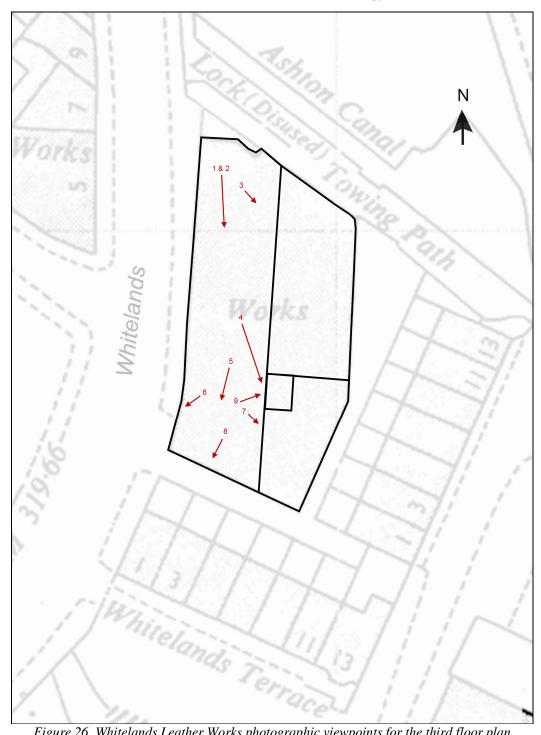


Figure 26. Whitelands Leather Works photographic viewpoints for the third floor plan





Figure 27. General shot of west facing elevation of third floor



Figure 28. Detail of hatch, third floor







Figure 29. Detail of pilaster and beam on the west facing elevation, third floor

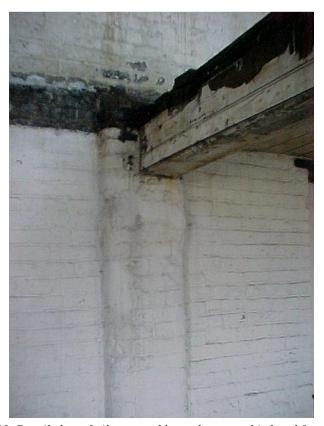


Figure 30. Detail shot of pilaster and beam between third and fourth floors





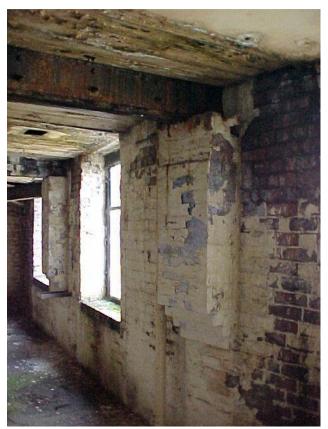


Figure 31. Detail shot of corbelled brick support for RSJ beam, third floor



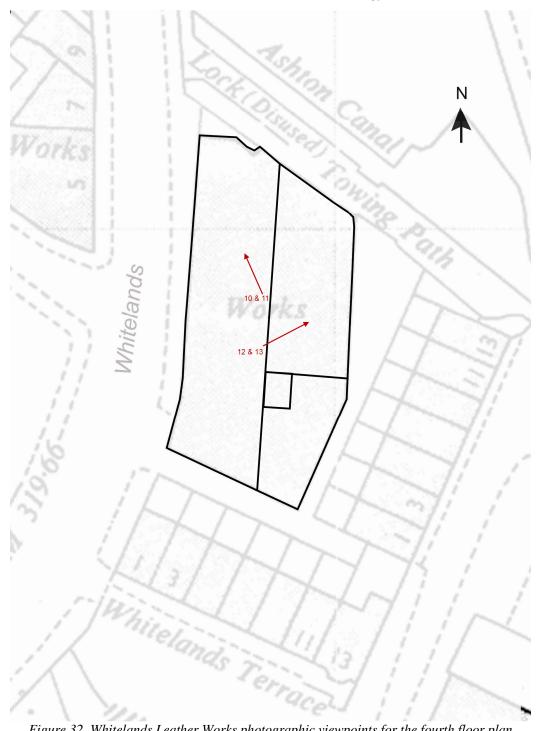


Figure 32. Whitelands Leather Works photographic viewpoints for the fourth floor plan





Figure 33. General shot of northern end of room, fourth floor



Figure 34. Detail of kingpost trusses, fourth floor







Figure 35. General shot of third and fourth floors





Figure 36. General shot of north facing elevation in partially demolished sheds



Figure 37. General shot of south facing elevation in partially demolished sheds





Figure 38. East facing elevation of works and classic car



Figure 39. North facing elevation of Shed 2 wall and classic car





Figure 40. General shot of north facing elevation, Shed 2



Figure 41. Detail shot of north facing elevation, Shed 2





Figure 42. North east facing elevation of towpath/yard wall



Figure 43. Detail of towpath/yard wall







Figure~44.~Detail~of~towpath/yard~wall



Figure 45. Detail shot of towpath/shed wall





Figure 46. General shot of towpath/yard wall

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