

ON BEING A HOUSE DETECTIVE:

The Study of Nos 145 and 147 High Street, Blakeney

By Michael Lee

During the autumn of 1998, under the auspices of UEA, the Society ran a 10 session course led by Mike Brackenbury to study English Vernacular Architecture. The course objective was to make a practical study of a local village house in order to attempt an interpretation of the various phases of the building's life. Course members were introduced to the various techniques needed to undertake the study, including the preparation of plans from site measurements, the observation of the detail of both building and fittings, the use of sketches and photographs, and the potential of documentary records. No 145 in Blakeney High Street was selected for study thanks to the kind offer of Mrs Ruby Brown, and the adjoining property, No 147, was also examined courtesy of Mr and Mrs Peter Kenward. This article comments on the practical work and offers a personal interpretation of the building.

Practical Aspects

The interpretation of building phases needed accurate dimensional recording and drawings which was accomplished by 'teams' working both inside and outside the building. The dimensions obtained were then collated at the next course meeting enabling each person to complete their own plans. Photographs and sketches complemented these measurements.

The drawing up of the plans using team measurements showed a good correlation between interior and exterior dimensions although a number of errors were noted which needed correcting at the next site session. However, it was the superimposing of interior plans and cross-sections against the exterior outlines which produced the most satisfaction when the positions of main features, such as doors, windows, and roof angles, matched remarkably well. This was despite being able to measure some features, such as the roof, only by visual gauge and calculations, or by counting the brick courses in the gable; for example, two independent sets of calculations of roof height were 4 ½ inches different in 24 feet.

Many problems were encountered and from them lessons learnt for any other study that might be made. Perhaps the most important was omitting to define a common horizontal external datum at the outset. This would have enabled each team to use an identical base thus avoiding some of the problems of transferring dimensions that occurred during the early drawing sessions. Also, whilst having defined a building corner as the vertical external datum, it was difficult to verify most of the measurements from it by cross checks due to the close proximity of the adjacent site. Nevertheless, the 'errors' found were only in the region of 2 inches or so, some of which could be attributed to measuring not a flat wall but a flint one.

Some typical examples of the 17 drawings are shown here as they were produced for the study; they have not been re-drawn for publication and so some of the detail may not be clear.



Interpretation

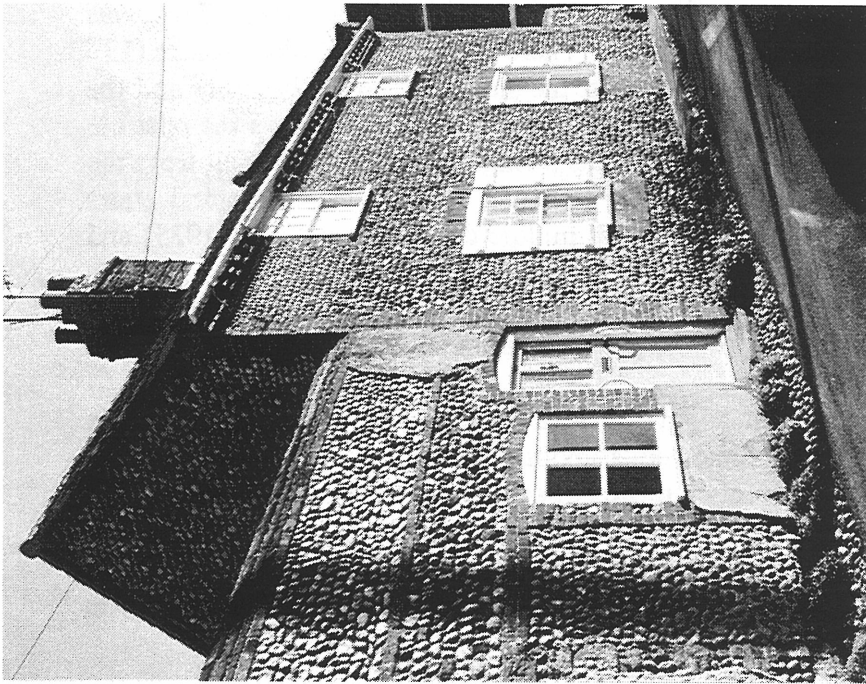
The interpretation given below is based purely on the plans produced and the observations made on site with, to date, no reference to any historical or legal documentation, including deeds, and census and tax returns, which could either confirm or contradict the conclusions.

