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Building Report on The Friends Meeting House York Street Bath



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THE FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE	5
STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE FREEMASONS' HALL (NOW THE FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE)	6
The Ground Floor	8
The Basement	9
The Friends Meeting House (1866-2005)	10
THE PRE-19TH CENTURY LANDSCAPE	11
THE 19TH CENTURY	13
The Freemasons Hall	14
The Bethesda Chapel	17
The Friends Meeting House	17
JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	19
LISTING DESCRIPTION	20
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	20
BIBLIOGRAPHY	20
APPENDIX I - WILLIAM WILKINS	20
APPENDIX 2 – DEDICATION OF THE FREEMASONS HALL, THURSDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 1819	23
PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE NOVEMBER 2005	39

Illustrations

- Fig. 1 Lower Assembly Rooms, showing Wilkins' pediment 1826
- Fig. 2 The Grange Hampshire (Jackson: 1980, Fig. 30)
- Fig. 3 The Temple of Concord Agrigentum, Sicily (Jackson: 1980, Fig. 31)
- Fig. 4 (BCL: B21 483 Original William Wilkins Ground Floor plan c1818 from glass negative)
- Fig. 5 (BCL: B21 484 Original William Wilkins Basement plan c1818 from glass negative)
- Fig. 6 (BaRO: Building Control Records - Gallery Plan Survey 174 (A) 3 Dec 1978 by Derek Stollar)
- Fig. 7 (BaRO: Building Control Records - Ground floor Plan Survey Date 12/78 Drawing 174 (A) 2 by Derek Stollar)
- Fig. 8 (BaRO: Building Control Records - Ground floor Plan Proposed Alterations Date 4/79 Drawing 1633/2 by Derek Stollar)
- Fig. 9 (BaRO: Building Control Records - Basement Plan Proposed Alterations revised Date 10/81 Drawing 1633/1 by Derek Stollar)
- Fig. 10 Bath c1300 (Peter Davenport)
- Fig. 11 1610 Speed Map
- Fig. 12 Gilmore map 1694
- Fig. 13 1725 map (Peter Davenport)
- Fig. 14 Kingston Estate map 1725
- Fig. 15 1816 Map of the City of Bath (BaRO)

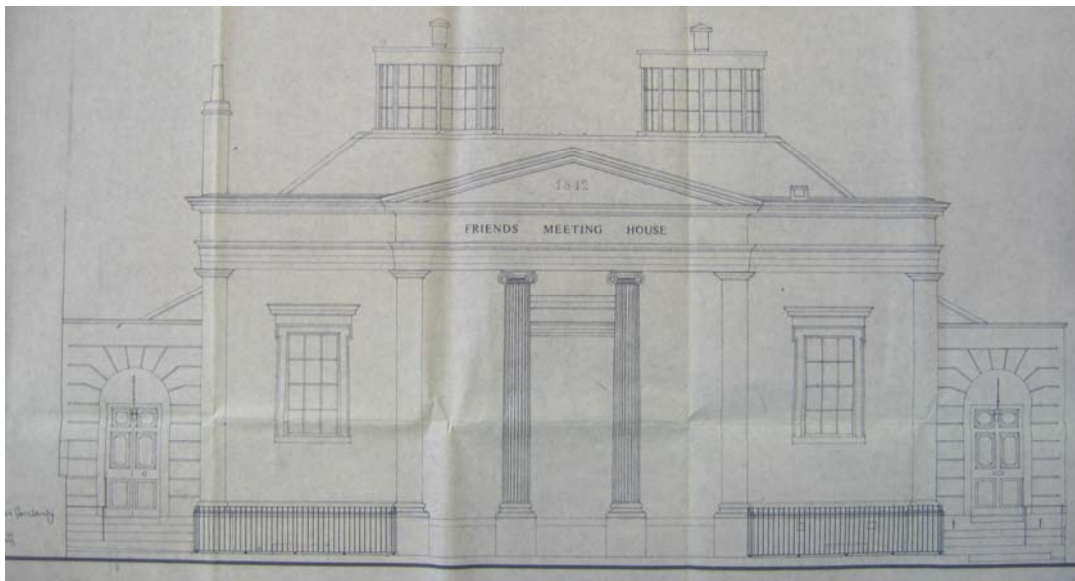
- Fig. 16 1845 Map of the City of Bath (BaRO)
 Fig. 17 BaRO: Cotterell 1852 map showing part of the chapel
 Fig. 18 BaRO: OS 1886 XIV 5-10
 Fig. 19 (B&NES SMR: ST 7564-37 ST751647 11 08 2000 nmr 18896-11)

Photographs of The Friends Meeting House November 2005

- Img.1 North front
 Img. 2 north-east window
 Img. 3 east entrance
 Img. 4 west entrance
 Img. 5 west window
 Img 6 central blind doorway
 Img. 7 view west through rear alley
 Img. 8 view east from Ralph Allens House
 Img. 9 view east through rear alley
 Img.10 rear alley and south wall
 Img. 11 north-east end wall with railings
 Img.12 remains of original railing
 Img. 13 main hall looking west
 Img. 14 main hall looking east
 Img. 15 detail of cornice in main hall
 Img. 16 detail of ceiling cornice in main hall
 Img. 17 roof lantern
 Img. 18 the two roof lanterns
 Img. 19 doorway in south-east corner of main hall
 Img. 20 fireplace on south wall of main hall
 Img. 21 central door into main hall from west entrance and 'squint'
 Img. 22 detail of 'squint'
 Img. 23 landing and staircase in west entrance lobby
 Img. 24 1980s window in east wall overlooking Ralph Allen's town house
 Img. 25 landing and staircase in west entrance lobby looking north
 Img. 26 basement hallway at bottom of west entrance staircase
 Img. 27 Top of staircase
 Img. 28 detail of staircase fixing rods
 Img. 29 hallway at base of stairs looking south to toilets
 Img. 30 area beneath the staircase
 Img. 31 Basement looking east
 Img. 32 Basement looking west
 Img. 33 Door into 'Tylers Room' (Ante-Room 2) north-west corner of basement
 Img. 34 Central Gothic window in south wall of basement
 Img. 35 detail of basement cornice
 Img. 36 detail of basement cornice
 Img. 37 Central rose in basement ceiling
 Img. 38 Gothic fireplace in south wall of basement
 Img. 39 detail of Kitchen 1 door with 'peephole'
 Img. 40 detail of Ante-Room 2 door with peephole
 Img. 41 detail of basement cornice
 Img. 42 detail of basement cornice
 Img. 43 detail of door
 Img. 44 detail of ... door with 'peephole' and deep panelled doorway
 Img. 45 area at north front looking west
 Img. 46 area at north front looking east
 Img. 47 north wall with blocked window
 Img. 48 one of the vaults

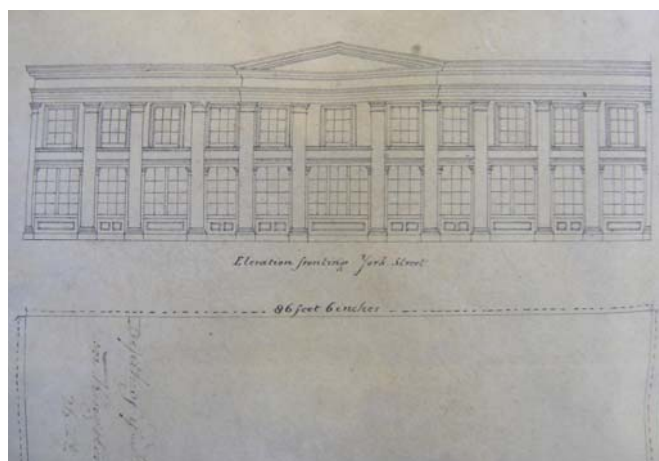
The Friends' Meeting House

The Friends' Meeting House was built by William Wilkins the younger in 1817-18 in the newly built York Street (1808).



(BaRO: BCR - 16333/3, 1979 Drawing by D Stollar)

Located to the south-east of the Abbey, it was built on part of the former gardens of Ralph Allen's town house. It forms part of a group of buildings with the 1819 pedimented terrace of houses opposite (the Beaux Arts Gallery). After much speculation, the plans of the buildings (below) have been found, drawn up by William Wilkins¹.



(BaRO: Plans for 11-15 York Street W Wilkins, unreferenced)

Built as a hall for the various Bath Freemasons' lodges, there were few windows, the hall being lit by two raised glass lanterns in the roof. The Masonic demand for secrecy still manifests itself in numerous architectural features within the building. It was used for a relatively short time by the Freemasons before becoming a venue for various functions, including art exhibitions c1820s. Several Gothic style features seem to have been inserted at this time in the basement and it is probable that the

¹ In January 1819, a building contract was signed between Earl Manvers and a Dr. Wilkinson for the building of Nos. 11-15 York Street opposite the Freemasons Hall. (NUL: M 2D 32, Manvers Papers).

two blind windows were opened up at the same time. By the 1830s it was a non-conformist chapel and in 1842 it was leased by the Reverend Wallinger, becoming the Bethesda Chapel. More windows were inserted, and an upper gallery in the hall for the growing congregation, reached by a staircase against the west wall.

In 1866 it was purchased by the Quaker Friends' Society who still own it today [2005]. In the 1980s, having failed to sell the building, the Friends restored it, removing the gallery and staircase and converting part of the basement to a flat. It has since been used both as a meeting house, a venue for different functions and on as a community drop-in centre by the charity MIND since the mid 1980s.

The survey of the Friends Meeting House covers the ground floor and the basement, excluding the flat in the east section of the basement, formerly the kitchen and wine cellar

Structural History of the Freemasons' Hall (now the Friends' Meeting House)

The Freemasons' Hall in York Street was built 1817-18 by William Wilkins the Younger, probably best known for The National Gallery in London. In 1808 the proprietors of Bath's Kingston (Lower) Assembly Rooms (dem. 1933 and now the site of Bog Island) engaged William Wilkins in to remodel their failing institution (Jackson: 1991,41). A fire in 1820 destroyed any interior work which William Wilkins might have done in 1808-09, but his massive Doric portico (**Fig. 1**) survived, bearing great similarities to his later one in York Street. He built The Grange near Northington, Hampshire (**Fig. 2**) at the same time as the Assembly Rooms' portico, and both designs are based upon the Temple of Concord at Agrigentum, Sicily (**Fig. 3**), which he had illustrated in *Magna Graecia* in 1807 (Jackson:1991, 44).



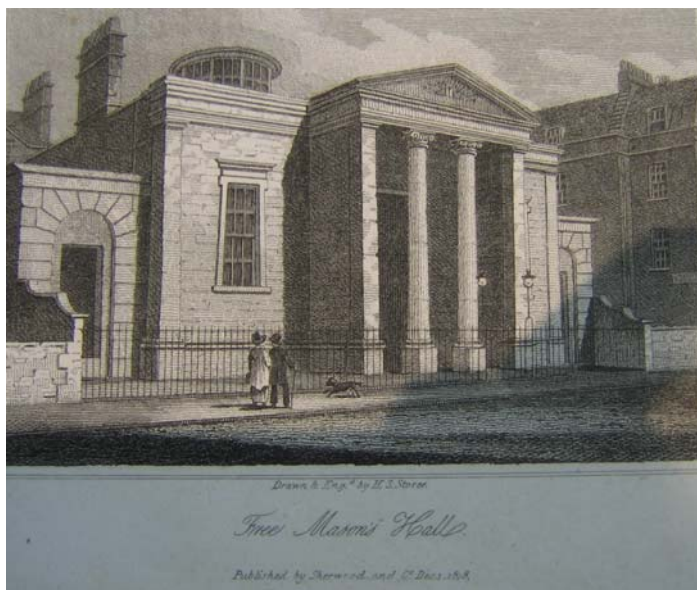
(BCL: B21 482 Original William Wilkins Elevation c1818 from glass negative)

The exterior is typical of its architect, William Wilkins [Appendix I], and is a scholarly composition of Grecian elements, except for the curious lapse of using rusticated arches to contain the side entrances. The wall of the great room is frankly treated as a decorative screen, with a central portico projecting from flanking wings. This portico is divided into three equal bays by two columns, with plain plinths and moulded bases, fluted shafts and Ionic capitals, between return

walls finished with antae. The plinth and base moulding continues in the wings, which terminate in corner pilasters.

In the wall behind the portico is a blind doorway, and the single window decorating either wing was originally also blind, but has since been opened up. The whole front is crowned by a full entablature, surmounted by a triangular pediment over the portico. Three figures representing Faith, Hope and Charity, symbolizing the ideals of Freemasonry, originally stood on the acroteria of the pediment, and the architrave of the blind doorway bore the inscription: FREEMASONS' HALL A.L. 5817: (Ison: 1980,68-9).

