HAVERSTONE PROPERTIES LTD

A statement justifying the demolition of
BUILDING 3 TALBOT MILL
Ellesmere Street, Hulme, Manchester

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PART 1 Background

1.0 TALBOT MILL

1.1 Talbot Mill is not Listed but is within the Castlefield Conservation Area.

1.2 Revised plans for conversion of the Mill to residential use are being prepared by the architects Halliday Meecham and will shortly be submitted for Planning and Conservation Area consents. The proposed scheme requires the demolition of the brick shed built against the northern boundary of the Mill's yard which has become known as Building 3. The Council has asked for the applications to be accompanied by a statement justifying this demolition and the erection of a new building in its place.

1.3 In this statement I quote from an Archaeological Desk-based Assessment of the Mill complex which was prepared in January 2005 by Oxford Archaeology North, which contains full details of the documentary sources. As copies of the Assessment are in the possession of the Council I will not duplicate the information by quoting the sources here.[1] I will also quote from my July 2003 assessment of the historic, architectural and environmental values of the five buildings in the Mill's courtyard, which included Building 3. The Council has copies of this also. Nothing I say in this present statement contradicts anything in either of these earlier assessments.

1.4 In this paper I have used the numbering of buildings shown by Oxford Archaeology North on their figure 10. This is different from the numbering in my 2003 assessment, but Building 3 is the same in both.

2.0 SUMMARISED HISTORY OF THE MILL

2.1 The Bridgewater Canal from Worsley to Manchester was completed in 1764 and the basin opening off it which forms Talbot Mill's west boundary was probably built in about 1838. The development of Hulme as an industrial area with its associated workers' housing began a few decades before that, though Ellesmere Street was not laid out until just before c.1855 when Talbot Mill was built.

2.2 A detailed history of the Mill was included in the Archaeological Assessment, but a summary may be useful here. The Mill was built and occupied until 1930 by J. & E. Waters and Co. who produced sewing cotton and a few small wares such as braid. In 1897 the firm joined with others to form English Sewing Cotton Ltd. but continued to trade under its own name. In 1930 sewing cotton and braid ceased to be produced at Talbot Mill, which was then empty for a few years. Thereafter it was

[1] The full professional archive was compiled in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines. The paper and digital archive will be, or has already been, deposited with the Greater Manchester Textile Mill Survey, with a synthesis (in the form of an index to the archive and the report) with the Greater Manchester SMR.

subdivided and tenanted by a succession of small companies involved in a variety of different businesses, some in the textile and clothing trades, others unconnected.

3.0 THE EXISTING BUILDINGS

Building 1 Five storeys of 12 bays, aligned north/south, running for most of its length along the canal basin. Proposed for conversion, with two additional storeys on the roof.

Building 2 Five storeys of 10 bays, aligned east/west on Ellesmere Street. Proposed for conversion, with two additional storeys on the roof.

Building 3 The subject of this assessment. Proposed for demolition.

Building 4 Built in 1890 on the north end of Building 4 to house the vertical beam engine (no longer present) which provided the Mill's steam power. Proposed for conversion into a house.

Building 5 A single-storey structure built at some date between 1948-52, possibly as a workshop. Of no historic or architectural interest. Proposed for demolition.

Building 6 A tiny two-storey time-keeper's house, probably dating from the Mill's erection. Proposed for conversion into a caretaker's office.

Building 7 A brick shed built in the 1930s or later. Of no historic or architectural interest. Proposed for demolition.

Building 8 Another shed built against Building 7 at a date between 1977-89. Of no historic or architectural interest. Proposed for demolition.

Part 2 Building 3

4.0 DESCRIPTION

4.1 The following description is copied from paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 of my July 2003 assessment of the Mill buildings. I have interpolated comments in square brackets to give information established subsequently by Oxford Archaeology North.