No 145, the prime subject of the exercise, appears to have had at least five phases of existence since its erection:

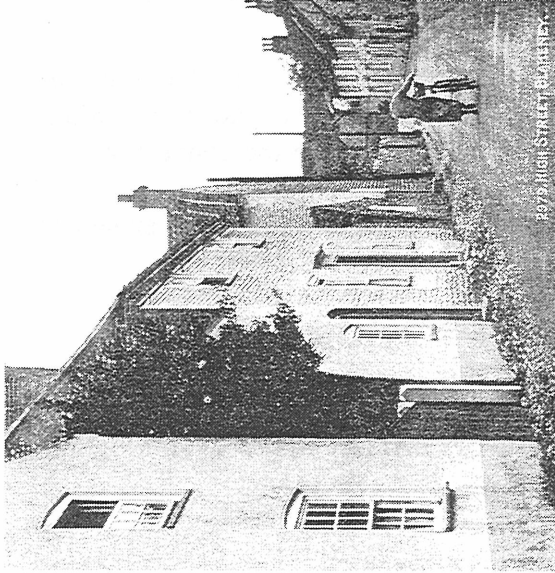
- 1 The original building of 30 ft x 17 ft with probably four rooms.
- 2 A rear extension giving an extra six rooms.
- 3 A split of the original building into two dwellings giving Nos 145 and 147.
- 4 The building of an L extension to the rear of 147 of (another) 30 ft x 17 ft.
- 5 A series of outbuildings/workshops to the north of 145 leading to the current extension.

1 The original building, thought to be 18th century and possibly dating to the 1740s, was by its construction of relatively high status for the area. There is evidence of older bricks (17th or 18th century) at the four corners which could suggest the site of an earlier building and the re-use of its footings, customary at that period. Interpretation drawing *Int 1* shows the possible major sequences and begs the question of whether it was a single or double dwelling from the outset. The answer is debatable but most probably two sets of back-to-back spiral stairs existed from the start. There is evidence of an external middle door (blocked after 1925) and of a door in the front window position of 147. The middle door could suggest a common entrance lobby to two dwellings at some time. Fittings such as the butterfly hinge illustrated and the design of some of the doors all support the possible dating.

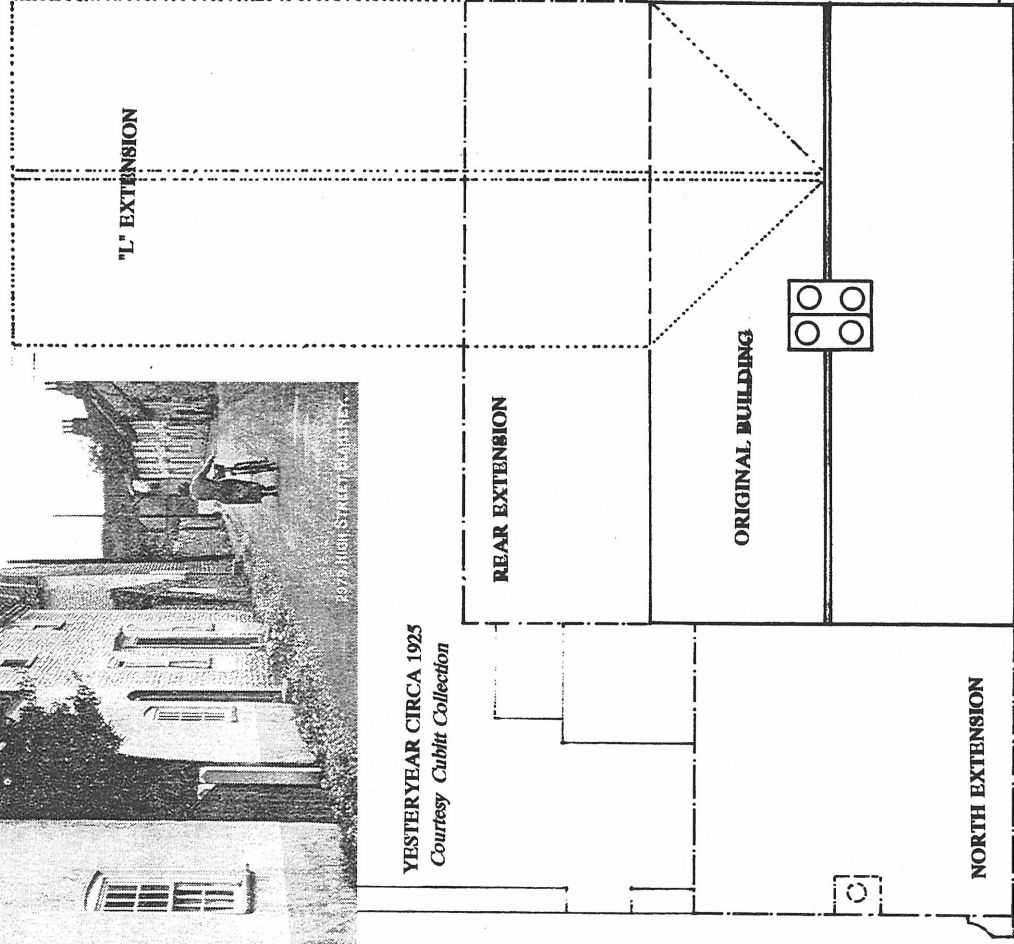
2 When the rear extension was built it gave at least an extra six rooms; the possible divisions for these are suggested by the dimensions about the building's centre line of the surviving walls. Perhaps this work was purely a means of achieving more space, as part of an expanding business for instance, or maybe it was in anticipation of the split when each dwelling could have three large rooms, 145 having two on the ground floor with 147 having two on the first floor as today. This, of course, presupposes that the original building was in fact a single dwelling at the time.