Wilkins' original elevation (above) shows the three figures and the blind windows, but



(BCL: 1818 new Masonic Hall BCL Hunt Vol. 2 18-480)

an 1818 engraving by H S Storer (above) shows the portico devoid of the figures and sash windows in place of the blind ones. A commemoration coin (below) struck in the same year also shows the three figures on the roof and also what appear to be sash windows. The three figures seem out of scale for the portico, and perhaps were never added. It seems unlikely that Storer would have omitted such a prominent feature in his engraving, but it is possible that he added sash windows to create a more aesthetically pleasing picture. The blind windows are thought to have been replaced with sash windows when it became a Bethesda Chapel in the c1840s, but they may have been altered earlier, c1820-30, after the Freemasons had left.



(BCL: Sydenham Collection)

The original railings with the two side gates remained until the 1970s when they were removed. In 1985 the present ironwork railings were re-instated, but the remains of the original fittings are still embedded in the stonework.

On the west wall is a high window above the hallway looking directly towards Ralph Allen's house. A lower one was originally inserted by Wilkins, allowing light into the hallway and the staircase. There were further windows in the rear water closets on both levels. The rear south wall originally had two windows at basement level, the existing one in the lower meeting hall being a later Gothic style replacement. Two further windows were inserted into the lower hall, probably c1830s when it became a chapel. The pavement of the back alley cuts across the windows, leaving a void beneath.

There are two hall windows above, neither of them featured on Wilkins' plan, and inserted at different times. It seems probable that the smaller window with a fixed sash was added when the upper gallery was inserted c1842 in order to provide some additional light, hence the deeply splayed surrounds. The window would have lit the staircase up to the gallery and is contemporary with the two 12/12 sash windows in the basement. The other window, probably c1820s, is contemporary with the two in the north front of the hall. There are no windows on the east wall, which abuts No. 2 York Street.

The vaults for the building run beneath the road, and access was originally from the kitchen. The north basement wall shows blocked windows which do not correspond to Wilkins' plan and which were blocked before the 1970s.

The Ground Floor

The rooms referred to in this section are taken from the Wilkins plans (**Fig. 4 & 5**) and the 1980s plans drawn up by Derek Stoller (**Fig. 8 & 9**).

Wilkins' plans of the ground floor (**Fig. 4**) and basement (**Fig. 5**) show a layout not dissimilar to today. The interior of the hall was restored in the 1980s by the Friends, removing a gallery (**Fig. 6**) and staircase at the west end, inserted when it was the Bethesda Chapel in c1842.

The east entrance led into a Committee Room with a fireplace and a further door into the main hall. Behind this room were stone back stairs down to the basement. The main room had two fireplaces on the rear wall, but oddly they were masked by the 5 rows of seats that ran continuously round three sides of the room. The Somerset P.G. Lodge sat on the north side and the Bristol P.G. Lodge on the south.

At the east end, in front of the seats, was the throne. In the centre was the 'Lodge covered with white satin', and various other Freemasons' paraphernalia. At the west end was a semi-circular area for the orchestra with the organ loft above. The west door led into the hall, the lodge members passing across the orchestra area to get to their seats. To the rear of the entrance hall was the main staircase to the basement with a water closet to the rear.

The height of the 'Great Room' is about 21 feet high, lit solely by two magnificent circular lanterns which rise above the roof.

The Quakers principal feature of the interior is the Great Room, measuring 50 ft. by 30 ft., and originally lit solely by the two circular lantern- lights on high glazed drums in the main ceiling, from which elegant glass chandeliers were suspended. Seating was ranged round three sides of the room, at the east end being a semi-circular platform for the orchestra, with an organ gallery over (Ison: 1980,68-9).

Most of the 6-panel doors are original, the three doors leading into the hall with deep panelled door surrounds. The design of the doors on the outer side of the hall is more elaborate, with a geometrical key design in each section. There is a small circular 'squint' or viewing hole beside the west central door with a larger splayed circular opening in the hall.

The cornicing is very elaborate in the hall, comprising of foliage, acanthus leaves and scrolls in a wide border, with an upper layer of egg and dart moulding. Around the raised ceiling, is a simpler design based on circles. Much of these mouldings were replaced using a mould from the existing plasterwork, in the 1980s. In the hall is a much painted egg and dart moulding, probably original.

The Basement

The main stairs led down to the basement, where there was another water closet to the rear. The basement was divided into a small meeting room and a kitchen. To the north were three small rooms, a 'Property Room', a 'Preparing Room' and a 'Tylers Room' and beyond an area with a row of seven vaults under the road. Beyond the kitchen was a wine cellar and the back stairs leading up to the hall.

Most of the doors in the basement are original, many having square or rectangular 'peepholes' set in the panels, some sliding, a legacy from the Masonic days. The original shutters have been retained in the north-west 'Tyler's Room' (Ante-Room 2) which has a corner fireplace, unblocked in the 1980s. The 'Preparing Room' (Kitchen 1), presumably where they robed, had no window, but the 'Property Room' (Children's Room) where they kept their paraphernalia, also has an original shuttered window.

The basement is in complete contrast to the classical elegance of the hall. The Gothic elements are all later than the hall, probably inserted when the Freemasons left. c1820s The cornicing, heavily painted, is very unusual, consisting of a double ogee design with what appear to be acorns. There were originally two fireplaces on the south wall, the central Gothic arched window replacing the eastern one. The remaining fireplace has a magnificent Gothic cast iron surround, contemporary with the Gothic window.

The floors, where visible, are covered with floorboards whilst the stairs and entrance hall are flagged pennant stone. The tongue and groove boarding in the hall is probably mid to late 19th century. The three smaller rooms had their flooring replaced in the 1980s.

After it ceased to be the Freemasons' Hall in the early 1820s, it went through a period of being used for various functions, before becoming a non-conformist chapel in the 1830s then the Baptists' Bethesda Chapel in 1842, the date on the pediment. Alterations were certainly made by the Baptists who are accredited with opening up the blind windows at the front of the hall, installed to maintain the secrecy of the Freemasons. The windows may have been altered earlier, but they did build a gallery with a staircase above the hall, removed in 1982, to accommodate their growing band

of followers. A partition wall was built across part of the committee room in order to form a lobby for the east entrance, and the rear wall was moved further south in line with the doorway into the hall. A new lobby was also created in the west entrance with double doors.

The Friends Meeting House (1866-2005)

The friends decided to sell the chapel in March 1978 because it was too big and costly to run. During this time a number of proposals were submitted for alternative use. Amongst those granted planning permission for Change of Use from a Place Of Worship was an Art Gallery and a Tourist Information Centre. In both cases planning permission was given to open up the blind doorway and replace it with double plate glass doors, and remove the principal staircase (BaRO: BCR Applications no. 10586/1-3 1978).

In 1980 the Friends took the chapel off the market and decided to restore it, converting part of it into a central community hall. The first stage was to restore the main hall and install a disabled toilet and kitchen facilities on the ground floor. They removed the upper gallery and stairs installed by the Baptists and the wall benches in the meeting hall and lower meeting room. They also opened up the fireplaces throughout and removed a second pair of double doors in the west wall (**Fig. 7. & Fig. 8**)

The partition wall in the east entrance between the ante-room and the lobby was removed and a new one inserted further back, to enlarge the lobby. The old door was rehung in the new position. The stone back stairs were removed and the rear wall of the ante-room moved further north, creating a new kitchenette (Tea Room) and disabled toilet.

The second stage was to restore the basement and convert part of it into a warden's flat (**Fig. 9**). The existing flagstones were relaid and new toilets installed at the north and south end of the hallway. The doorway into the 'Tylers Room' (Ante-Room 2) was blocked and a new doorway created into the Lower Meeting Room to the rear. A new window was inserted in a higher position in the east wall above the staircase.

The doorway from the 'Preparing Room' (Kitchen 1) was reopened and a new door inserted, and quarry tiles laid. Softwood floors were laid in the rooms to either side. Two new doors were also inserted into the 'Preparation Room' (Children's Room), one into the area and vaults beyond, the other into the Lower Meeting Room. The wall between the two smaller rooms had been removed, and was now re-instated (BaRO: Planning App 1633 architects Hugh Roberts Graham & Stollar, 30 Brock Street, Bath)

- North elevation as existing Date 4/79 Drawing 174 (A) 14
- Ground floor Plan Survey Date 12/78 Drawing 174 (A) 2
- Gallery Plan Survey 174 (A) 3 Dec 1978 Drawing DS
- Ground floor Plan proposed alterations 174(A) 13 4/79
- Ground floor Plan Proposed Alterations Date 4/79 Drawing 1633/2
- Basement Plan Proposed Alterations revised Date 10/81 Drawing 1633/1
- North elevation as proposed Date 4/79 Drawing 16333/3
- Men's Lavatory 12/81 1633/7 Revision A

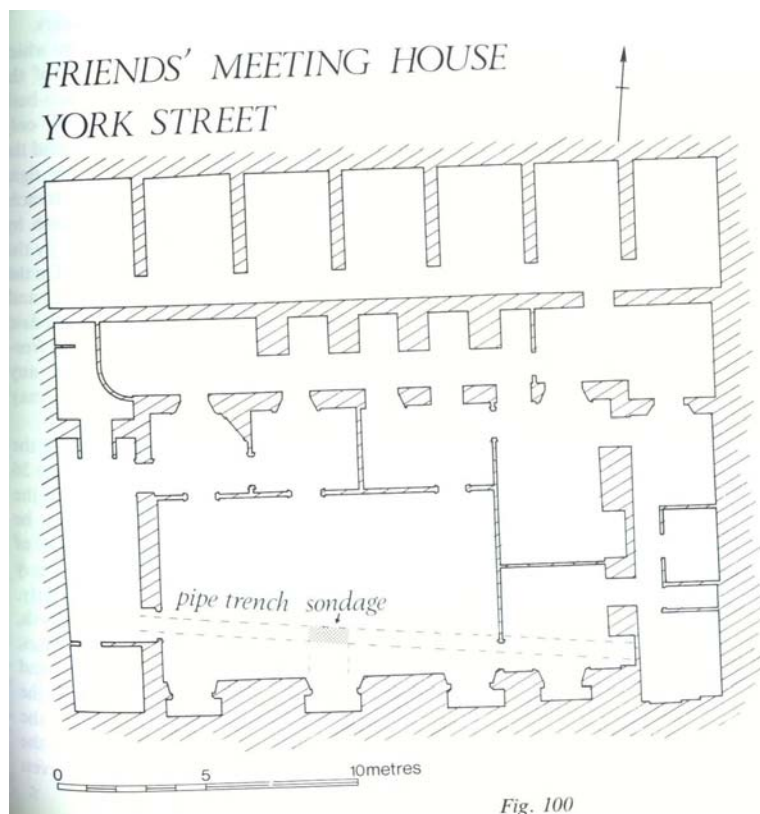
The ceiling needed considerable work carried out on it and much of the plasterwork was replaced using moulds from the originals, including a 16 feet section of the cornice in the main Hall.

In 1975 planning permission was granted for the removal of the railings and gates at the front of the building (BaRO: CD/10586 23.9.75). In 1986 following local complaints, the missing sections of the railings were re-instated.

The pre-19th century landscape

The origins of the site on which the Freemasons' Hall was built date back at least to Roman times.

During the winter and spring of 1982, work began on converting the basement of the Friends' Meeting House into a flat and small assembly hall. New drains were laid in trenches below the floor and a watching brief on these excavations was kept by P Davenport, N. Cooper, and Stephen Bird...Topographical evidence suggests that the site was on the Abbey cloister garth, and remained undeveloped until the building of the present hall in 1817...It seems that in this part of the city some Roman structures occur (layers 6, 7 and 8), but no medieval structural remains were seen in this, admittedly tiny, investigation. ..To the north of the sondage a large stone-slab- covered culvert was uncovered beneath the stone slab floor. The slabs of the culvert were circa 1 metre wide, but it was not possible to investigate further. The drain (below) represented is likely to be post-medieval, but...seems to be earlier than the present building. Six sherds of pottery were recovered from layer 7. These were late Roman colour-coated and black burnished (BBI) wares (Davenport:1991,116-7).



