

PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT AT BROWN STREET



HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

GARRY MILLER

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LITTLEBOROUGH, METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF
ROCHDALE

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JUNE 2020

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ABOUT GARRY MILLER HERITAGE CONSULTANCY

Garry Miller is a heritage consultant and architectural historian who has spent more than 40 years studying buildings of town and countryside, in particular those of North West England. His career as a consultant began in the mid-1980s with the Preston-based Nigel Morgan Historic Building Consultancy, of which he became a partner in 1992 upon its rebranding as Datestone. In 1997 he was commissioned by the Heritage Trust for the North West, a buildings preservation trust based at Barrowford, Lancashire, to produce an in-depth regional study of vernacular houses in southwest Lancashire: the result, *Historic Houses in Lancashire: The Douglas Valley, 1300-1770* was published in 2002. The book was described as ‘*scholarship as its best*’ by *Country Life* (June 2003), and ‘*well analysed and presented*’ in *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* (Vol 48, 2004); and was extensively cited in the revised *Buildings of England* volume on Liverpool and Southwest Lancashire (2006). Research on the houses of Georgian and Regency Liverpool has also been undertaken, with a view to future publication. Following the success of his Douglas Valley book, Garry Miller established his own consultancy, producing analytical and interpretive reports on historic buildings and advising planning applications affecting the historic environment. His field of operation extends throughout the North West, Midlands, North Wales and parts of Cumbria and North and West Yorkshire, and projects range from the £40m Wolstenholme Square redevelopment in central Liverpool to the Grade I Barkisland Hall, Ripponden, West Yorkshire and to cottage extensions and barn conversions. Several local authorities have cited his assessments as examples of best practice, and reports on more than 130 buildings or sites are produced annually.

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1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report supports proposed redevelopment at the NJA Business Centre at Brown Street, Littleborough, in the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale in Greater Manchester. The principal structure of the site is a 19th century industrial building that is neither statutorily nor locally listed, and is therefore considered in planning terms to be an undesignated heritage asset

Proposals have been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for redevelopment of the site, involving total demolition of the application building and replacement by a new residential apartment development of up to five storeys. The heritage consideration raised by the proposal is its impact upon the significance (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the undesignated building. The scope and purpose of this report is to identify this significance and assess how it will be affected by the proposal.

The building is L-shaped and two-storeyed, built of brick in a plain and functional manner, and is adjoined by modern industrial/commercial units. Documentary evidence suggests it was built in the early 1880s, but may have been preceded by an earlier building of which a stone basement survives at the northwest corner of the site where ground level falls.

The appearance of the building shows it was intended to be industrial, but its original function is unknown. There is no apparent evidence of power systems, suggesting it was intended to be a warehouse; alternatively, documentary sources imply it may have been an oil and tallow works at the turn of the 20th century. These sources also suggest that the building doubled at this time, somewhat unusually, as a public hall and a makeshift cinema in the pioneering days of motion pictures. Testimony to this may be the remains of an arch on the first floor that could have belonged to a dais or proscenium.

Where heritage assets are undesignated, the relevant guidance is that provided in paragraph 197 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which requires a balanced judgment that has regard to the scale of harm or loss and the significance of the asset. In this case, the proposal would result in the total loss of the application building. This report has demonstrated that the building's significance lies principally at local level, and modern alterations and additions have compromised this significance to the extent that it is chiefly historical rather than in terms of its surviving fabric. Given these circumstances, it is considered that the loss of the application building is not inappropriate. For these reasons, it is judged that the proposal meets the test established by the guidance and therefore the application should receive approval.