TODAY 1999



YESTERYEAR CIRCA 1925
Courtesy Cubitt Collection



4 It is of interest that the 'L' extension in the 19th century, probably built in the 1840s as a consequence of the general population growth taking place, is of the same dimensions as the original building. The width at least had to be the same to allow the roof pitch to marry with the original. This extension to the back of 147 broke into the previous rear extension. It could be presumed that it was at this point that the split with 145 occurred with the consequent effects, albeit minor, upon 145's interface at the rear with 147. However, the split appears to have been made earlier than this, in which case what was the reason for building the extension? Was it the intention to make the frontage 147 the 'lesser' building with reduced space to allow the 147 extension to be the prime abode with more rooms and space complete with yard and privacy away from the High Street? If given a 20 ft frontage it would have become a new separate dwelling with probably five rooms. However, judging from the position of the stairs two small dwellings would appear more likely – although it is known to have been in three dwellings in recent times.

This part of the building was examined but was not part of the full measured survey, which was confined to 145, and so it is not possible to make a more detailed appraisal. The only effect of the analysis above is to provide a possible explanation of why the 147 bathroom intrudes into 145 at first floor level and why the 145 larder makes a slight inroad into 147 as shown in drawing *Section DD*.

5 The north extension offers scope for some wild interpretation based upon the visible brick quoins, the front wall brick courses and the suggestion of an old roofline in the north wall. This area to the north of the building is similar in size to the original ground floor room and may have been part of a business working area. The current stove position aligns with an external brick feature suggesting the position of an open stove, for crab boiling perhaps, despite the distance from the Quay. In turn, this could have been covered by a rudimentary roof and subsequently extended and raised, probably in three stages. At some point the alley separating the house from the working area was covered in, leading no doubt to thoughts of erecting today's structure. Drawing *Int 2* shows these stages and the corner sections which may indicate why the bricks are set up to the present day 'buttress' and not to the corner. Does the section shown in the middle plan reflect that the corner may in effect have been chamfered to provide easier vehicle access to the yard at the back? This would then account for the current bulge in the corner of the room as being the residue of that structure when the 'buttress' was built to fill the corner of the building.

Conclusion

The commentary above shows the difficulty of interpretation and indicates that further study of the building structure and methods is necessary to provide another set of clues. To date there has been no reference to documentation, which ought to provide some indication of important dates and possible usage which, in turn, could help to put the sequences in better order.

The experience has been intriguing and tantalising – a good advert for any other building course put on by the Society!

Michael Lee is a retired mechanical engineer who worked in the defence industry.