The site of the Freemasons' Hall appears not to have been built on prior to the building of York Street's in 1808. It had belonged to the Abbey prior to the

Dissolution, and Davenport's map of Bath c1300 (**Fig. 10**) shows the site south of the Abbey (**Fig. 10**). Following the Dissolution, the site became part of a large bowling green shown on Gilmore's 1694 map (**Fig. 12**) stretching from the south wall of the Abbey to Lilliput Alley, all belonging to the Kingston estate (**Fig. 13**).

In the survey of the Kingston estate the area of the Freemasons Hall is allocated the number 7 ("The Old Post House". KE 1725; KE 1750; OS 1886). In 1718, The property [Ralph Allen's Town House] is called the Post House, but by 1726 it is named the Old Post House. In 1727 Ralph Allen held the site, having become a sub-tenant there as early as 1718 and running his Post Office from there. He also acquired part of the Bowling Green as a garden (Holland:1992).

Ralph Allen's town house was built beside Lilliput Alley, formerly Segar's Alley, with gardens running down towards the river. Allen lived there from 1727 when John Wood rebuilt the façade and added a northern extension (now part of a house in Church Street). Wood's description of the bowling green gives a vivid image of what the area was like prior to Allen's arrival.

an Addition to the North Part of Mr. Allen's House in the Alley then leading from the Abbey Green to the old Bowling Green, but now to the Grand Parade, and for that, and some other Reasons, called Lilliput Alley: The Designs, as well as a Model for this Addition, were made while I was in London in the Spring of the Year 1727 ; and a third Part of the Bowling Green having been granted for a Garden to the House, Smock Racing and Pig Racing, playing at Foot-Ball and running with the Feet in Bags in that Green, four of the Bath Diversions of those Days, thereby received their Final End : Nor did Grining, Starving, Scolding, Eating hot Furmety, Laughing, Whistling and Jiging upon the Stage for Rings, Shirts, Smocks, Hats, &c. escape the common Ruin; these Amusements falling likewise...While Mr. Allen was making the Addition to the North Part of his House in Lilliput Alley, he new fronted and raised the old Building a full Story higher; it consists of a Basement Story sustaining a double Story under the Crowning; and this is surmounted by an Attick, which created a sixth Rate House, and a Sample for the greatest magnificence that was ever proposed by me for our City Houses (Wood:1765,244-5).



The gardens were 'L' shaped, a large strip of the west side of the old bowling green having been incorporated into it. There is no description of the gardens, but a drawing (left) by Henry Venn Lansown (c1840) gives some idea, though the 'addition to the north part' was not the matching wing artistically expressed here on the site of the Freemasons' hall. The gardens reached as far as Dame Lindsay's Assembly House and four other houses which were built

across the east side of the bowling green by Wood in 1727-30, fronting the Terrace Walk.

Ison describes the house, 'its principal front facing east, overlooking a fine view of Claverton Down' upon which Sham Castle was built. (Ison:1980, 112). When Allen built his folly, he would have had a more or less uninterrupted view across his

gardens to the hills beyond. In 1733 the Kingston rental lists the Old Post House as “Mr Ralph Allen his Heirs” and by 1750 Philip Allen is listed for the property. In the 1760’s it is given as being in the occupation of Prince Hoare (Holland:1992).

After Allen’s departure to Prior Park, ‘the garden was subjected to successive building encroachments, and the almost hidden house degenerated into a tenement (Ison:1980, 112). Between the backs of the houses along Lilliput Alley and the rear of the Freemasons’ Hall was a narrow alleyway (below), now the yard of The Huntsman public house.



(Meehan:1901, 32)



(HH, 2005)

The 19th century

As early as 1764, a proposal was put forward to build a new road along the east side of the Orange Grove. This was the first of many schemes to create a vehicular connection from the north of the city to the Parades. The opening of York Street in 1808 led to the construction of a roadway along the southern end of Terrace Walk, linking the city centre to Pierrepont Street. (Bathnes:1999).

Monday last at Guildhall in full chamber...At the above court the Corporation agreed on an exchange of property with Lord Newark for the purpose of enabling his Lordship to make the long wanted coach-road to the Lower Assembly Rooms which is intended to be at the south end of the Pump Room from Stall Street in a strait (sic) line across Abbey and Church Streets and is to be called York Street; for the completion of which Lord Newark with a noble liberality not only sacrifices much property but has also laid out in the purchase of houses &c. to be pulled down above £5,000. This will it is hoped be a prelude to further improvements in the Old Town (Bath Journal, 28 September 1796)

In 1808 the Corporation finally purchased land from Charles Earl Manvers [Lord Newark] for ‘an intended New Street to be called York Street and another called Swallow Street, Abbey Lane [also known as Lear Lane] (BaRO: Deed 14 Sept 1808).

York Street was built in 1808, cutting across both Church Street and Abbey Street (which became Upper and Lower Church Street and Abbey Street respectively) and Swallow Street created at the same time (**Fig. 15**).

The Freemasons Hall

In 1817 the Freemasons of Bath commissioned William Wilkins the Younger, a fellow freemason, to build them a Masonic hall in York Street. The Bath Freemasons are thought to have been inaugurated in 1724. Until the new Masonic Hall was built, they had met in local hotels, but by 1817 this was no longer conducive to the secrecy of their society.

As these hotels changed in character, their adaptation to Masonic purposes became more than questionable, and inasmuch as the members had increased, it was deemed desirable that a hall should be built, sufficiently capacious to accommodate the whole fraternity.' (Peach: 1884, 27)

Mr T Whitney of Bath had the idea of building a Masonic Hall and on August 1817 the foundation stone for the hall was laid at midday by Frederick Augustus, the Duke of Sussex by the 'brothers' of the four different lodges of Bath.

'The Foundation Stone of this Masonic Hall, was laid with the usual ceremonies, August 4th, A.D. 1817, in the 57th year of the reign of his present Majesty, George the Third, and the year of Masonry 5817, in presence of the Masters and Wardens of the Bath Lodges. His Royal Highness, Augustus Frederick Duke of Sussex, being most Worshipful Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England, and Arthur Chichester, Esq., R. W. Provincial Grand Master for the County of Somerset. Brother Wilkins, Architect. Walter Harris, Builder.' (contemporary account)

A brass plate bearing the inscription quoted above was placed, with a box of contemporary coins, in a cavity of the foundation-stone of the Freemasons' Hall in York Street, which was completed and dedicated with magnificent ceremony on September 23rd, 1819. Now the rites and mysteries of Freemasonry are celebrated elsewhere, and the building is the Meeting House of the Society of Friends (Ison: 1980,68).



In September 1818 three Bath Lodges; The Royal Cumberland Lodge – No. 55, The York Lodge of Perfect Friendship – No. 243 and The Lodge of Virtue – No. 311 ; assembled at the New Freemasons' Hall for the purpose of opening the Lower Lodge Room, previous to the intended visit of HRH the Duke of Sussex (left, BCL: Hunt Vol 2), and for holding their future Masonic meetings.'

There was a 'very numerous assemblage of Brethren to witness this truly interesting ceremony' and the new organ was unveiled 'its soft and beautiful tones were accompanied at intervals by the sounds of trumpets, horns and double drums-which added considerably to the effect of the solemnity.' (28 September 1818)

The dedication of the new hall did not take place until the following year, owing to Queen Charlotte's illness.



(BCL: Hunt Vol 2 September 1819 p.32)

THE COMMITTEE for conducting the MASONIC MEETING on the 23d inst. being anxious to prevent the confusion and disappointment that occurred at the last Provincial Grand Meeting in viewing the REGALIA, &c. of the GRAND LOGDGE gratis, beg to inform the public that the MASONIC HALL, as prepared for the reception of his Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, and the Ceremony of Dedication, will be ready for the Inspection of the Public, by Tickets ONLY, which may be obtained at the Committee Room, York-street, at one shilling each, on Friday next.

[5035]

(BCL: Hunt Vol. 2 1819 p.32)

When the consecration finally took place on Thursday 23 September 1819, it seems to have attracted most of the City, as well as those from further afield [Appendix II]. The chapel was consecrated by the Duke of Sussex, the Grand Master of England. He was accompanied by 'many of the chief officers of the Lodges of Freemasons and between 800 to 900 of the brethren'. They processed from The Guildhall, up Broad Street and down Milsom Street and Stall street, then along York Street to the Hall.

The ceremony was performed by the Royal Grand Master with most impressive effect. (23 Sept 1819)

Between 400 and 500 of them ended the day with a dinner at the Kingston Rooms. The following Wednesday and Thursday 'upwards of 2,000 people (chiefly ladies)' paid to view the Masonic paraphernalia in the hall.

It was not a success, not least because the cost of the building, 'out of all proportion to the resources of the Lodges meeting within its walls', had virtually bankrupted them. Peach writes of disputes amongst the different lodges, and the financial burden of the Hall itself.

Here a word or two may be said with reference to the York Street Hall. Laudable as was the project in many respects, it yet seems to have been entered upon without sufficient consideration and with inadequate means. In 1821 and 1822 the difficulties by which the several Lodges were beset were considered by a United Fellow Craft Committee; and, from the first, it was obvious that the whole thing must come to grief. In 1824 the Lodges were dispersed, and the cry was "To your tents, O Israel".

The pecuniary difficulties of the Craft generally, arising out of the cost of the Hall, began, it may be said with the building itself, which was apparently out of all proportion to the resources of the Lodges meeting within its walls. Geary was the chief promoter, and not the least nor last to hasten the crisis.

As early as 1818, the pressure began to be severely felt, and in October of that year a Committee was appointed "for the purpose of conducting the pecuniary and other business relating to the Freemasons' Hall." ...A General Meeting of the Members of the Royal Cumberland Lodge, the Royal York Lodge, and the Lodge of Virtue, was held at the Masonic Hall, on Monday, August 27th, to take into further consideration the Plan proposed by Brother Spry for raising the sum of £4,000 towards liquidating the present encumbrances of the Masonic Hall, and adding to the elevation of the present building.

Brother Geary, Chairman of the Financial Committee in the chair. The Chairman in the first place informed the members present of Earl Manvers' ready acquiescence and consent towards the improvement of the Masonic Hall; he also laid before the members a statement of the encumbrances, and the various sources of income which might be applied to the liquidation of such encumbrances, subject to any plan approved of by the members present.

A series of resolutions were then moved by Dr. Spry, the sum and substance of which may be thus summarised.

"The whole of the debt amounted to £3,780; and thus allowing £1,000 towards the expense of elevating the Hall, makes a net sum of £4,780. The sum proposed to be raised by Tonitne £4.000, leaving a residue f £780, for which the principals are willing to receive interest until the whole is paid off."

The Scheme was impracticable, and if otherwise, would have worked only to the advantage Geary (Peach:1894, 30-32).

In 1822 the tontine was set up to invest money to pay off the debts of the Masonic hall. Eligible investment of small sums into a yearly increase of investment' it entitled the survivor 'to this valuable and spacious building. In order to bring the scheme 'to a more speedy termination' each life nominated had to be at least 60. The tontine was open to non-masons, everyone paying £20 for a share. (Bath Journal, 17 Sept 1822).

The tontine does not seem to have attracted sufficient investors, and the following year Earl Manvers leased the 'ground and buildings known as the Freemason's Hall in York Street' for 94 years at a yearly rent of £14 16s to Charles Geary, of Fountain Buildings, Bath, a wine merchant and former Grand Master, whose overbearing personality and temper Peach comments on.

The hall was let out for secular functions and it was probably during this time that the Bath artists Benjamin and Thomas Barker exhibited there (Forsyth:2003,105). In 1833, and again in 1842, it was listed as the non-conformist Masonic Hall Chapel, with regular Sunday Services and Prayer Meetings (Bath Directory 1833 & 1842).

The Bethesda Chapel

The date 1842 is painted on the pediment above the Friends Meeting House, which suggests that the building changed hands in this year. The lease had been purchased in that year by the Reverend Wallinger (NUL: M 2D 32, Manvers Papers, Surrender 12 November 1842) when it became known as the Bethesda Chapel, under the ministrations of the Reverend J Wallinger. They are credited with opening up the blind windows at the front of the hall, installed to maintain the secrecy of the Freemasons, but it may have been Geary who did it.