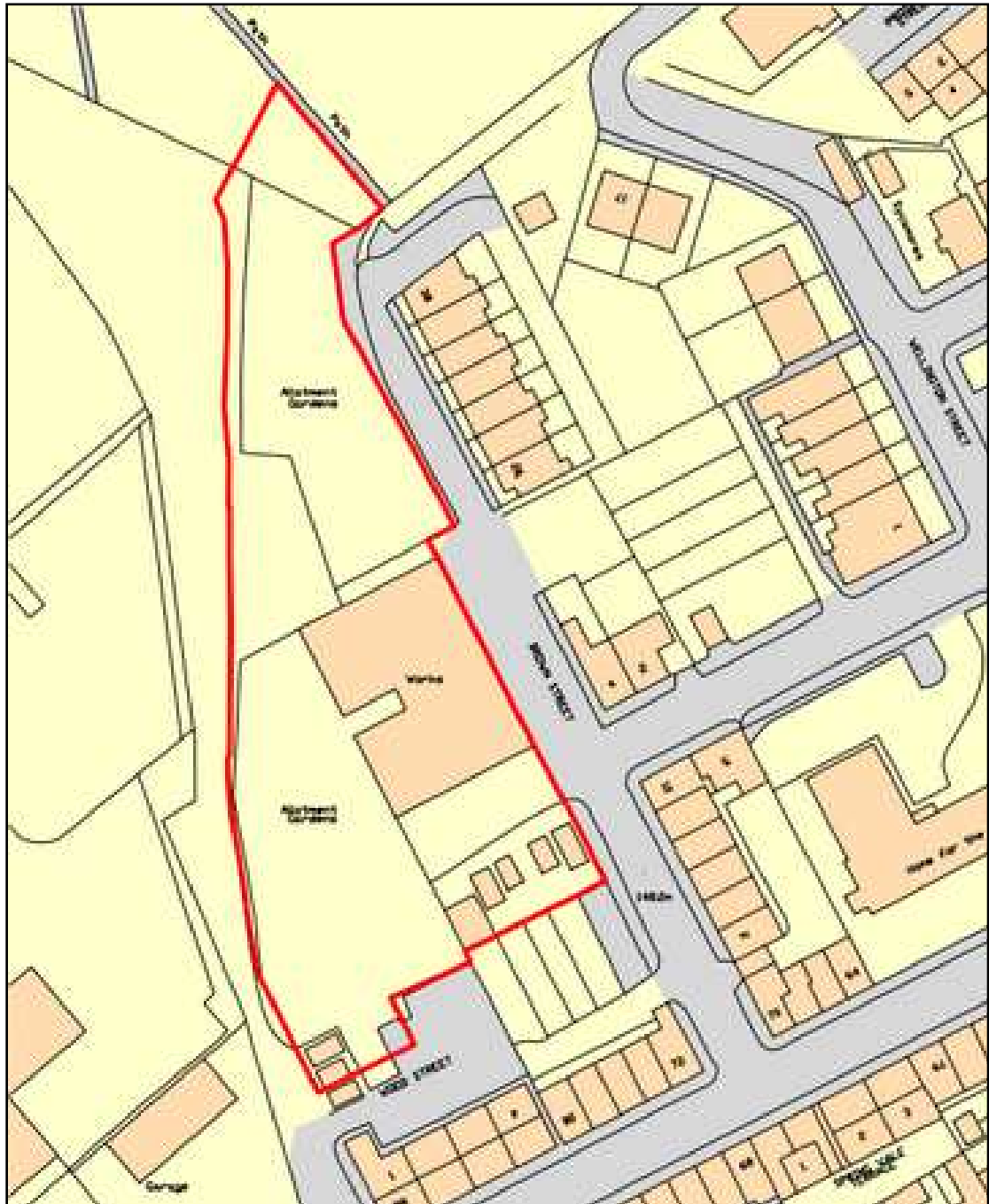
2: THE SITE

2.1 Overview

The building is sited on the western fringe of Littleborough town centre adjoining an area of densely-built 19th century terraced housing to the north of Church Road and overlooking areas of open space to the north and east. The NJA Business Centre lies on the west side of Brown Street immediately north of its junction with Regent Street, the latter a cross-street in the grid-pattern that typifies the area; the modern, industrial appearance of the centre's units is in sharp contrast to the 19th century residential character of the locality.



1. Setting: looking south from the northern end of Brown Street to the building



Map 1. The application site



2. Looking north along Brown Street, from Regent Street junction, with the NJA Business Centre on the left



3. Southern portion of Brown Street, below Regent Street junction, showing terraces that characterise the area

2.2 Elements of the site

The NJA Business Centre occupies a rectangular site, with the building at the north end. The building is adjoined by modern industrial and storage units immediately to the south along with banks of storage containers to the north and west.



4. Aerial view of the NJA Business Centre from the northwest, with the building arrowed (GMAU image)



5. The NJA Business Centre from the southeast, with the building at the rear of the view



6. View from northeast showing the brick principal elevation of the building and clad northeast elevation

3: THE PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

3.1 Designation

The application building is neither statutorily nor locally listed, and is therefore considered in planning terms to be an undesignated heritage asset.

3.2 Proposed development

Proposals have been submitted to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council for redevelopment of the site, involving total demolition of the application building and replacement by a new residential apartment development of up to five storeys.

3.3 Heritage impact

The heritage issue raised by the proposal is its impact upon the significance (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the undesignated building.

3.4 Scope and purpose of this report

Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (as revised July 2018 and February 2019) states local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the *significance* (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the heritage assets affected, including the contribution made by their setting. The scope and purpose of this report is therefore to describe the significance of the undesignated building and to evaluate the impact of the proposal upon it. It is to be read in conjunction with other documentation supporting the application.

NB. The survey of the building within this report is drawn from an earlier heritage assessment by Garry Miller Heritage Consultancy, produced in 2011 to support an outline application for an apartment redevelopment. The level of detail of that original report was at that time specified by the then conservation officer at Rochdale MBC.

3.5 Report structure

This is as follows:

1. A summary of the historical background relating to the building (Section 4) and s description of the building itself (Section 5).
2. A summary of its significance as an undesignated heritage asset (Section 6)
3. A summary of the relevant planning policies by which the application will be determined (Section 7)
4. Evaluation within this policy context of the proposal's impact upon the significance of the undesignated building (Section 8).