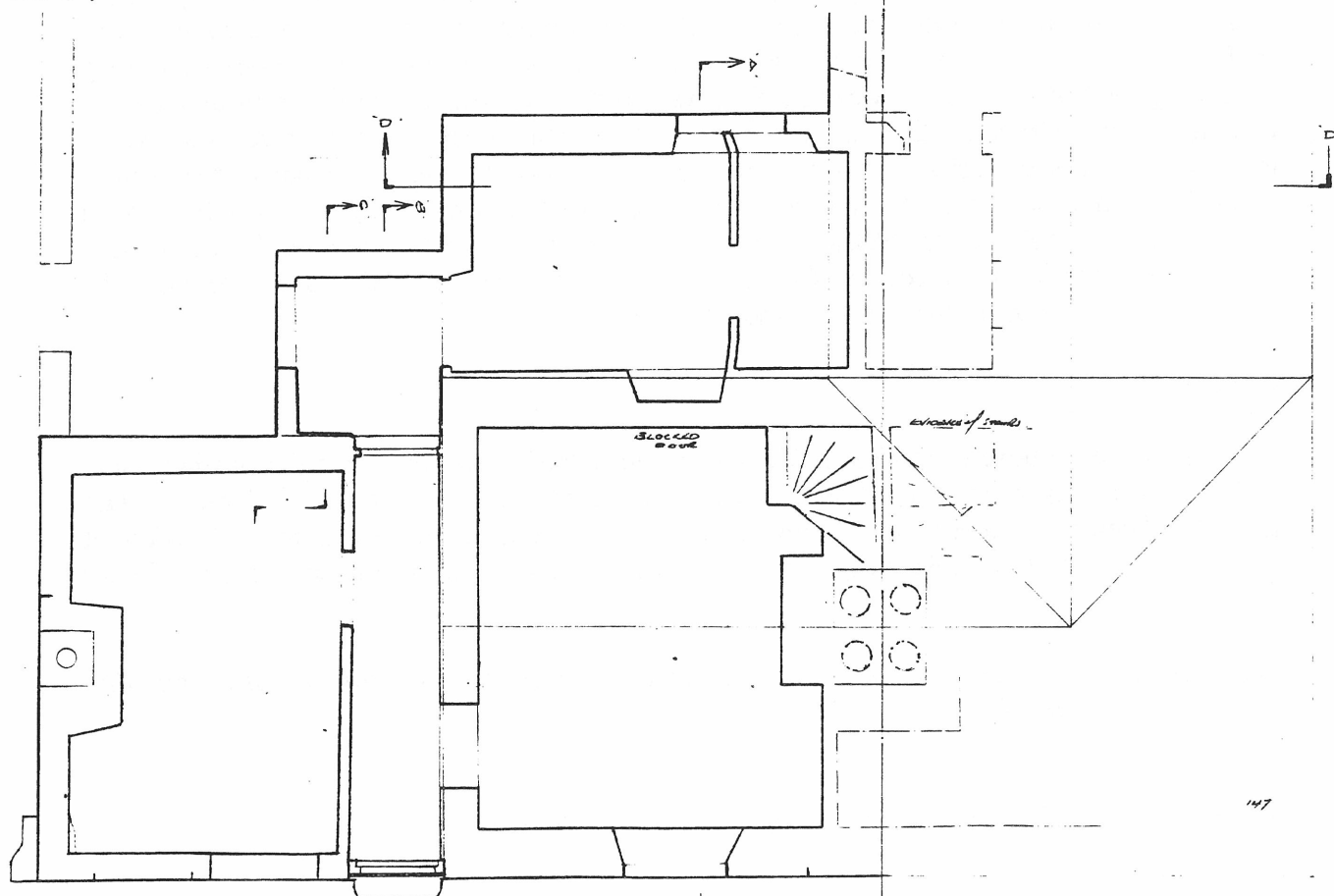
145 HIGH STREET.
BLAKENY.
MAY 1898.



2.