4.2 'This is an exceedingly ramshackle building which is approaching collapse. Its extraordinary history of constant change explains why. It originated some time between 1848 and 1881 [probably when the Mill was built in c.1855, possibly later but before 1881] as a simple rectangular building, free standing on three sides but with its short east gable-end abutting another building. By 1889 it had expanded with a complex of buildings along the entire length of its southern wall, and with the Mill chimney growing out of its middle. Some now demolished part must therefore have been the boiler house. Its northern wall had also ceased to be free-standing, having become a party wall with a building belonging to Worsley Mills. Its western gable wall was also enclosed, by some sheds. By 1948 it remained basically the same, but the buildings on its western wall had gone and the chimney had been demolished, probably retaining its bottom 3 or 4 metres. By 1954 a largish building attached to its south-western wall was demolished, including half the circumference of the chimney's stump, leaving fragments of the other half embedded in the surviving wall. By 1977 a building attached to its south-eastern wall had been demolished. Some time later Worsley Mill attached along its north side was demolished. The result of all this is that every part of the external walls that are now visible were at some time internal walls. Their patches, infillings, scars, altered windows and blocked doors are an incomprehensible result, as is the shakiness of the whole building.'

4.3 'The building that survives today consists of two connected slate-roofed ranges running east/west parallel to each other. The northern range, presumably the original building dating from before 1881, is the longer and its roof has a central louvred ventilator along its length, supported on king-post trusses. The shorter southern range, presumably[2] dating from between 1881-9, is supported by queen-post trusses. Because the building has been so extensively altered, it is impossible to discover what its original and later functions could have been. The compiler of the 1992 record sheet was apparently equally baffled because the building is not mentioned in it.' [The archaeologists now suggest that it may have housed a bleaching plant. See paragraph 5 below.]

5.0 PURPOSE OF THE BUILDING

5.1 One of the more revealing documents uncovered by the archaeologists was a plan of the Mill complex surveyed in 1911 for insurance purposes. The

[2] I say presumably because it is impossible to be sure that an earlier building had not been demolished and rebuilt in the same position. Judging from everything's decrepit condition, that is unlikely.

archaeologists say Building 3 "appears to be shown as a multi-storey structure, with a single-storey extension appended to the south elevation. The buildings" [i.e. the two joined ranges of Building 3] "are not labelled as to their function, although the single storey structure is fitted with louvre vents and skylights along the roof, suggesting that it was not a warehouse." It is possible that the building is now lower than it was in 1911, but more probable that an internal floor, possibly a mezzanine, has been removed. "The building contains some evidence for power transmission in the form of surviving bearing boxes, although it is not immediately obvious as to how the power was delivered. Indeed, it is possible that the structure housed its own source of motive power. It is suggested that Structure 3 was dedicated to the bleaching and dressing operations. The configurement of the structure, and the presence of louvre ventilation, is consistent with the requirements of a bleaching plant, whilst the positioning of former buildings around the chimney hints at the secondary use of hot gasses for elements of the bleaching process." Later in the archaeologists' assessment they sum up their consideration of the building as "the vestiges of a putative bleaching plant."

6.0 HISTORIC VALUE

6.1 *All* old buildings have some historic value because they say something of the lives and activities of the past. Building 3 was obviously a part of the working operations of Talbot Mill, and possibly its bleaching plant. It is hard to say how much historic value that gives it, but the minor role of bleaching in the preparation of sewing cotton, the degree of uncertainty as to whether this was indeed the function of the building, combined with the fact that the Mill as a whole has been judged of insufficient historic value to justify its being Listed, must surely mean that any historic value is extremely slight.

6.2 It must also be remembered that if Building 3 were to be preserved it would have to be found a new use, and this would inevitably involve the obliteration of at least some of the features which have suggested its possible original use to the archaeologists. If Talbot Mill was going to be preserved as an example of a working mill then Building 3 should probably be preserved as part of it, but it is not, the Mill is to be converted to residential use.

6.3 I think it is reasonable to conclude that Building 3 has insufficient historic interest or value to justify its preservation.

7.0 ARCHITECTURAL OR VISUAL VALUE

7.1 Clearly the building has no architectural or visual values whatever. It probably never had beauty or charm and certainly has none now. At the moment it is an eyesore. Even if repaired (which would unavoidably mean some highly speculative 'restoration') it would be an ugly and unwelcome neighbour for the proposed and existing flats around it.

8.0 CONDITION OF THE BUILDING

8.1 I have not been able to examine the roof covering or the louvred vent because no wise person would now venture onto the roof, but I think it is highly likely that both have reached the end of the lives. Repair would probably involve almost complete replacement. The roof timbers are rotted and some of them propped at their ends where they are built into the walls. Below the roofs everything is so decayed and neglected, with walls patched and filled, with ugly new windows crudely inserted and old ones walled up with concrete blocks, that Building 3 is a mess approaching collapse.