4: HISTORICAL SUMMARY

4.1 Setting context

The building is located within an area developed in the second half of the 19th century as part of Littleborough's urban expansion, a process fuelled by the growth of industries which were described as '*various and extensive*' by *Cleggs's Commercial Directory of Rochdale* in 1909. These included cotton spinning, dying, fulling and finishing, along with brick and tile works and chemicals manufacture. The site of what became Brown Street was undeveloped countryside in 1848 (see Map 4, Page 19) but by 1890 the area comprised a grid-pattern of streets of mostly terraced housing (Map 3, below). The pattern was probably created by the mid-1870s, when plans for building in Regent Street and Victoria Street were approved by the Littleborough Local Board (1). Brown Street was probably laid out at this time, but was on the fringe of this development and was only partially built-up by the early 1890s as Map 2 shows.

(1) Peter B Cryer, transcripts of *Rochdale Observer* reports of meetings of the Littleborough Local Board, 1993 (Rochdale Local Studies Library)



Map 2. Area around Brown Street depicted by 25-inch OS mapping surveyed 1890-1891, with the building arrowed

4.2 Date of the building

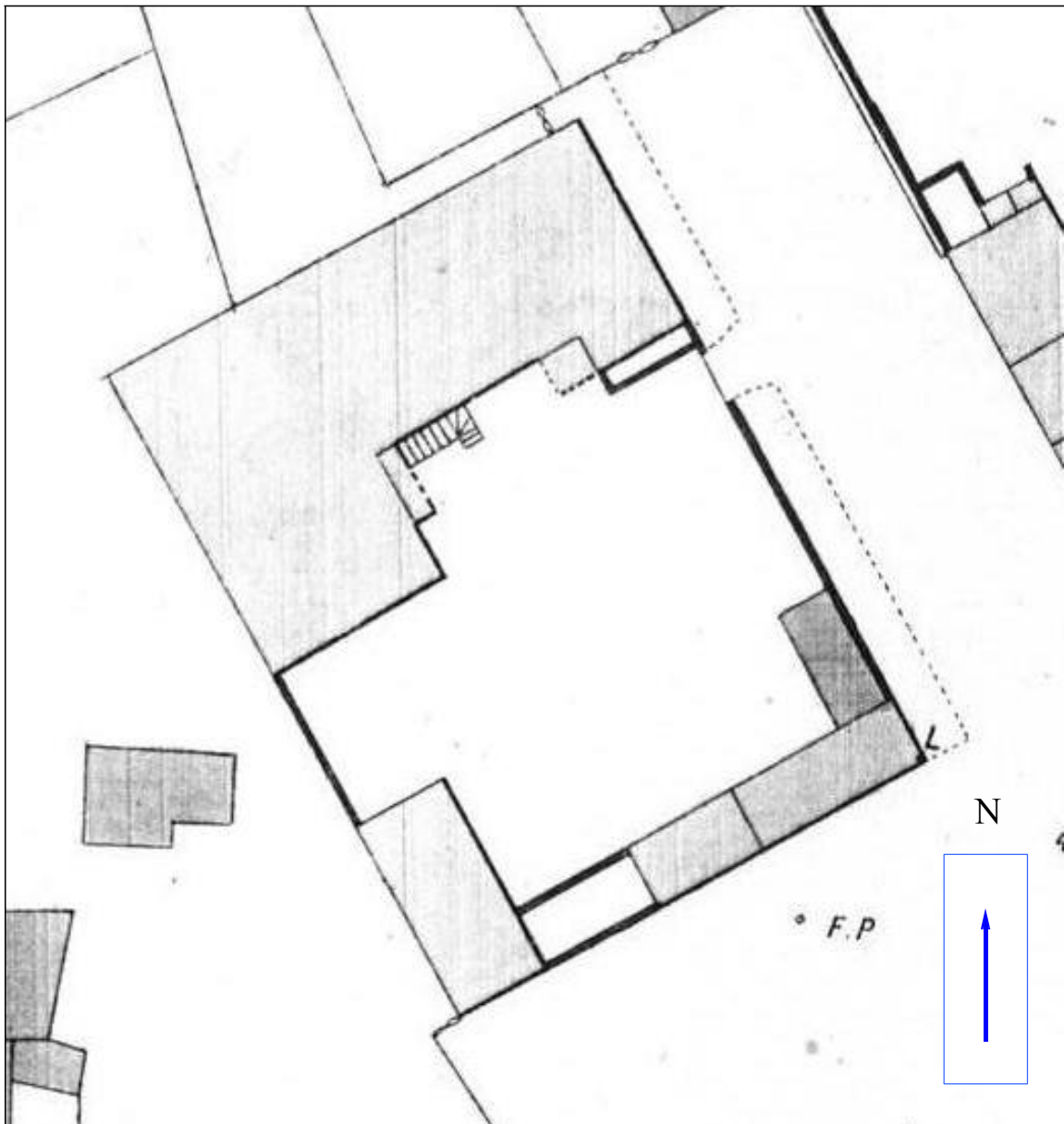
Documentary sources suggest the building dates probably from the early 1880s. On July 21, 1881, the general meeting of the Littleborough Local Board approved plans by John Alletson for 'additional buildings to be erected off Brown Street and Regent Street' (1); the wording implies they had been preceded by others. Later sources suggest Alletson was the owner of the building. According to his entry in the 1889-1890 *Rochdale Directory*, Alletson was a beerseller and tripe dresser; subsequently he diversified into manufacturing oil and tallow. Alletson must have been a property speculator too as his plans for five houses in Regent Street were approved by the Local Board on June 20, 1878.