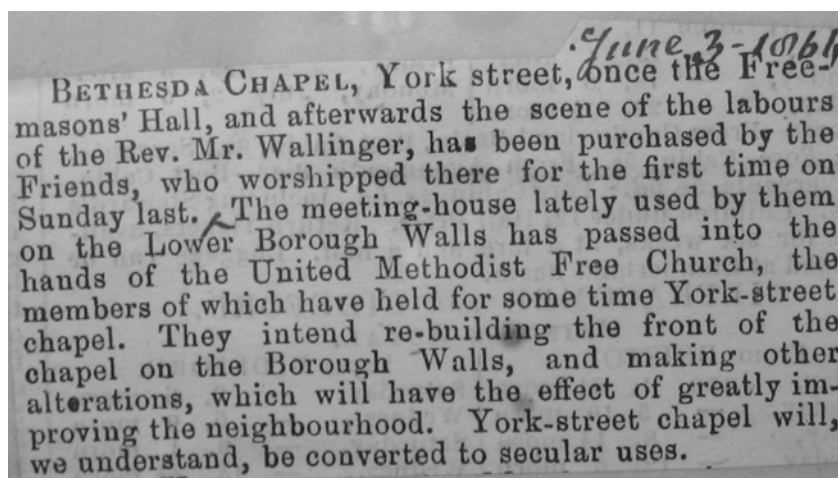
John Wesley, writing to E Bolton in 1769

A preaching house cannot be too light and airy, therefore your windows must be large And let them be sashes opening downwards; otherwise the air coming in would give the people cold. (Binney & Burman:1977, 29)

They did, however, build a gallery above the hall with a staircase, to accommodate their growing band of followers (**Fig. 6**).

The Friends Meeting House

In June 1866 the lease of the Bethesda Chapel was taken over by the Quakers. An article in the local newspaper mentions the York-street chapel, which, confusingly, was the Baptists Chapel adjoining Swallow Street. The United Methodist Free Church moved to the chapel on the Lower Borough Walls which had been the Quakers' meeting place for some years. Amongst the Quakers was Isaac Sewell, father of Anna who wrote 'Black Beauty'.



(BCL: Hunt vol 2 Bethesda Chapel (newspaper cutting 3 Jun 1866)

A few years afterwards, the Friends purchased the freehold of the building and have remained there ever since. It was used for many different functions, both secular and religious. They decided to sell the chapel in March 1978 because it was too big and costly to run. During this time a number of proposals for alternative use were granted planning permission, including an Art Gallery and a Tourist Information Centre. In all cases planning permission was given to open up the blind doorway and replacing it with double plate glass doors, and remove the principal staircase.

Following disappointing offers and their unsuccessful search to find suitable premises, the Friends decided to take the chapel off the market in 1980 and convert part of it into a central community hall. After 5 years of work the cost had spiralled to £120,000, the Quakers raising all but £12,000 by public donations

'The Friends felt the high cost of restoration was justified only if the building could be used by 'the caring organisations of the city' as well.' The charity MIND has used the premises since last July (B&WEC 5 April 1985, 5).

During the restoration they removed the upper gallery and stairs installed by the Baptists. The first stage was to restore the main hall, install a disabled toilet and kitchen facilities on the ground floor at a cost of £38,000. The wall benches in the meeting hall and lower meeting room were removed at the same time. The second stage was to restore the basement and convert part of it into a warden's flat.

The groundwork of the restoration was carried out by young unemployed under the Community Service Programme. Moran & Wheatley of Batheaston restored the plasterwork, Barry Baldwin a Corsham stonemason, refaced the basement front and the iron railings were replaced by Sam Chantry of Ironart.



(BCL B21 667 n.d. showing the original railings)

Justification of the Proposed Development

The original integrity of the building as a Freemasons' Hall was undermined from a very early stage by various windows added to the virtually windowless Wilkins' building by each group who took it over. Wilkins' 1817 building was probably altered within 5 years of its erection. The hall has been adapted to different purposes by each new owner; the Gothic window, fireplace and cornicing in the basement c1820s and the addition of windows at various stages to allow more light into the hall than the Freemasons had permitted themselves.

In the 1840s when the Baptists took over, they added a seating gallery (Fig.6) across almost half of the hall with a staircase leading up to it, which existed for over 140 years. It was in situ c1842-c1985, only removed during the Friends' restoration in the 1980s.

The Baptists also added the splayed rear window in the hall, which was purpose built to light their new gallery and staircase. It is probable that the two blind windows were opened up by the c1830s, and with the exception of 3 windows in the north basement wall, none of Wilkins' windows appear to survive in their original format. The west window overlooking Ralph Allen's Town House was only inserted in c1980, replacing Wilkins' original, lower window.

The building was only used as a Masonic hall for about 5 years. For most of its existence the hall and basement had benches around the sides of the room. The 1980s restoration did away with the benches and the gallery, effectively stripping away the historic features of its 150 years as a non-conformist chapel.

The building has always had a kitchen, Wilkins installing a sizeable kitchen and wine cellars for the masons to cater for their Masonic dinners. The Friends added two smaller kitchens when they converted the original kitchen and wine cellar to a flat, removing the stone back staircase at the same time.

Prior to this, in 1979, planning permission had been granted for at least three applications to open up the blind doorway as the main entrance and insert a pair of double doors.

The current railings were only replaced in the 1980s, the original ones having been removed in the 1970s leaving the front of the building open.

Listing Description



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FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, YORK STREET (south side) , BATH
BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

Date listed: 12 June 1950 (no further amendments)

Grade II - ST 7564 NE 19/88 12.6.50.

1817-19 by William Wilkins. 1 storey. Portico with 2 Ionic columns in antis, entablature and pediment. Neo-Grec detail. On either side is small rusticated wing with door. 2 cylindrical skylights in roof. Interior?

Acknowledgements

Colin Johnston and Lucy Powell at the Bath Records Office (BaRO)

The local history staff at Bath Library (BCL)

Thanks to Mike Chapman for kindly showing me the deeds for 11-15 York Street and sending me the references from the Manvers Collection.

Nottingham University Library (NUL)

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Appendix I - William Wilkins

William Wilkins, whose name is now best known as the architect of the National Gallery in London, was but thirty years old [in 1817] and in practice in Cambridge, where he was a Fellow of Gonville and Caius. He had travelled extensively in Italy and the Levant between 1801 and 1804, and in 1807 published drawings made while abroad in *The Antiquities of Magna Graecia*. Coincident with this publication he secured in 1806 the commission for the new Downing College at Cambridge. This scheme had attracted some publicity; in 1804 Thomas Hope had written his *Observations on the Plans and Elevations . . . for Downing College*, calling for a design in the Neo-Greek and significantly referring to Wilkins as a contender; the next year Wilkins had actually exhibited, at the Royal Academy, Neo-Greek designs for the south and entrance fronts. And when the College committee came to make their decision in 1806 they had already consulted George Dance, whose designs for the Theatre Royal in Bath were then under construction.

Not knowing who the proprietors of the Lower Assembly Rooms were at this time, it is difficult to be sure why Wilkins received this contract so far from home.* One can speculate that Dance might well have made a recommendation for Wilkins: but then Wilkins was already beginning to make a name for himself.

Wilkins' proposals for the Lower Assembly Rooms consisted of the addition of a large, hexastyle Doric portico, and presumably some work to the interior. But the building was burned out on 21 December, 1820 [28], and no record of any interior work has come

to light. Yet Wilkins' work was extensive enough to provide material for the Royal Academy in both 1808 and 1809.

The portico he added is very significant, both in the development of his own work and as part of the Greek Revival in Britain. If the argument of dates as presented by R W Liscombe in [29—31] William Wilkins added the hexastyle, Doric portico to the Lower Assembly Rooms in 1808—09, at just the time he was building *The Grange* near Northington, Hampshire. Both designs are based upon the Temple of Concord at Agrigento, Sicily, which he had illustrated in *Magna Graecia* in 1807.

William Wilkins is accepted, and there seems to be no reason why it should not be, then the designs for the Doric portico at the Lower Assembly Rooms [29] precedes that similar and more celebrated portico he built contemporaneously at *The Grange*, near Northington, Hampshire (1809) [30]. The fact that the work at *The Grange* was completed some months before the Lower Assembly Rooms reopened on 1 November 1810 is possibly because it was of brick and stucco and could be erected more quickly than even the Bath masons could work stone for the Lower Assembly Rooms.

The Grange is extremely important: Pevsner said of it, 'this was one of the first determined credos in the coming Grecian mode, highly exciting and far from domestic.' Wilkins brought, for the first time, the massive scale of fifth-century BC Doric of Parthenon proportions to English parkland. This was a very determined attempt, as Liscombe comments, to 'out-Pericles' what George Dance had done, but only in tetrastyle, at neighbouring Stratton Park six years earlier.

The Lower Assembly Rooms must be equally important. Public rooms deserved a powerful, public style, and the grand proportions of Wilkins' portico did just that. Wilkins could have derived the design from a number of sources he had seen on his European tour. The most likely model would be the fifth-century BC Temple of Concord at Agrigento [31] in Sicily, or possibly the Temple of Juno Lucina, at the same site. Both are recorded in *Magna Graecia*. Wilkins had also visited mainland Greece — his *Atheniensi* was written in 1816 as the 'result of observations made during a residency there in the year 1802' — and the Theseion in Athens provides another model for the Lower Assembly Rooms.

The fire of 1820 necessitated extensive rebuilding of the Lower Assembly Rooms [32]. This work was done by George Allen Underwood, who was at this time (1822—

3) surveyor to the County of Somerset. Underwood had worked for Sir John Soane between 1807 and 1815 and would have been well versed in Greek architecture. Indeed the interiors, when rebuilt, were quite Soanesque. His work to the exterior of the building displays much confidence: he retained Wilkins' portico and added a heavy and rather dominating attic storey. And if contemporary prints can be read clearly, it would appear to be he rather than Wilkins who built the small, in antis, Doric portico at the side [33], a feature which he might well have picked up from Wilkins himself, who added just such a portico to Kingweston House, near Glastonbury in Somerset, at about this time. Regrettably, the Lower Assembly Rooms were demolished in 1933. Until recently, its awkward triangular site overlooking Parade Gardens was known, eponymously, as 'Bog Island.'

Wilkins next returned to Bath to build in 1817. This time the building remains, the Friends' Meeting House in York Street, which he designed as a Hall for the Freemasons. A brass plate laid in the foundations of the Hall referring to 'Brother Wilkins, Architect' would also indicate his affiliation to the fraternity. And here one might speculate that the buildings directly opposite the Hall are also by Wilkins. Nos. 11 to 15 York Street [34J not only reflect the details of the Hall in the capitals and entablature, but also present a pediment to reflect, directly, that of the Hall. But no documentation as to their authorship has come to light. (Jackson:1991, 41-45)

* Writing in 'A Trial-Run for Regent's Park: Repton and Nash at Bath, 1796 (Bath History, vol III, 1990)' Tim Mowl states that Wilkins' father, William Wilkins (1751—1815), had provided, between 1802 and 1804, a scheme for 17 houses set around a square on the Ham where St John the Divine now stands. Commissioned by Lord Newark, it was not built

UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND,
FOR
THE INSTALLATION
OF THE
Provincial Grand Master for the County of Somerset,
AND
THE DEDICATION
OF THE
FREEMASON'S HALL, IN THE CITY OF BATH,
On THURSDAY, 23d SEPTEMBER, 1819.

THE Officers and Brethren of the several Lodges are to assemble in the Great Banqueting Room of the Guildhall, at Nine o'Clock in the Morning, and at Ten the Grand Lodge will be opened in ample Form and with solemn Prayer.

The Provincial Grand Master for the County of Somerset will be installed, according to the ancient and accustomed Solemnities, by His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, the Most Worshipful Grand Master; after which, the Grand Director of the Ceremonies, having, by Command of the Grand Master, formed the Procession, it will move towards the Hall up High Street, through Broad Street, York Buildings, Milsom Street, Burton Street, Union Street, Stall Street, and York Street, in the following Order:

The Grand Tyler,
A Band of Music,
Brethren not Members of any Lodge, two and two,
Lodges according to their Numbers, Juniors walking first,
A Band of Music,
Members of the Provincial Grand Lodge of the County of Somerset, viz.
Provincial Grand Tyler,
Provincial Grand Organist,
Provincial Grand Sword Bearer,
Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works,
Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies,
Provincial Grand Secretary,
Provincial Grand Registrar, bearing the Seal of the Provincial Grand Lodge,
Provincial Grand Treasurer,
Provincial Grand Chaplain,
Provincial Junior Grand Warden,
Provincial Senior Grand Warden,
Provincial Deputy Grand Master,
A Band of Music,
A Steward, { Banner of the United Grand } A Steward,
 { Lodge of England, }
OFFICERS OF THE GRAND LODGE ACCORDING TO SENIORITY; viz.
The Grand Usher with his Staff,

Two Grand Stewards,
 Grand Organist,
 Grand Superintendant of Works,
 Grand Director of Ceremonies,
 Grand Deacons,
 The Grand Secretary, bearing the Book of Constitutions,
 The Grand Registrar, bearing the Great Seal,
 The Grand Treasurer,
 The Grand Chaplain,
 Past Grand Wardens, two and two,
 Provincial Grand Masters, each preceded by his Banner,
 A Steward,—Provincial Grand Master for Somerset,—A Steward,
 The Pillar of the Junior Grand Warden,
 The Junior Grand Warden,
 The Pillar of the Senior Grand Warden,
 The Senior Grand Warden,
 The Right Worshipful the Deputy Grand Master,
 A Steward, { Visitor, His Grace the Duke of Leinster, } A Steward,
 { Grand Master of Ireland, preceded by his Banner, }
 A Steward, { The Banner of H. R. H. the Duke of Sussex, } A Steward,
 { Grand Master, }
 Grand Sword Bearer,
 Two Stewards, { The Most Worshipful Grand Master, } Two Stewards,
 { H. R. H. the Duke of Sussex, }
 Two Grand Stewards,
 Two Stewards, { The Standard of H. R. H. the } Two Stewards,
 { Grand Patron, }
 Grand Stewards,
 Grand Tyler.