8.2 Repair, at very great expense, is of course possible, but it is hard to see what function the building would then serve, and repair combined with conversion would involve so many further changes that an almost entirely new building would result, inevitably falsifying the historic record further.

9.0 CONCLUSION TO PART 2

9.1 Building 3 is not Listed. Its extremely slight historic value, its lack of any architectural or visual interest, its extreme dilapidation, and the fact that repair and conversion to some new use would require such substantial changes that it would finish as an almost entirely new building, lead inevitably to the conclusion that demolition would not only be justified, but beneficial. The building disfigures the Conservation Area and blights the nearby new housing. Its demolition would benefit both.

Part 3 The proposed new building

10.0 CONTEXT

10.1 The new building had to be designed in a context which was dominated by two utterly different groups of buildings: the two nineteenth century blocks of Talbot Mill, which have elevations of brickwork pierced by windows, and the flats recently built by Urban Splash, which have elevations of concrete frames with huge sheets of glass. The Mill's elevations are of low architectural quality but Urban Splash's are of high architectural quality. The Urban Splash block to the west of Talbot Mill is of roughly equal height to it, but the block to the north is substantially higher.

10.2 The Urban Splash buildings make excellent neighbours for the adjacent Mills. Although very different in elevational treatment, they are designed in the same tradition of straight-forward functionalism, with repetitive elements eschewing any of the classical 'compositional' devices such as cornices, emphasised bases, and so on.

10.3 However, not everybody wants to live in flats which are virtually glass boxes, so there was clearly much sense in Haverstone providing flats with a ratio of window to wall which many potential occupants would prefer. Presumably for this reason, and to differentiate the Haverstone development from Urban Splash's, Halliday Meecham designed their new building with brick elevations pierced by window openings (which, I would guess, will provide much more convenient ventilation).

11.0 ADDITIONS TO THE MILL BUILDINGS

11.1 Externally, the main alterations proposed for the two existing blocks of Talbot Mill are the construction of two storeys of flats on their roofs. Clearly this would only be acceptable if it were immediately obvious that they *are* additions, and not part of the original Mill. It was also necessary that they should be visually distinct from them and not attract attention to themselves. In other words, they should be as un-noticeable as possible. This has been achieved by setting them well back from the Mill's facades, and by designing them with all-glass facades. (They are somewhat similar to the Urban Splash elevations, but were, I believe, designed well before these were built). In my opinion they are a model of how this type of addition to an old building should be done.

12.0 WORSLEY STREET

12.1 The new block will continue the line of Burton Place. I assume that Burton Place will have glass elevations like the other Urban Splash blocks. The Haverstone block will, in contrast, have a brick facing.

13.0 THE COURTYARD

13.1 It has always been obvious that Talbot Mill's courtyard has the potential to become a delightful place if the rubbishy buildings which currently occupy it were removed. It is proposed that the only attractive one of these, the old timekeeper's house, will remain, being converted into a caretaker's office. When I first saw the Mill the courtyard was an incoherent space due to the lack of enclosure. On its west side this has now been splendidly rectified by the Urban Splash flats. The north side is currently closed by Building 3. Even making every possible allowance for its unpleasantly botched and derelict condition, it doesn't work as a visual enclosure because it is too low. This is made worse by the fact that it is at the bottom of a sloping site, and worse still by the fact that Urban Splash's Timber Wharf building towers above it.

13.2 The proposed new block will be slightly lower than the existing Mill buildings, and have only one storey on its roof instead of the two proposed for the existing blocks. This means that the courtyard will be surrounded by buildings all of which will be of roughly the same height, and in scale with the space. I think it will be a most attractive environment.

14.0 BRITANNIA MILL BASIN

14.1 At the moment the basin is a mess, little more than a rubbish dump under a few feet of water. (It is, however, noticeably clear water and presumably adequately clean.) It is obvious that rubbish dumping will continue until the Basin is supervised by living-room windows. It is equally obvious that once this occurs it will become a place of enchantment. In addition, Halliday Meecham propose a quite large but protected terrace at one end of the basin, so contrived that it maintains the enclosure of the courtyard.