Map evidence confirms the building existed by 1890. It is absent from the six-inch OS mapping of 1847-1848 (Map 3, below) but present on the 1:500 survey of 1890 (Map 4). However fabric evidence, to be examined in Section 5, implies the building was actually built in two stages, with a stone basement at the northwest end which may be the remains of an earlier structure above which the present building was constructed.

(1) Rochdale Local Studies Library, Minute Book of Littleborough Local Board, April 1877-October 1882 (ref. UDLi 1 / 2)



Map 3. Six-inch OS mapping of 1847-48 with approximate future site of the building arrowed

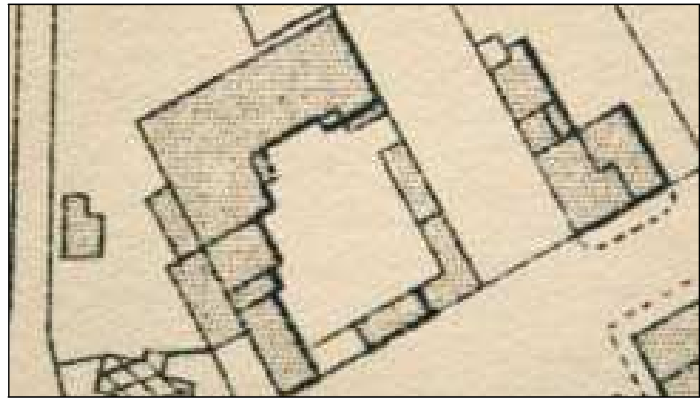


Map 4. Enlargement of the 1890 1: 500 mapping

The detailed view provided by the 1890 1:500 OS mapping gives little evidence to suggest its specific function at that time. It shows the principal L-shaped building at the north end of a rectangular walled yard, with gated entrance from Brown Street. Sited against the perimeter walls of the yard are smaller buildings, perhaps connected with transport or storage. Lack of obvious features such as a chimney linked to boiler/engine houses tends to rule out heavy industrial use such as textile production and implies the building may instead have been a warehouse or small factory.

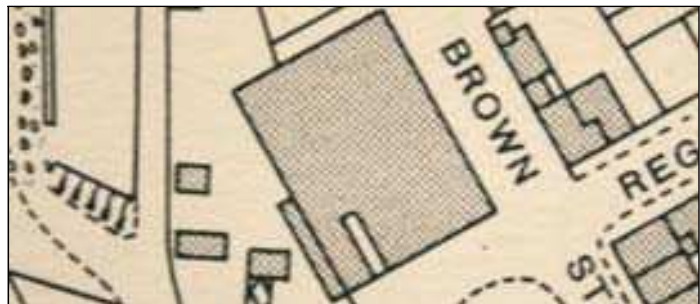
4.3 Later development of the site

The 1908 25-inch OS mapping shows further structures had appeared since 1890 both within the yard and outside it.



Map 5. 1908 25-inch mapping

The 1930 edition implies more building had taken place, as the yard is almost entirely built up, and the original L-shaped building not identified. However this may be due to simplification of the cartography.



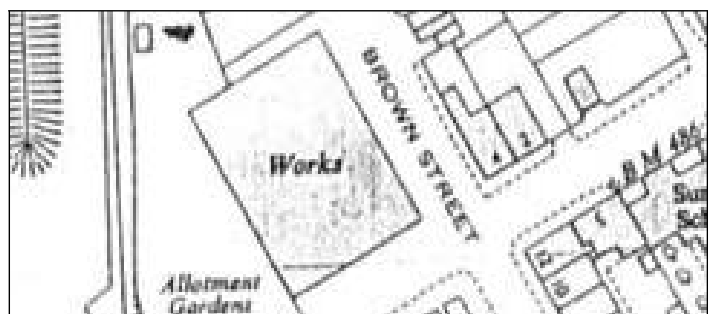
Map 6. 1930 25-inch mapping

A similar picture is shown by the 1937 mapping.



Map 7. 1937 25-inch mapping

The 1961 1:2500 map refers to the site simply as 'Works'.



Map 8. 1961 1:2500 mapping

4.4 *Its function*

The appearance and construction of the building implies it was built for industrial purposes, although exactly what remains unclear; it may even have been a speculative venture. However documentary evidence indicates it actually performed quite a complex role involving use as a public hall and makeshift cinema.