When the Procession arrives at the Hall, the Brethren will divide to the right and left, for the Most Worshipful Grand Master, his Officers, the Provincial Grand Masters, &c. to pass up the Centre, preceded by their Banners. On entering the Great Room, the Brethren will proceed to their appointed Places except the Most Worshipful Grand Master, the M. W. Grand Master of Ireland, the Provincial Grand Masters, and the rest of the Officers and Members, who are to assist at the Ceremony of Dedication, who will be conducted to the Lower Lodge.

The Procession will then be formed for the Solemnity of the Dedication, in the following Order:

Grand Usher with his Staff,
 Two Grand Stewards.
 A Steward, { Four Master Masons carrying the Lodge } A Steward,
 { covered with White Satin, }
 A Steward, { A Cornucopia borne by a } A Steward,
 { Master of a Lodge }
 Two Grand Stewards,
 Two Golden Ewers with Wine and Oil,
 borne by two Masters of Lodges,
 A Steward,—Banner of the United Grand Lodge,—A Steward,
 Grand Organist,
 Grand Superintendant of the Works, Grand Director of the Ceremonies,
 Grand Deacons,
 The Grand Secretary,
 bearing the Book of Constitutions on a Cushion,
 The Grand Registrar, bearing the Great Seal.

Illustrations



Fig. 1 Lower Assembly Rooms, showing Wilkins' pediment 1826



Fig. 2 The Grange Hampshire (Jackson: 1980, Fig. 30)

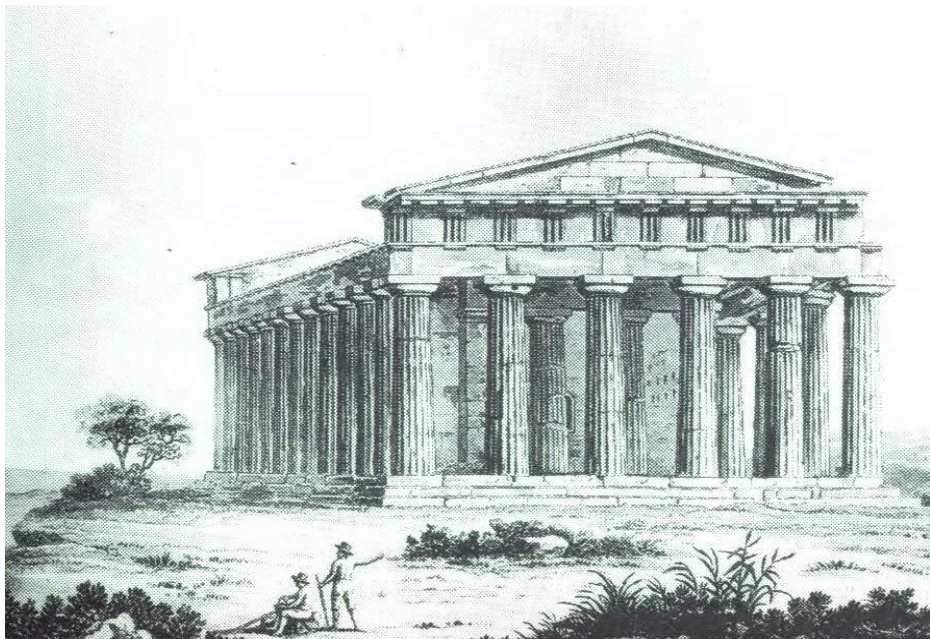


Fig. 3 The Temple of Concord Agrigentum, Sicily (Jackson: 1980, Fig. 31)

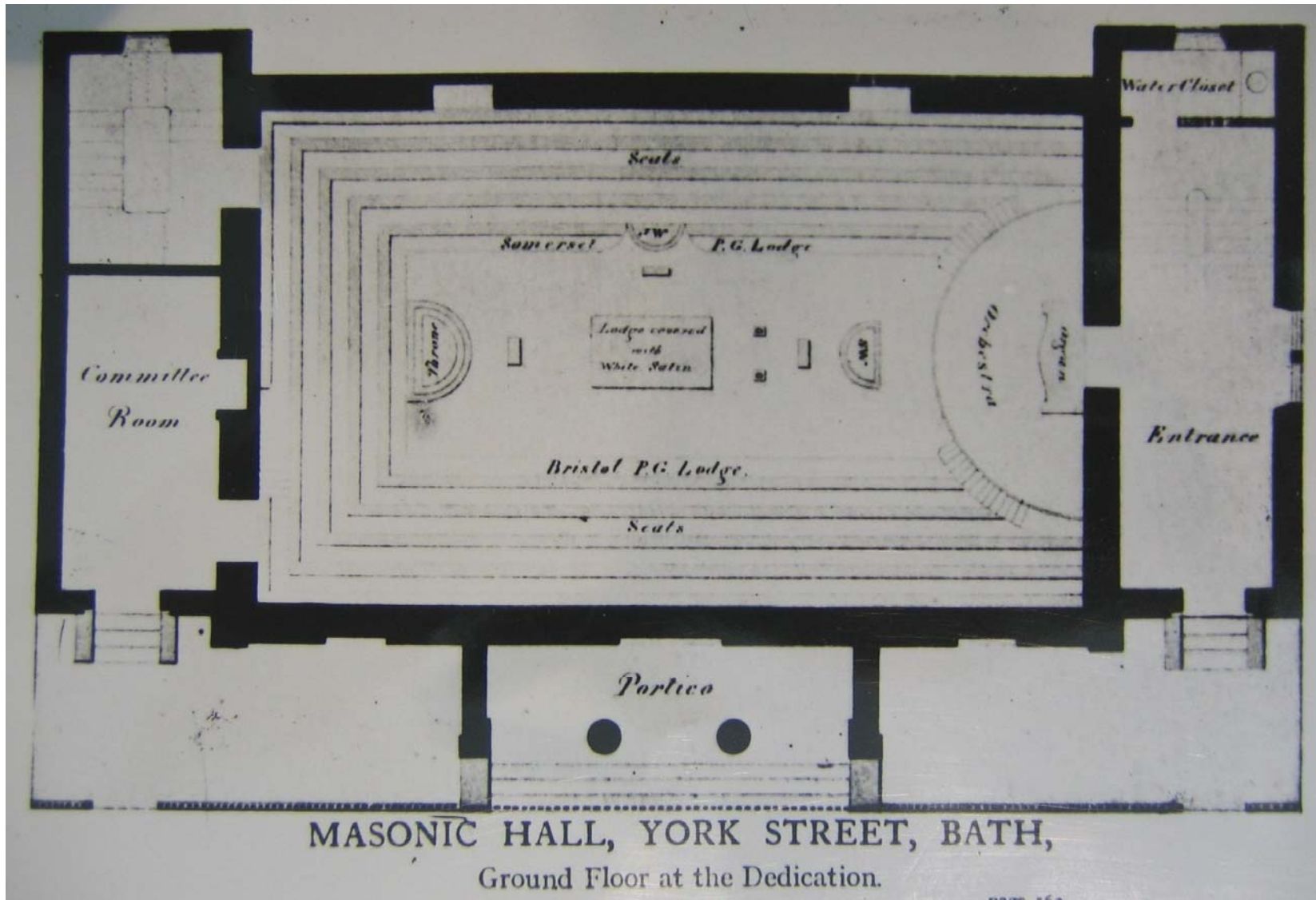


Fig. 4 (BCL: B21 483 Original William Wilkins Ground Floor plan c1818 from glass negative)

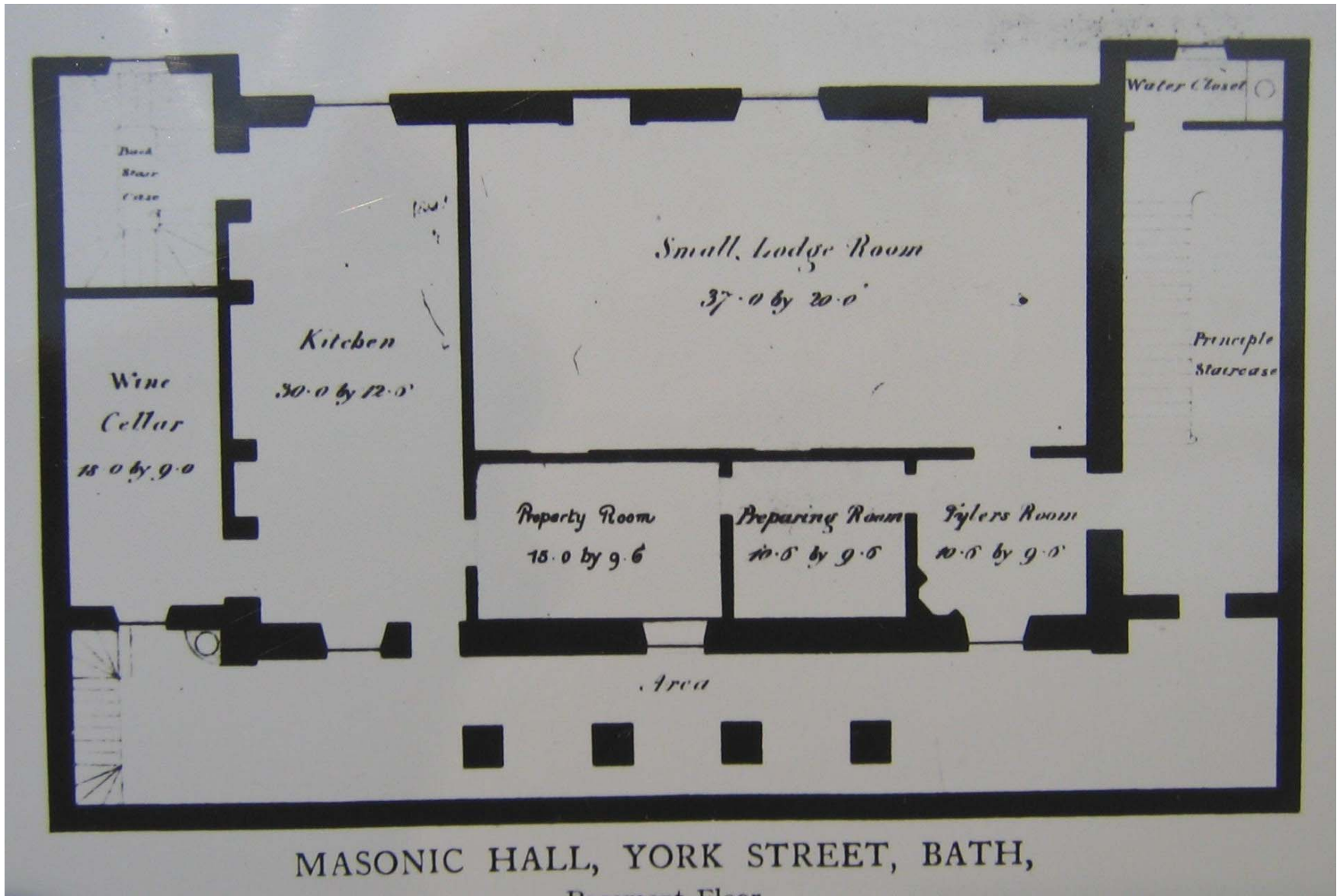


Fig. 5 (BCL: B21 484 Original William Wilkins Basement plan c1818 from glass negative)