FRONT ELEVATION

1:50



145 HIGH STREET.
BLAKENY

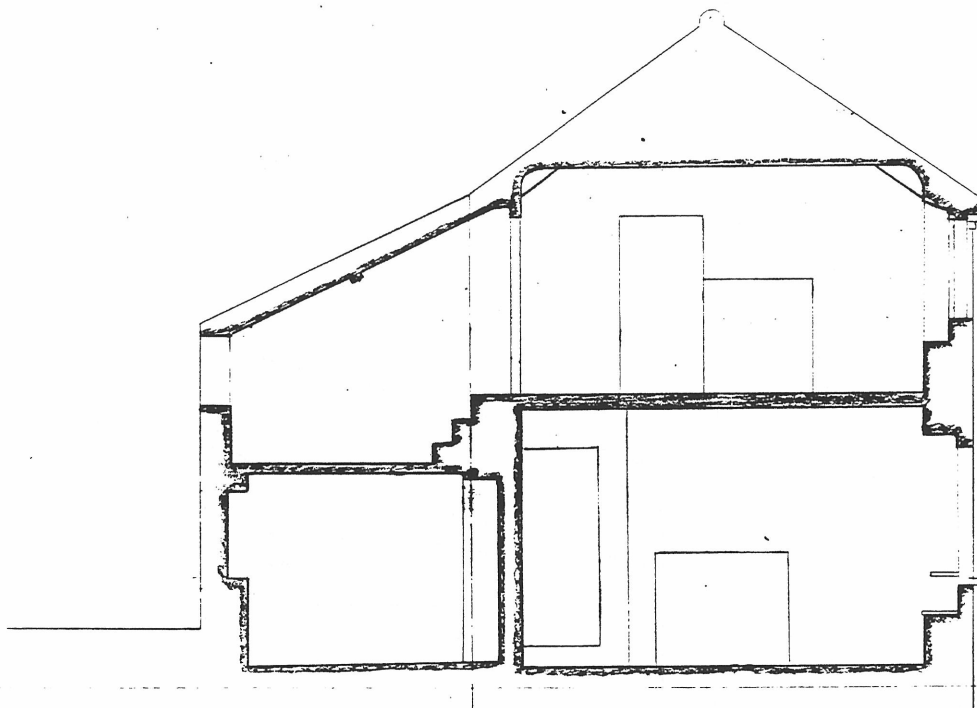


2



PLAN - SECTION THRO'
GROUND FLOOR

1:50



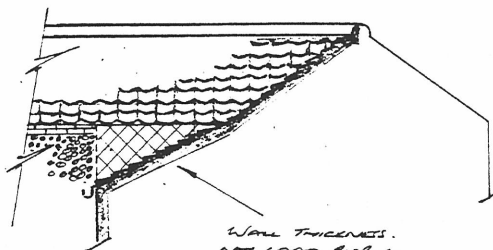
DATUM

145 HIGH STREET
BLAKENEY

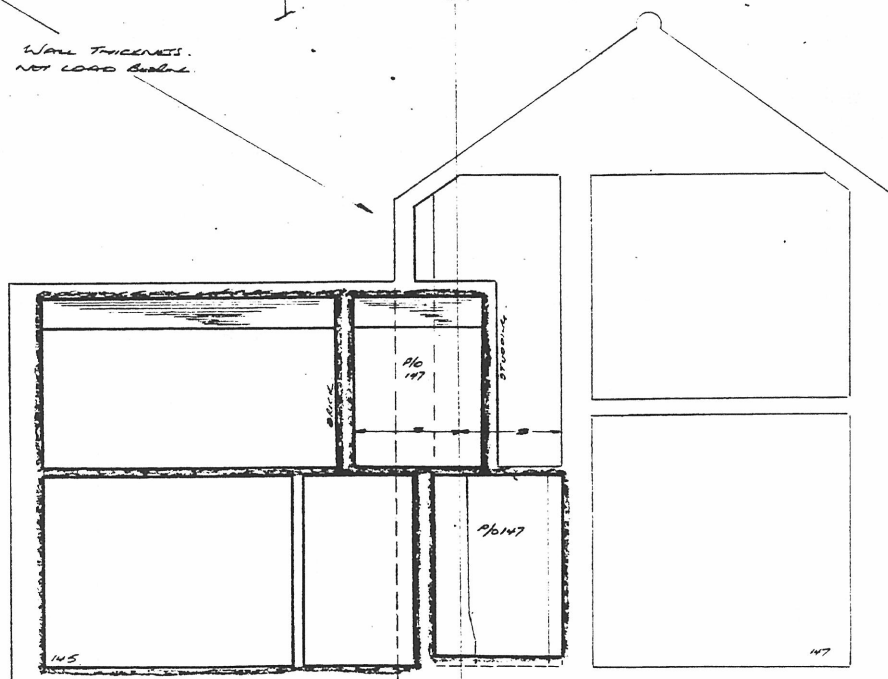