15.0 CONCLUSION

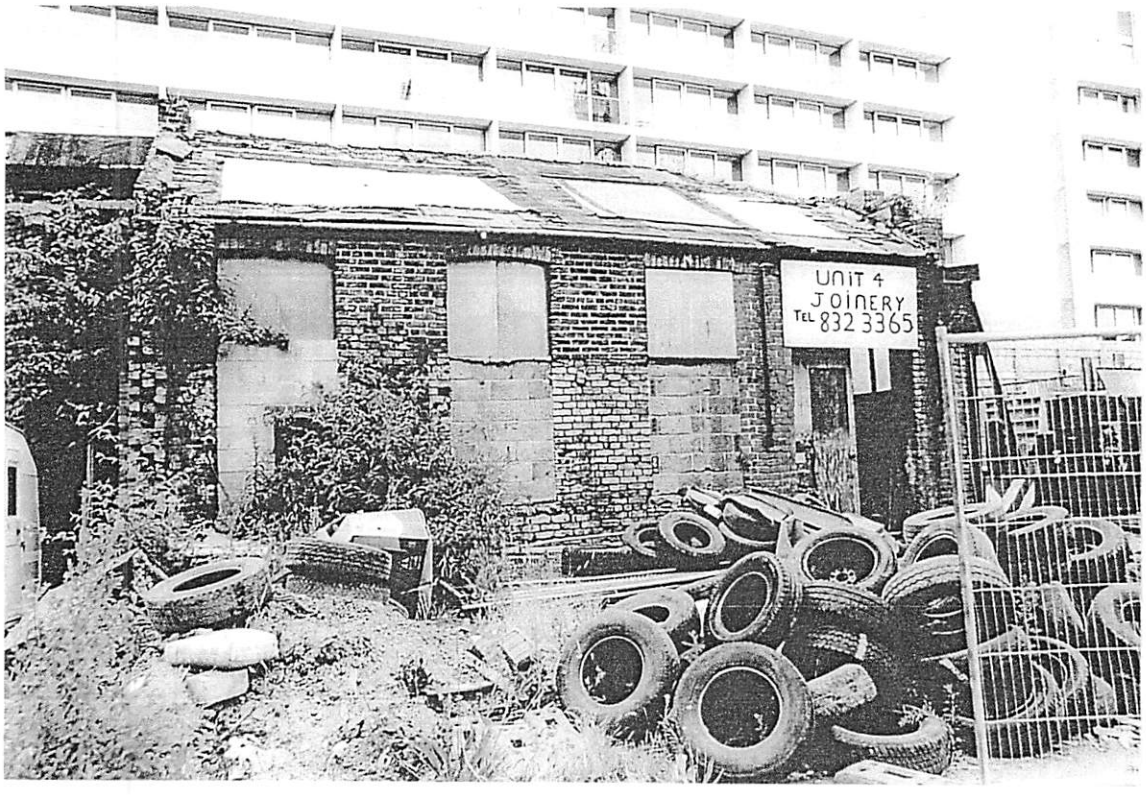
15.1 As I stated in the Conclusion to Part 2 of this Assessment, Building 3 disfigures the Conservation Area and blights the nearby new housing. Its demolition would benefit both. In addition to that, its demolition, and that of the ugly twentieth century buildings in the yard, will allow the construction of a new block which will transform the courtyard into a delightful and memorable space. It will add to Manchester's housing stock, continue the rehabilitation of the district and enhance the Conservation Area. These are great benefits. I can see no disadvantages.