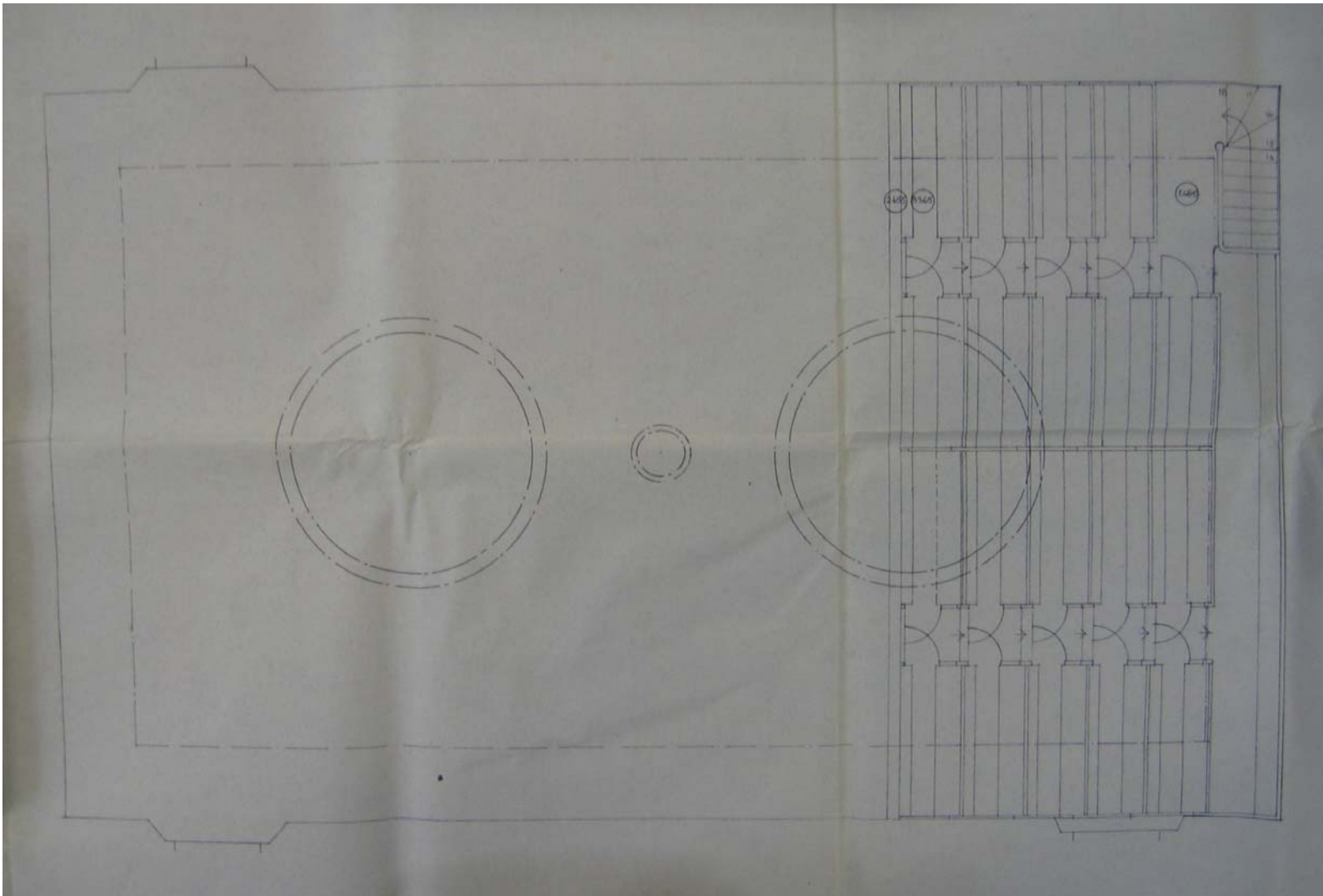


Fig. 6 (BaRO: Building Control Records - Gallery Plan Survey 174 (A) 3 Dec 1978 by Derek Stollar)

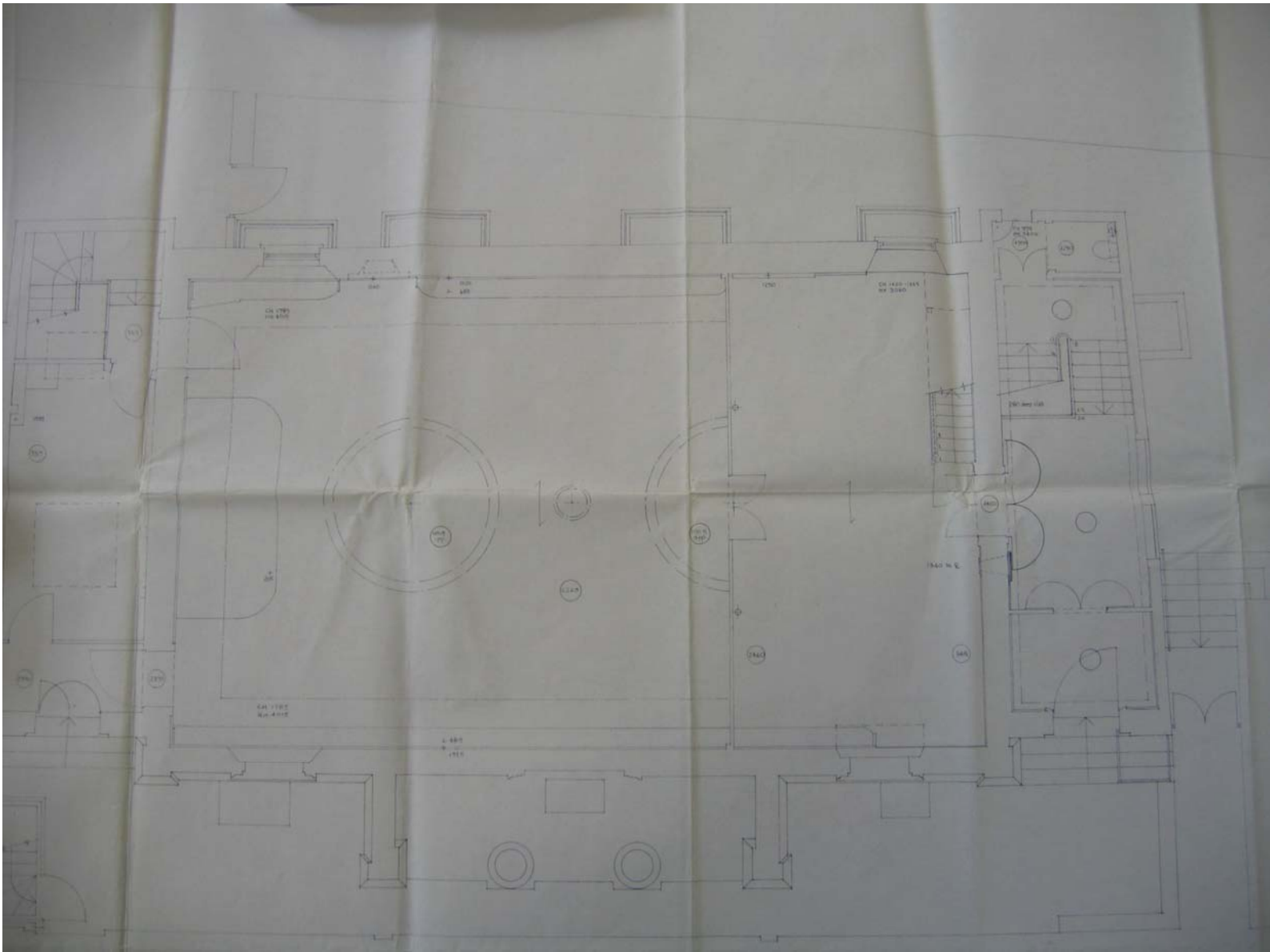


Fig. 7 (BaRO: Building Control Records - Ground floor Plan Survey Date 12/78 Drawing 174 (A) 2 by Derek Stollar)

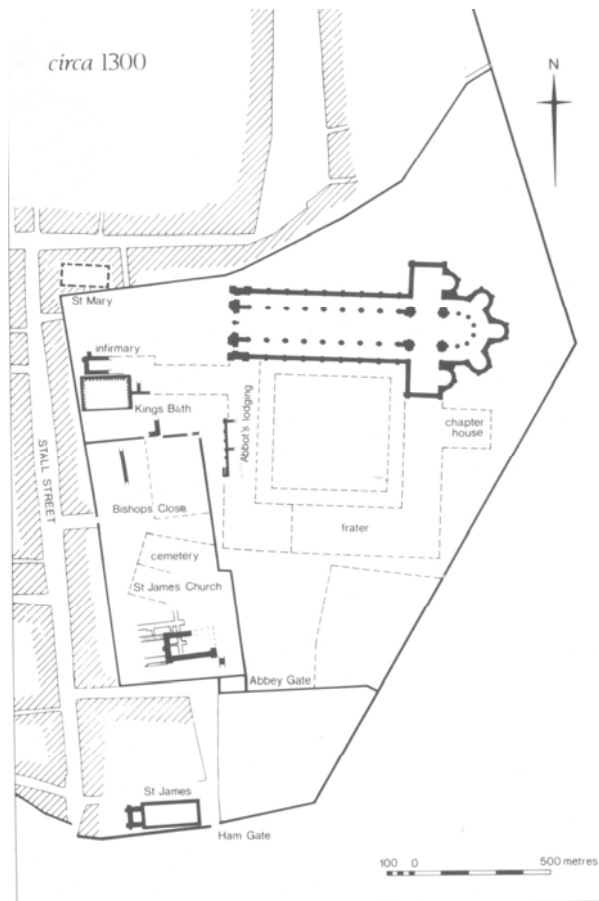


Fig. 10 Bath c1300 (Peter Davenport)