NJCL 98

SECTION AA

1:50



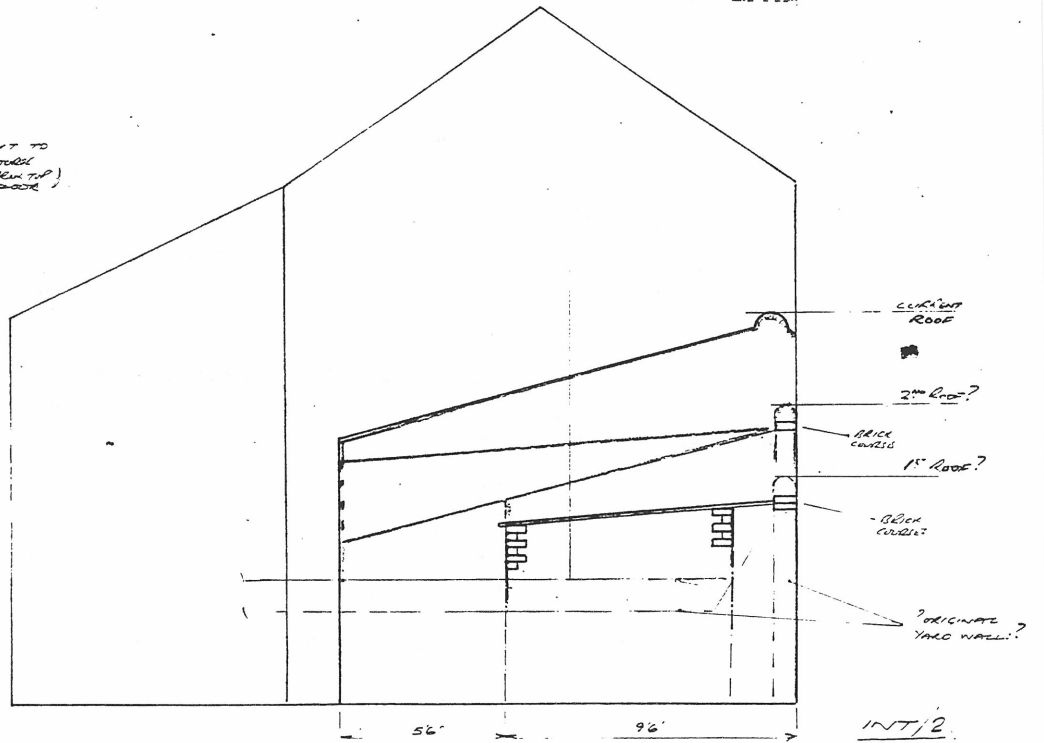
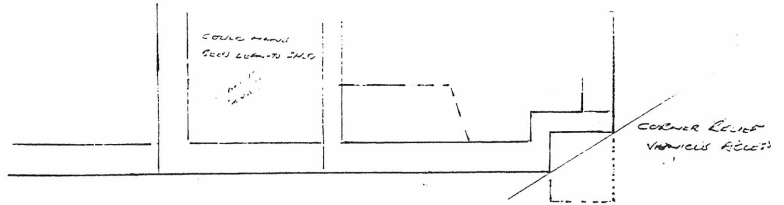
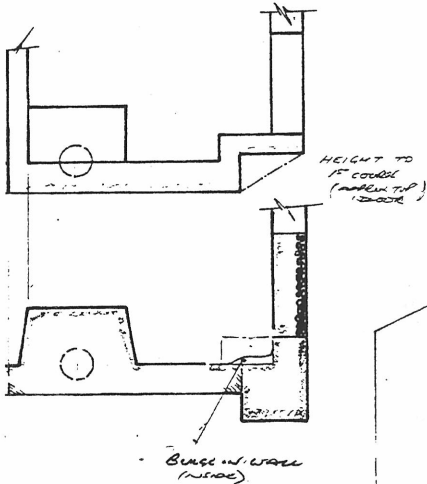
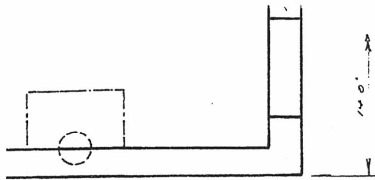
WALL THICKNESS.
NET LOAD BUILDING