BUILDING 3

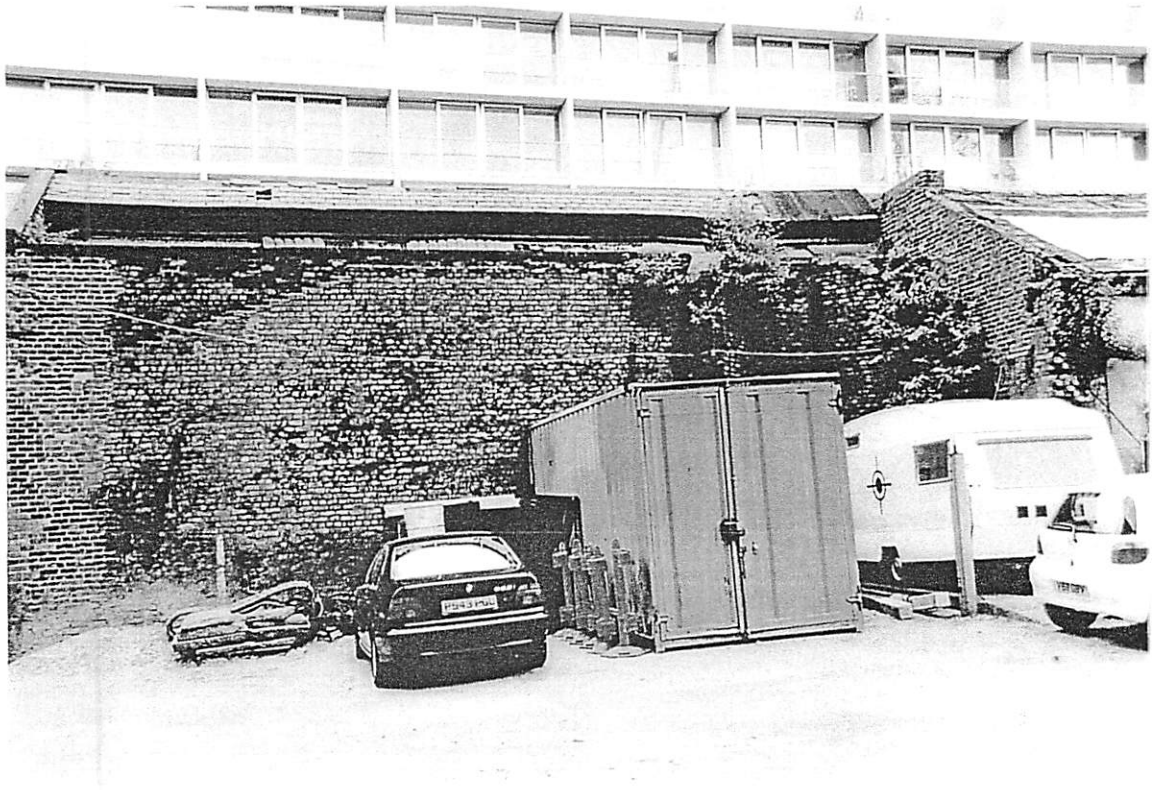


View from above

East end of south wall

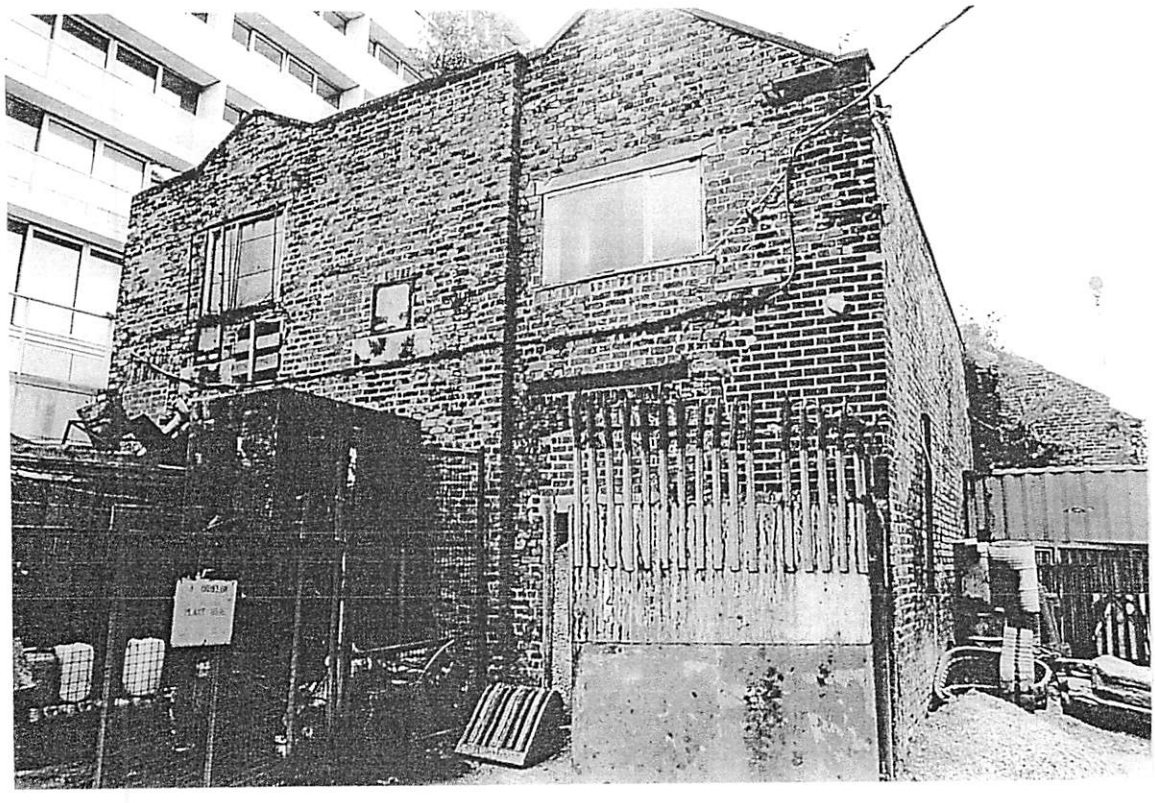


BUILDING 3