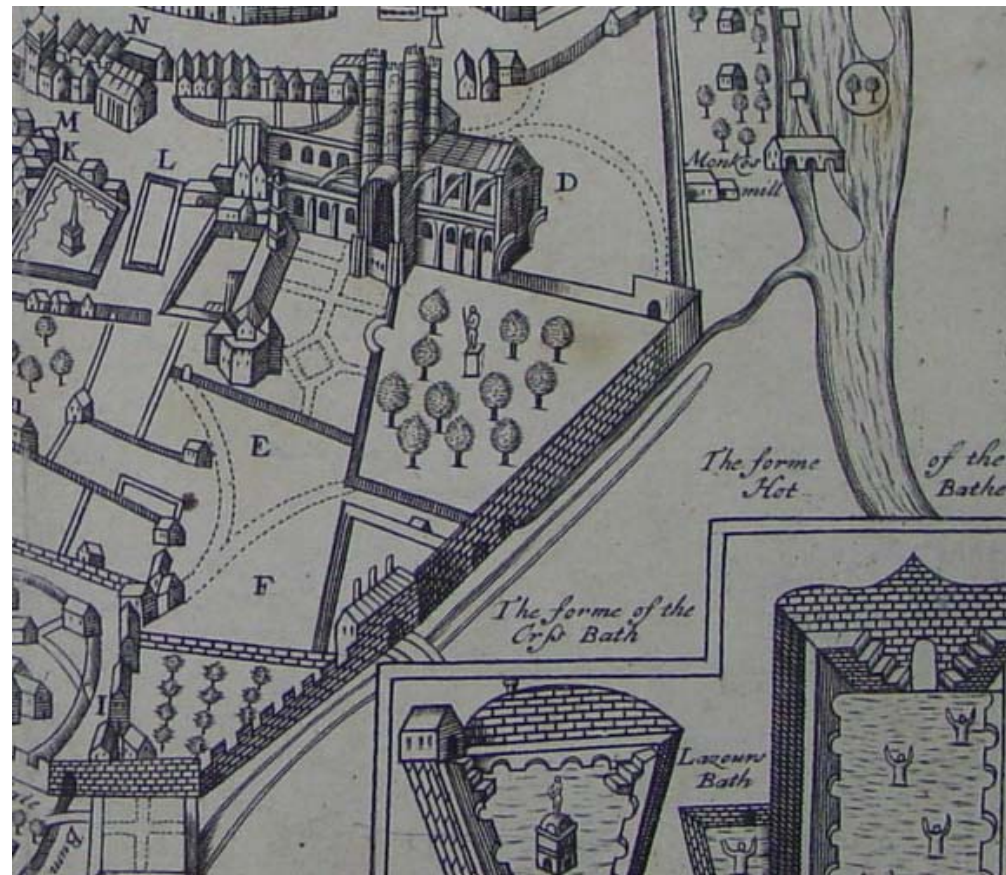


Fig. 11 1610 Speed Map

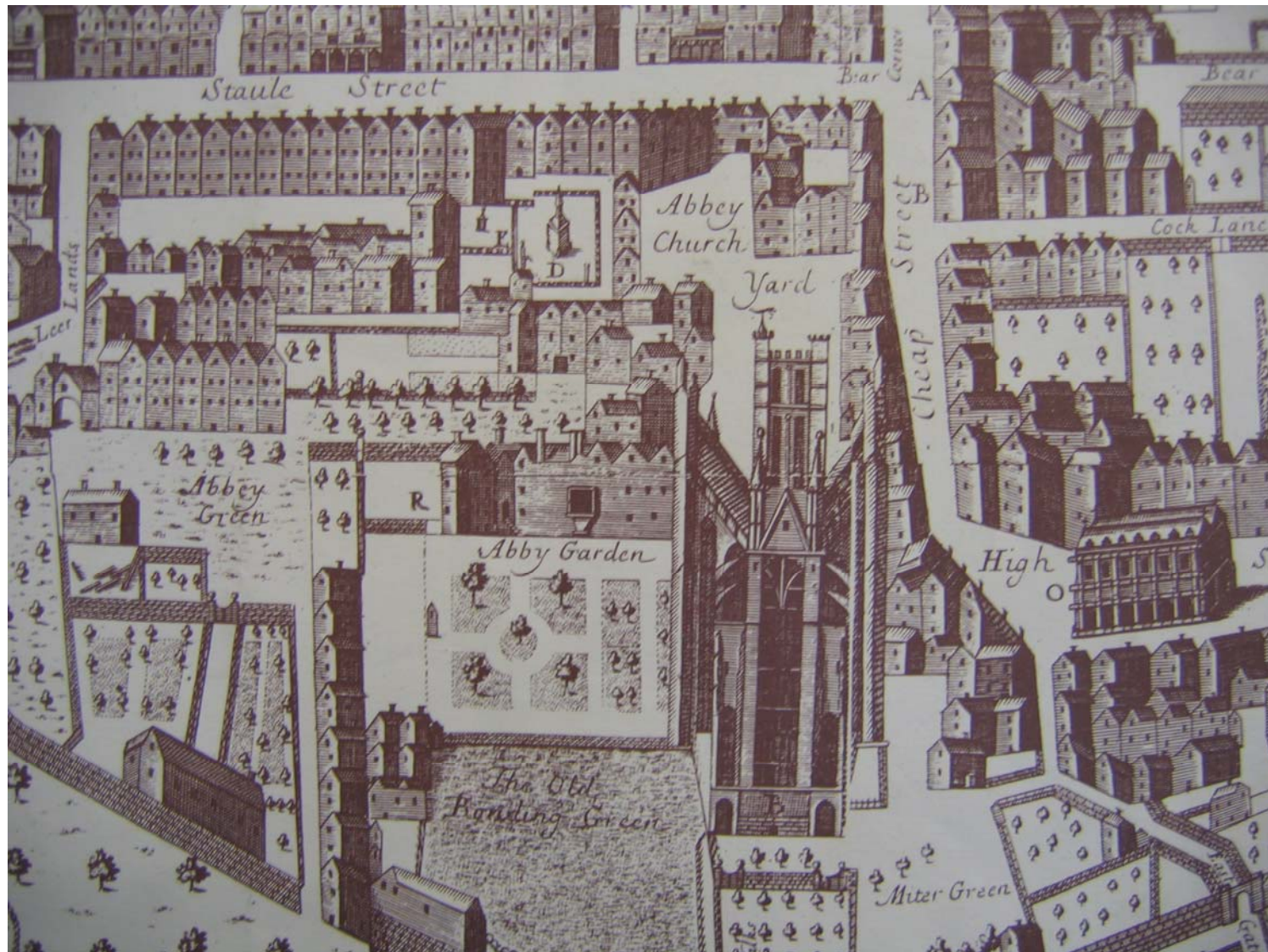


Fig. 12 Gilmore map 1694

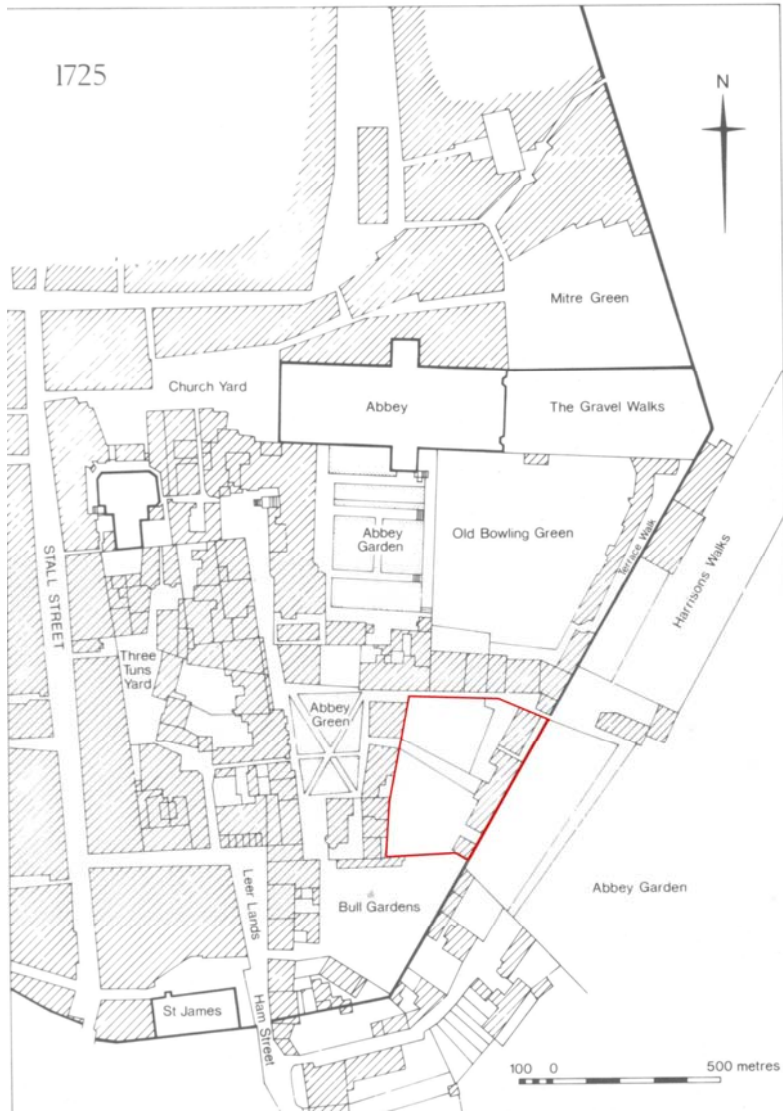


Fig. 13 1725 map (Peter Davenport)

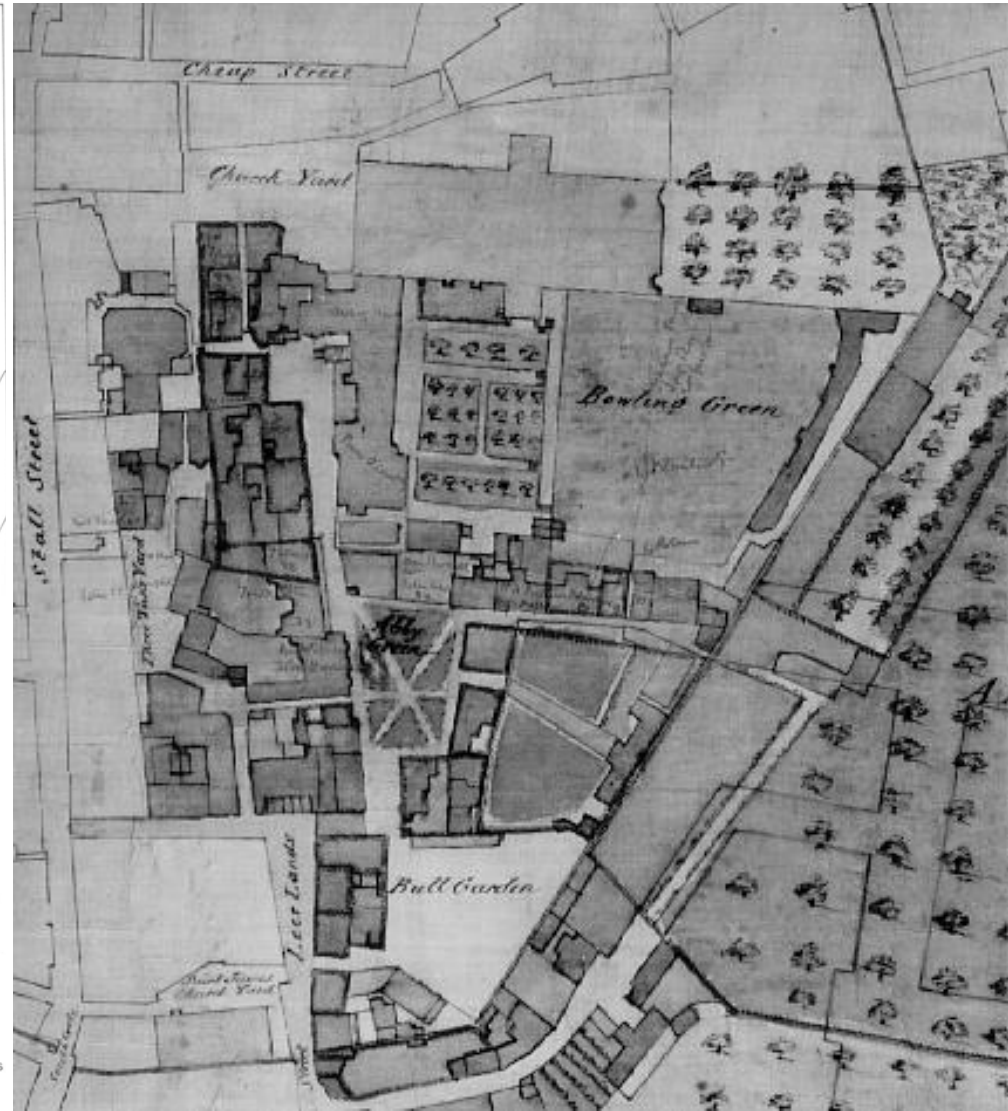


Fig. 14 Kingston Estate map 1725



Fig. 15 1816 Map of the City of Bath (BaRO)

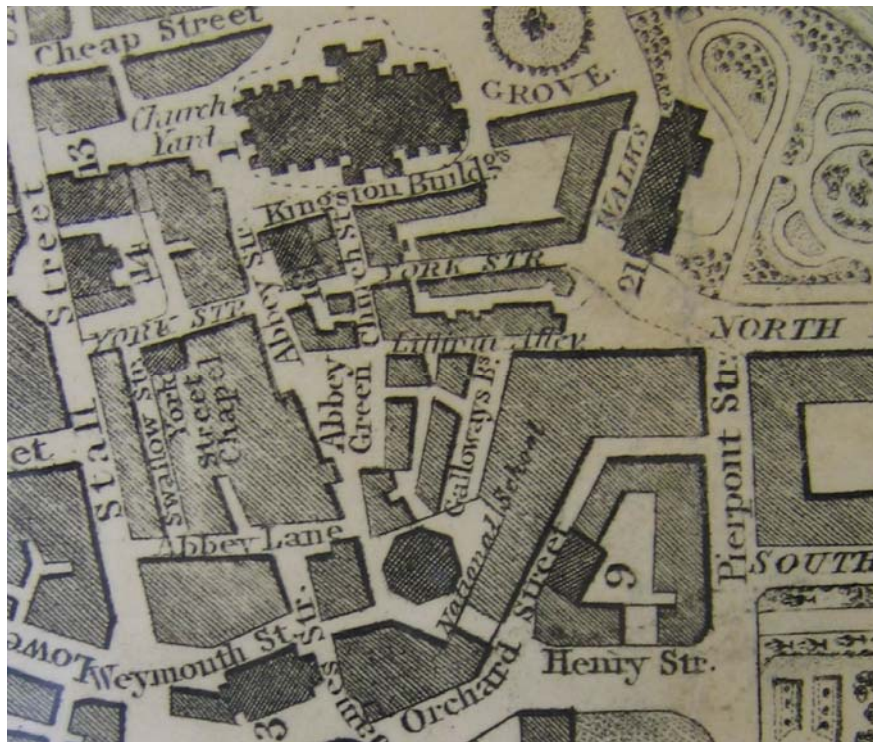


Fig. 16 1845 Map of the City of Bath (BaRO)