145 HIGH STREET
BLAKENEY
NJCL 98

SECTION DD

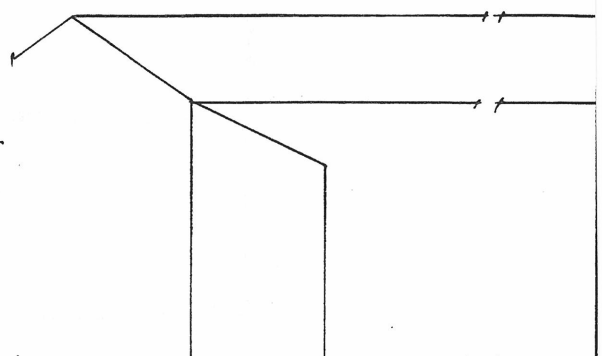
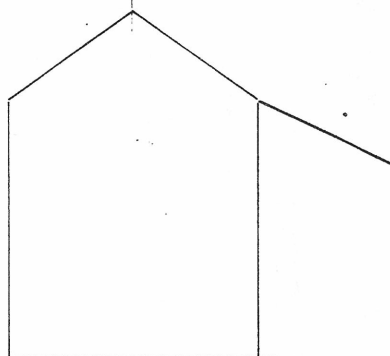
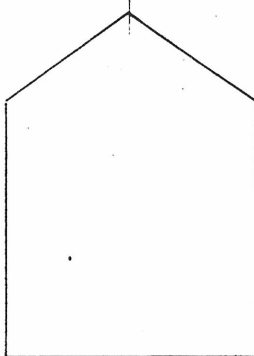
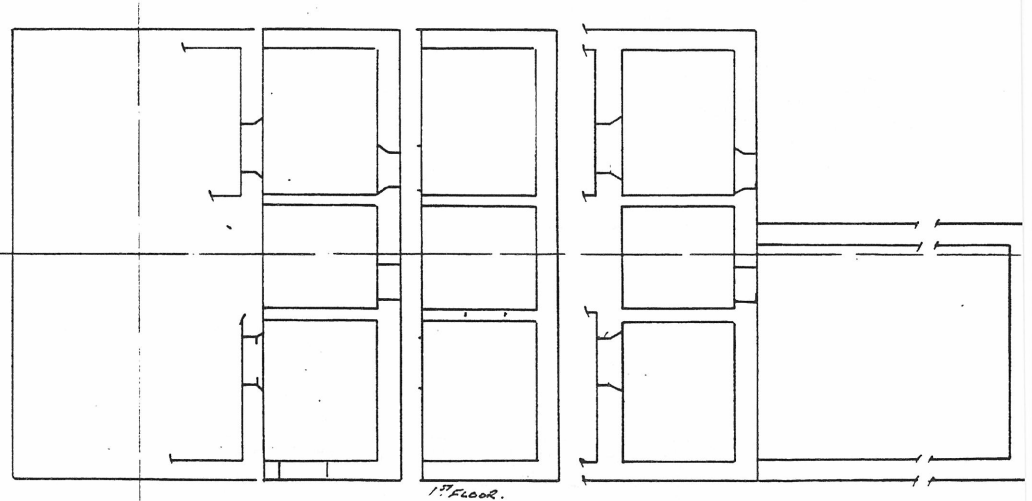
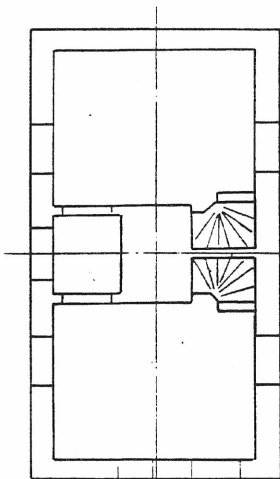
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145 HIGH STREET
BRACKNETH
MAY '98.

NORTH EXTENSION.