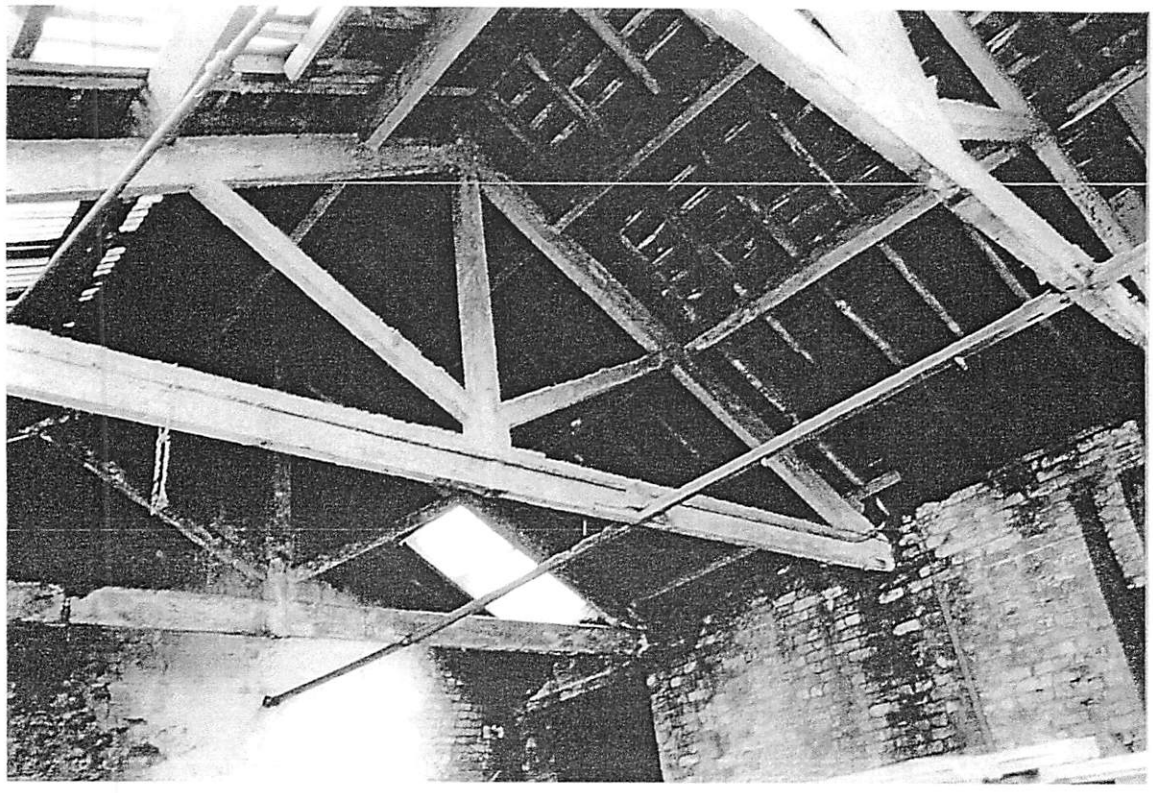


West end of south wall

West gable wall



BUILDING 3



King-post trusses in north range

Queen-post trusses in south range