Alletson may have used the building as the base for his oil and tallow business, which he had established by 1899-1900, according to that year's *Duncan's Rochdale and District Commercial and Postal Directory*. The entry states his business premises were at 22 Hare Hill Road and at Brown Street. The latter suggests the building may have been his oil and tallow works, and indeed a fringe location such as this would suit what was considered to be a noxious trade. However directory entries also imply the building was used from a much earlier date, and for at least three decades, as a public hall. The 1889-1890 directory lists two public halls in Littleborough, the Temperance Hall in Sale Street (opened 1883) and a public hall in Brown Street -- of which the proprietor was John Alletson. This role supports the belief that the building doubled as an early cinema (see below). The 1907 edition of *Clegg's Commercial Directory of Rochdale* records the building was still a public hall, but by now owned by James Alletson. It is not recorded in Clegg's edition of 1916.

Evidence of later use of the building is fragmented. Its function is not recorded by the OS mapping sequence with the exception of simply "Works" in 1961 (Map 8). Possibly it was the premises of Isaac Lee and Son, Victoria Works, or the Cloughfield Transport Company, both listed in Brown Street in the 1959 *Rochdale Directory*. A former owner of the premises, Mr H Townsend, recalls the building was once a car showroom. (1)

(1) Telephone interview in connection with the initial report, May 2011

4.5 *Use as an early cinema*

John Street, in *The Story of Littleborough*, refers briefly (p. 295) to a former cinema on Brown Street, '*... the shell of which was still recognisable in the late 1990s*'.

Anecdotal evidence suggests this was the building concerned: the story of its former use was related not only by former owner Mr H Townsend, but also mentioned independently by an employee during the site visit. He stated the cinema was on the first floor of the main range, with access from outside along the south wall. This may be supported by the fact that a painted arch remains on timbers beneath the truss forming the western hip of the roof of the main range (Plate 24). Also an external stair shown in the 1890 mapping (Map 4) may have been that used to reach the first floor.

If this is the case, the likelihood is that this was a makeshift cinema dating from the pioneering days of motion pictures. In the period following the first British public showing of films in London in 1896, various premises including shops, railway arches and halls were converted into crude cinemas, before the safety regulations of the 1909 Cinematograph Act encouraged the construction of purpose-built cinemas (1). It is possible the first floor of the Brown Street building was used as one of these makeshift picture houses, prior to the appearance of Littleborough's first proper cinema in 1912. This was the Queens Picture Theatre, Church Street, whose licence

was granted in December 1912. *Clegg's Commercial Directory of Rochdale* for 1916 shows two others had followed, the Victoria, Sale Street, (the former Temperance Hall) and the Kings Hall, Chapel Hill. The Brown Street cinema is not mentioned and therefore may have been a victim of the 1909 Act.

- (1) *Cinemas & Cinemagoing: The Rise of the Cinemas* by Allen Eyles: article on British Film Institute website (www.screenonline.org)
- (2) Rochdale Local Studies Library, file on Littleborough cinemas

5: THE APPLICATION BUILDING

5.1 Elements of the building

The building involves three distinct elements:

- a. An L-shaped **principal building**, built of brick and of two storeys. This comprises a main range aligned on a southwest-northeast axis with the main elevation to the northwest, and a short rear wing at its southwest end
- b. An **outshut** added as a continuation of the rear wing and built between 1890 and 1908 on map evidence
- c. A stone **basement** beneath the northwest corner of the principal building, accommodated within falling ground at this end and probably of earlier date; it is currently inaccessible.

The elements are shown on Plate 7 on the following page.



7. Elements of the building (based on GMAU photograph)

5.2 Construction

- a. **Walling.** The principal building and outshut are generally built in English Garden Wall bond brickwork using between four and six stretcher courses. The basement however is of coursed buff sandstone rubble with rusticated quoins at the northeast corner.
- b. **Roof construction.** The slate-covered roof of the principal building is hipped at each end and carried on five machine-cut kingpost trusses, supporting a ridge and one deeply-trenched purlin on each side. Some of the trusses have wooden braces from wall to tiebeam with simple pierced decoration; the truss from the northeast retains one survivor from a pair of small braces to its kingpost (Plate 8).
- c. **Fireproofing.** The building is of 'slow-burning' construction, using brick outer walls combined with floors carried on heavy timber beams supporting closely-spaced joists. The technique is found in late 19th century Lancashire textile buildings such as Livingstone Mill, Daneshouse, Burnley of 1887 (1) and Peel Mill, Rose Grove, Burnley, of 1896 (2).