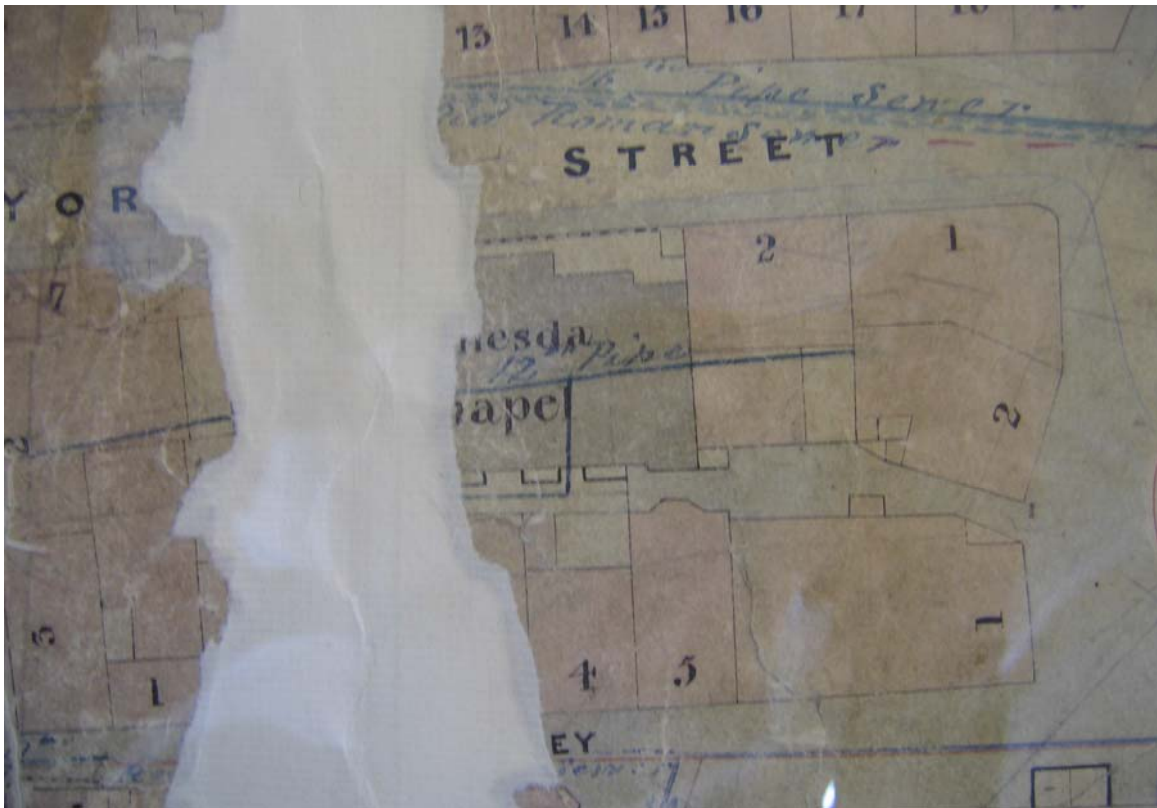


Fig. 17 BaRO: Cotterell 1852 map showing part of the chapel



Fig. 18 BaRO: OS 1886 XIV 5-10



Fig. 19 (B&NES SMR: ST 7564-37 ST751647 11 08 2000 nmr 18896-11)

Photographs of The Friends Meeting House November 2005



Img.1 North front



Img. 2 north-east window



Img. 3 east entrance



Img. 4 west entrance



Img. 5 west window



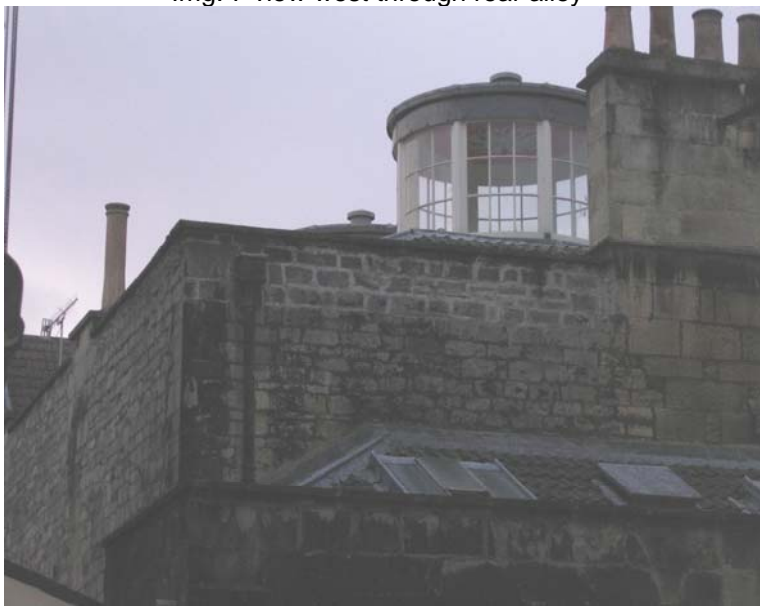
Img 6 central blind doorway



Img. 7 view west through rear alley



Img. 8 view east from Ralph Allens House



Img. 9 view east through rear alley



Img.10 rear alley and south wall



Img. 11 north-east end wall with railings



Img.12 remains of original railing



Img. 13 main hall looking west



Img. 14 main hall looking east



Img. 15 detail of cornice in main hall



Img. 16 detail of ceiling cornice in main hall



Img. 17 roof lantern



Img. 18 the two roof lanterns



Img. 19 doorway in south-east corner of main hall



Img. 20 fireplace on south wall of main hall



Img. 21 central door into main hall from west entrance and 'squint'



Img. 22 detail of 'squint'



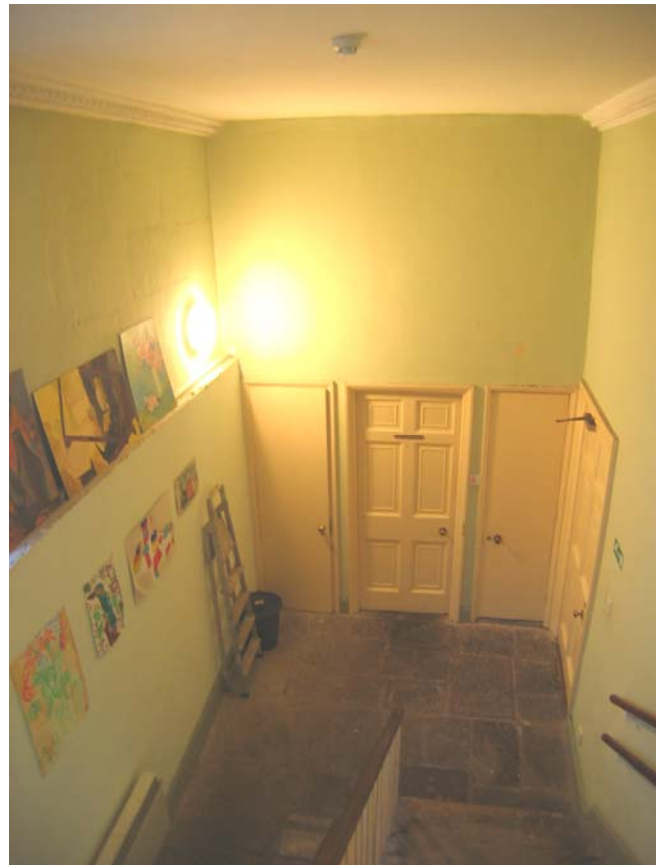
Img. 23 landing and staircase in west entrance lobby



Img. 24 1980s window in east wall overlooking Ralph Allen's town house



Img. 25 landing and staircase in west entrance lobby looking north



Img. 26 basement hallway at bottom of west entrance staircase



Img. 27 Top of staircase



Img. 28 detail of staircase fixing rods



Img. 29 hallway at base of stairs looking south to toilets



Img. 30 area beneath the staircase



Img. 31 Basement looking east



Img. 32 Basement looking west



Img. 33 Door into 'Tylers Room' (Ante-Room 2) north-west corner of basement



Img. 34 Central Gothic window in south wall of basement



Img. 35 detail of basement cornice



Img. 36 detail of basement cornice



Img. 37 Central rose in basement ceiling



Img. 38 Gothic fireplace in south wall of basement



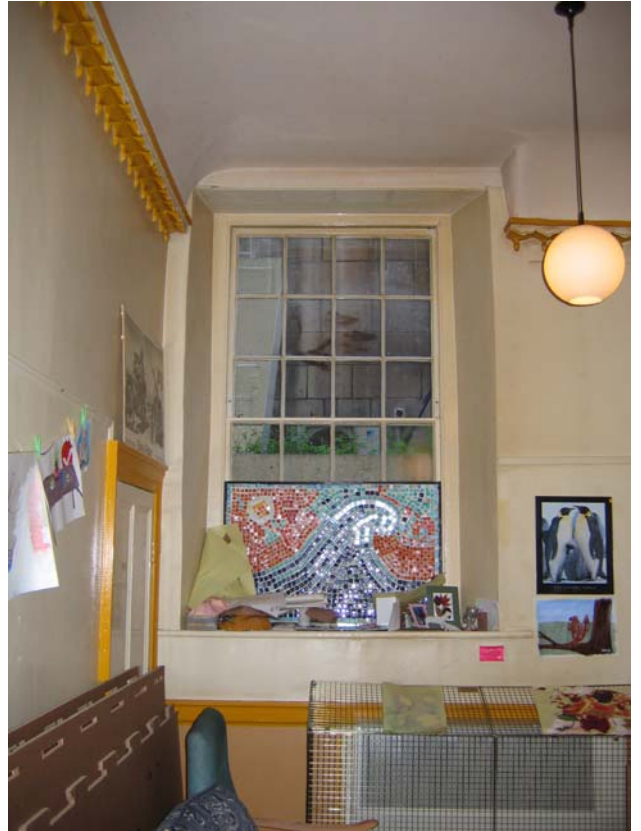
Img. 39 detail of Kitchen 1 door with 'peephole'



Img. 40 detail of Ante-Room 2 door with peephole



Img. 41 detail of basement cornice



Img. 42 detail of basement cornice



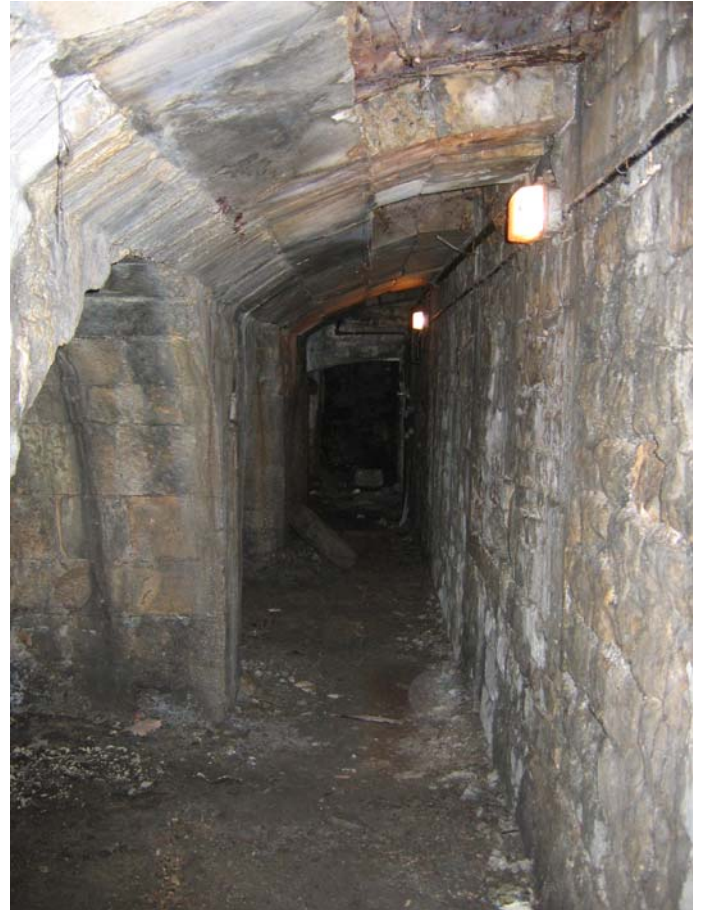
Img. 43 detail of door



Img. 44 detail of ... door with 'peephole' and deep panelled doorway



Img. 45 area at north front looking west



Img. 46 area at north front looking east



Img. 47 north wall with blocked window



Img. 48 one of the vaults