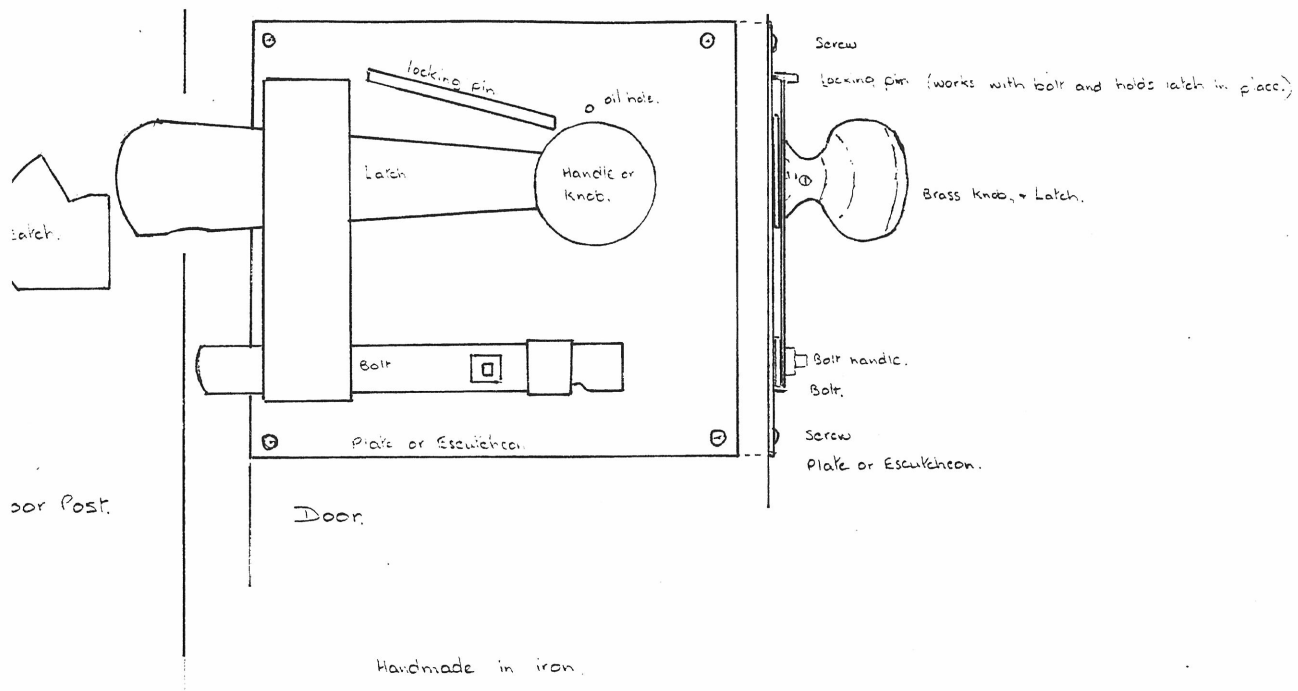
1:50



1:50

INT 1

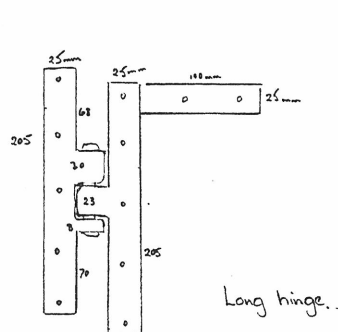
100:1.



Handmade in iron.
Tumbler bit latch lock.

KMF

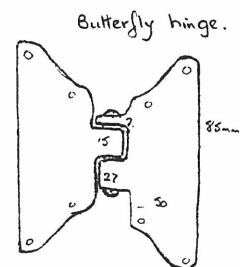
LOCK ON STAIRCASE DOOR ACTUAL SIZE FRONTAL & SIDE



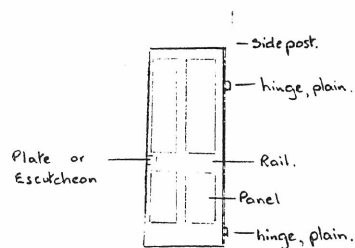
hand made in iron.

NOT to scale
← approx 1/4
" 1/2
↓

Top & Bottom Hinges
on lounge door.



handmade in iron.



STAIR DOOR TO SCALE 50%

KMF