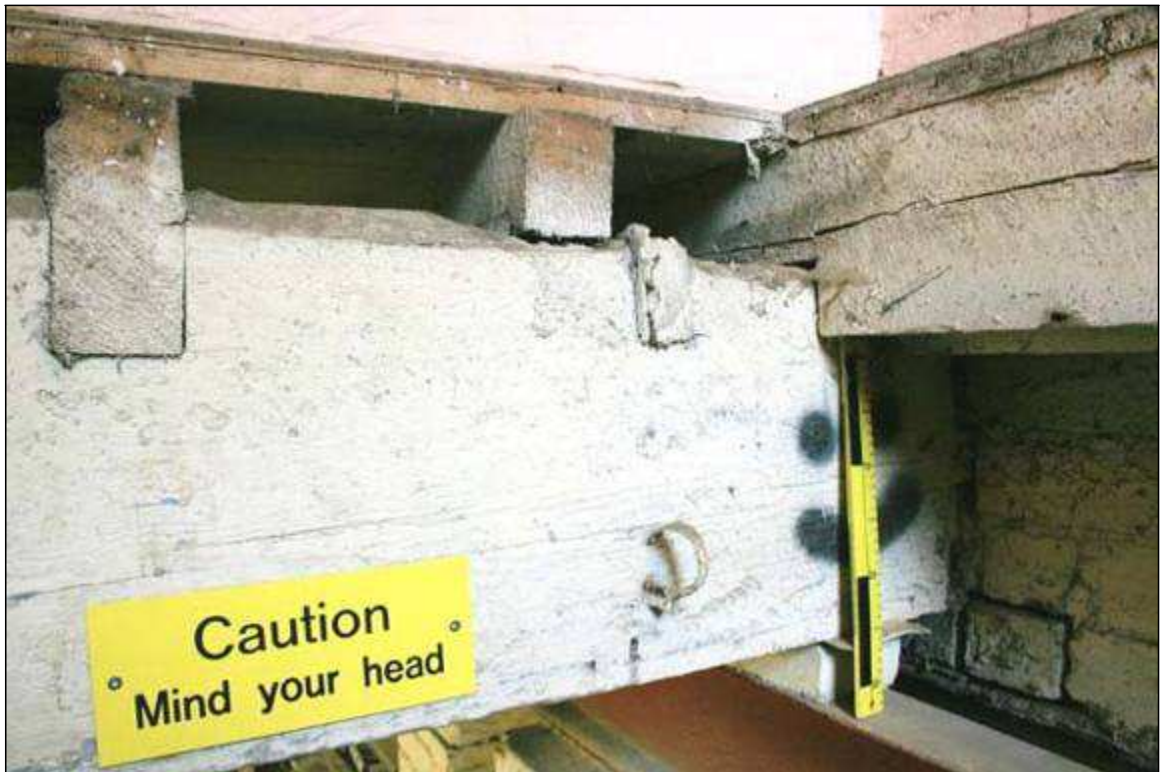
Notes:

(1) Historic Building survey and report by Garry Miller for Burnley Borough Council/Lancashire County Archaeology Service, June 2010

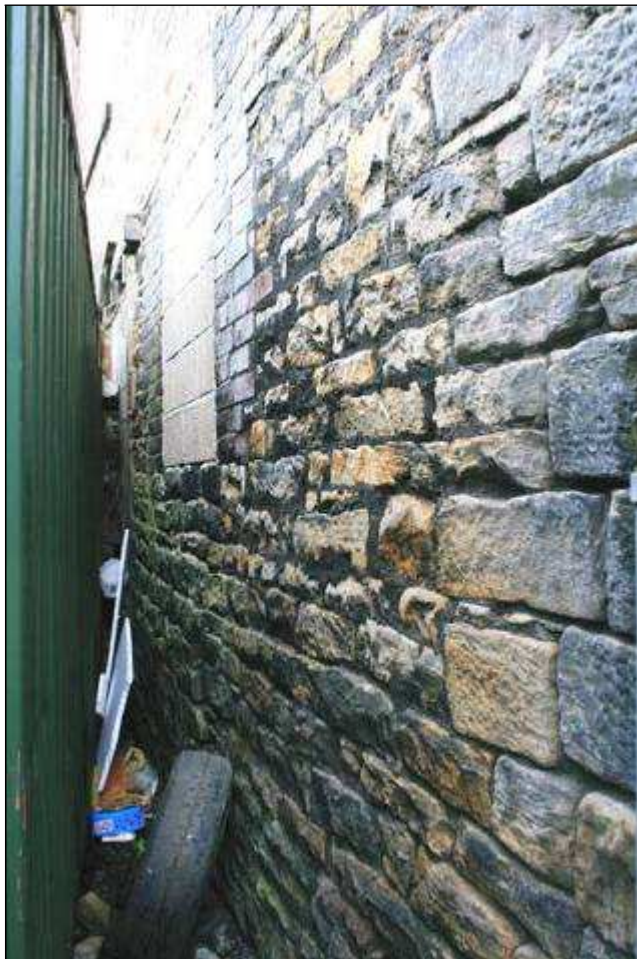
(2) Historic Building survey and report by Garry Miller for Burnley Borough Council/Lancashire County Archaeology Service, December 2010



8. Roof truss with small surviving brace to kingpost



9. Detail of heavy floor beam and joists, above staircase at rear of rear wing



10. Sandstone rubble masonry of basement

5.3 Exterior description – principal building

- a. **Northwest (principal) elevation.** This is of six bays, with regularly-spaced windows on both floors, most with shallow segment-arched heads. Those on the ground floor are blocked with the exception of the first window, (enumerating from northeast) which has been reduced in depth. The second has been enlarged to form a doorway and is also blocked. The first window on the first floor retains fixed four-pane glazing which appears original; the second window is blocked and the rest are eight-pane probably mid-20th century replacements, with straight concrete lintels; the brickwork around these windows shows signs of rebuilding. Between the fifth and sixth bays, which are more widely spaced, is a narrow ground floor opening, blocked at an early date, which may have been a loading doorway from the lower level outside the basement. At the far southwest end, between the ground and first floor windows of the sixth bay, is a circular aperture blocked in 20th century brick. A small chimney rises from the eaves at the northwest corner of this end. A rather surprising touch of decoration in this otherwise plain and functional building is found in the remains of a cornice in dogtooth brickwork.
- b. **Southwest elevation.** This end of the main range has two widely-spaced blocked ground floor windows, the left vertical and the right horizontal. The first floor has four evenly-spaced vertical mostly eight-pane windows, again probably mid-20th century and with concrete lintels. The brickwork at this level also shows signs of rebuilding.
- c. **Southeast (rear) elevation.** This is concealed within modern structures and details difficult to ascertain because of machinery, storage equipment etc. A wide segmental-arched entrance lies approximately in the centre and the first floor has blocked windows.
- d. **Northeast elevation.** Modern cladding with no historic features exposed.

5.4 Exterior description – outshut

The southwest wall has three blocked windows; the roof is modern; there are no other visible features of interest.

5.5 Exterior description – basement

Mostly concealed by storage containers parked alongside. It appears to extend beneath the fifth and sixth bays of the principal building, where the ground level is lower; the stonework stops approximately halfway along the southwest elevation (see Plate 16) so whether the basement extends beneath the rear wing is not known.. The northwest wall has a blocked doorway; a quoin near ground level carries the graffiti date of 1900 or 1909 and the initials BS (Plate 19).



11. Main elevation of principal building, from northwest



12. Closer view showing blocked windows



13. Blocked possible loading door between fifth and sixth bays, above stone basement

14. 20th century replacement first floor windows, and blocked circular aperture at southwest end of principal building

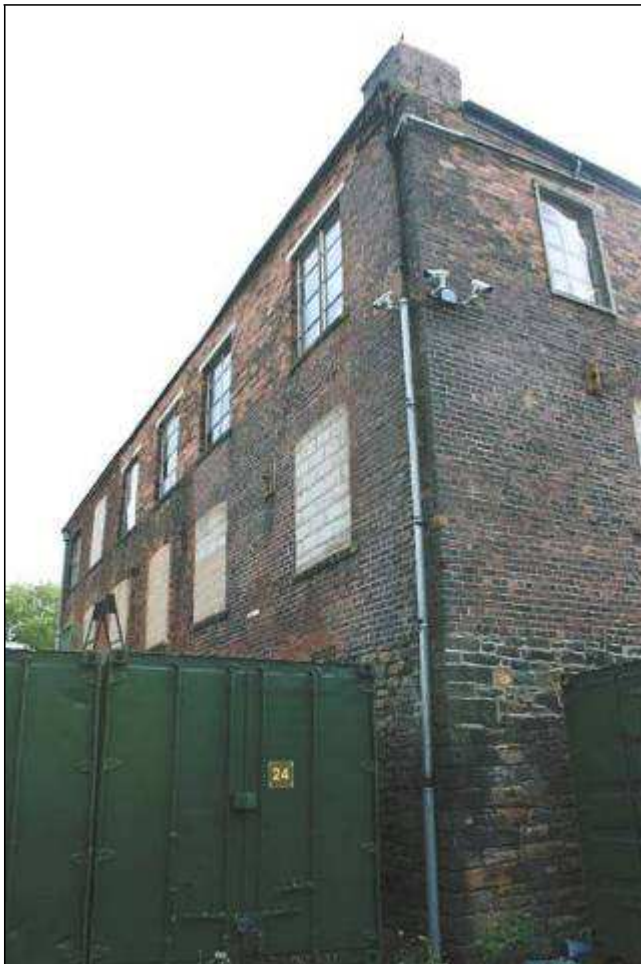




15. Four-pane, probably original, glazing of first floor window in first bay; also dogtooth eaves cornice



16. Southwest elevation, showing first floor rebuilding



17. Detail of junction of rear wing and outshut

18. Northwest corner showing relationship of stone basement to principal building; also chimney



19. Quoin at northwest corner of basement with graffiti initials BS and date of 1900 or 1909

5.6 Interior description

- a. **Ground floor.** The principal building consists almost entirely of a single space running the full length of the main range, separated by a crosswall, with door, from the rear wing. The principal feature is the ceiling, of heavy chamfered wooden beams, most strengthened with steel beams, and closely-spaced joists supporting the floorboards. One beam at the southwest end has a section of simply-moulded cornice, unusual in an industrial building and perhaps suggesting an office space at this end; at the northwest corner is a small blocked cross-corner fireplace. In the northeast corner of the main range is a small room, now a kitchen; adjacent to this is a wooden quarter-turn staircase to the first floor. A further stair, of straight-flight form, is sited against the rear wall of the rear wing. This is unlikely to be in its original position as the rear wall of the wing has a wide blocked opening spanned by an I-section steel beam acting as a lintel; the opening was probably cut through to reach the outshut when the latter was added. The northeast outer walls of the outshut and rear wing have been removed. There is no visible evidence of power systems on this floor.
- b. **First floor.** The principal visible feature is the roof truss forming the hip at the southwest end of the main range, which has applied and painted boards in the shape of a segmental arch (Plate 24); this may be the remains of a dais canopy or proscenium dating from the building's early role as a cinema and

public hall. The trusses themselves have already been described; they are painted in the dark green colour typically found in late 19th /early 20th century industrial buildings. Again, no evidence of power systems was visible.

5.7 Evolution summary

- **1847/1848 – early 1880s:** Probably the first phase of building took place, now represented by the basement beneath the northwest corner of the principal building. The extent of the building erected during this phase is not known.
- **Early 1880s:** The present building was probably built at this time. It was L- shaped with a main range and rear wing and stood on the northern side of a walled yard which contained several smaller buildings.
- **1890-1908:** Map evidence shows the outshut was added behind the rear wing of the principal building.
- **Probably mid-20th century:** some rebuilding and refenestration of the first floor of the principal building occurred.
- **Late 20th century:** modern structures were built to the rear of the principal building to form the NJA Business Centre as it now stands.



20. General view of ground floor of main range, looking southwest



21. Detail of ceiling construction, with heavy beams and closely-spaced joists



22. Rear wall of rear wing of principal building showing blocked opening to outshut



23. Blocked openings in southwest outer wall of outshut



24. Boarded arch applied to roof truss forming hip at southwest end of main range, suggesting a dais or proscenium

25. One of the decorative roof truss braces

6: SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

6.1 Rationale

Paragraph 190 of the National Planning Policy Framework states local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of a heritage asset, including its setting, and take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal in order to avoid or minimize conflict between the asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Significance is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

6.2 Overall terms

The significance of the building is considered to chiefly extend to the local (i.e. Littleborough rather than Rochdale as a borough) level for the following reasons:

- *Historically*, in terms of its supposed use as a cinema, probably in the years following the introduction of motion pictures in this country in 1896 and the 1909 Cinematograph Act which encouraged the development of purpose-built cinemas. However the subsequent alteration of the building, and lack of features relating to this use (except the possible arch on the first floor) means this significance has been compromised, and now chiefly lies in historical and documentary terms rather than in the surviving fabric.
- In terms of its *group value and setting* as part of the grid-pattern development that occurred on the western fringe of Littleborough during its late 19th century urban expansion. Again however, modern additions and alterations have compromised this aspect of its significance.
- In terms of its *function*, where documentary evidence suggests this was an industrial building which unusually also served as a public hall. Again this significance is historical rather than fabric-related.

It is not considered that the building is of regional interest, with the exception, again in historical terms, that it may be of interest to any study of the early cinema in Greater Manchester and North West England.

6.3 Significance of the fabric

- a. **Overview.** Because of extensive modern alterations and additions, it is considered that the building overall has been rendered of low architectural significance, as much of its original appearance has been changed (due to blocked windows, cladding etc) and its original setting compromised (removal of ancillary buildings in the former yard and replacement by modern units). The modern buildings are themselves of no interest.
- b. **Individual features.** Within the context of the building itself, the most significant individual features (visible at the time of the 2011 inspection) were, in hierarchical order:

1. The remains of the first floor arch in the principal building

Reason: possible association with the building's presumed function as a public hall and cinema

2. The stone basement

Reason: possible remains of earlier structure

3. The sequence of roof trusses in the principal building

Reason: as a detail of the building's construction; also for the use of decorative braces (most of which have been lost)

4. Ceiling beams and joists in the principal building

Reason: for demonstrating late 19th century slow-burning construction techniques

7: PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

The relevant Government guidance for dealing with heritage-related planning applications is established by Chapter 16 of the Revised National Planning Policy Framework (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*). Paragraph 192 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- *The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation*
- *The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, and*
- *The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*

Regarding undesignated heritage assets, paragraph 197 states:

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgment will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

8: IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

Where heritage assets are undesignated, the relevant guidance is that provided in paragraph 197 of the NPPF, which requires a balanced judgment that has regard to the scale of harm or loss and the significance of the asset. In this case, the proposal would result in the total loss of the application building. This report has demonstrated that the building's significance lies principally at local level, and modern alterations and additions have compromised this significance to the extent that it is chiefly historical rather than in terms of its surviving fabric. Given these circumstances, it is considered that the loss of the application building is not inappropriate. For these reasons, it is judged that the proposal meets the test established by the guidance and therefore the application should receive approval.

