

LWS
Heritage

Historic Building Investigation and Watching Brief Report

Chorlton Leisure
Centre, Manchester
Road, Manchester

Client:

Caddick Construction

Technical Report:

Lewis Stitt

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Summary

Caddwick Construction has obtained planning consent from Manchester City Council to carry out the erection of two 5-storey residential buildings comprising 50 dwellings (Class C3) with ancillary communal facilities; and, associated access, car parking, bin store, amenity space and landscaping, following the demolition of the existing building (Planning Ref: 136791/FO/2023).

In order to secure archaeological interests, Manchester City Council attached a condition to the planning consent that required a programme of archaeological investigation in advance of, and during, the redevelopment of the site. Following consultation with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS), it was recommended that an appropriate scheme of archaeological works would comprise a Level 3-type historic building investigation of the former Chorlton Leisure Centre as an appropriate record of any historical interest.

In July 2023, Salford Archaeology was commissioned by Caddwick Construction to undertake the recommended investigation and fulfil the archaeological planning obligations. Due to Salford Archaeology's closure LWS Heritage undertook the watching brief during the demolition and ground breaking of the baths in July 2024. This report incorporates both elements to fulfil the planning condition.

The historic building investigation concluded that the public baths was first constructed between 1922 and 1929 and was originally called Chorlton Baths. The land which the baths occupy was previously undeveloped, located between Manchester Road and the Chester Line Railway.

The baths comprised a central two-storey office building with separate female and male baths, with changing rooms and a boiler house to the rear. Baths during the 19th century were constructed due to the increasing popularity and ideology change of the promotion of cleanliness to combat disease. However, this became less relevant during the early 20th century as individual houses were fitted with a water supply. At this point the function of baths became more used for leisure, sport and fitness.

By the late 20th century the buildings had undergone several changes with the construction of squash courts to the rear and the male pool having been infilled and used as sports courts. During this time Chorlton Baths was renamed as Chorlton Leisure Centre. The centre remained in use until its closure in 2015 when it became vacant and was subject to squatters, vandalism, and a fire in 2023.

The historical building investigation of Chorlton Leisure Centre and watching brief has provided a valuable opportunity to record an example of a 20th century public baths to mitigate any loss of historic fabric as part of the redevelopment. It has also enabled a review of the available documentary material to be combined with the physical evidence embedded in the historic fabric to produce a detailed narrative of the building's development, enhancing the questions posed by the North West Regional Framework questions.

1. Introduction

1.1 Planning Background

Caddwick Construction has obtained planning consent from Manchester City Council to carry out the erection of two 5-storey residential buildings comprising 50 dwellings (Class C3) with ancillary communal facilities; and, associated access, car parking, bin store, amenity space and landscaping, following the demolition of the existing building (Planning Ref: 136791/FO/2023).

Chorlton Leisure Centre was first constructed between 1922 and 1929 and was originally called Chorlton Baths. The land which the baths occupy was previously undeveloped and is located between Manchester Road and the Cheshire Lines Railway. Public baths were built as a result of the increased popularity and ideology change in the promotion of cleanliness to combat disease. However, this became less relevant during the early 20th century as individual houses were fitted with a water supply. At this point the function of baths became more used for leisure, sport and fitness, which Chorlton Baths reflected.

The original baths comprised a central two-storey office building with separate female and male baths, with changing rooms and a plant room to the rear. The baths reflected the Art Deco style of the 1920s and was brick built, with Portland stone panels to the principal elevation fronting Manchester Road.

During the latter half of the 20th century the complex expanded to the north-east with the construction of three squash courts. During this period the male pool was infilled and converted into sports courts and the roof to both pool houses being replaced. The complex at this time was renamed as Chorlton Leisure Centre.

The leisure centre remained in use until its closure in 2015 and has been vacant succumbing to squatters, vandalism and a fire in 2023.

In view of the historic interest of the building, the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS), in their capacity as archaeological advisors to Manchester City Council, recommended that a Level 3 survey of the former Chorlton Leisure Centre is carried out in advance of any demolition works. In view of the recommendation, Manchester City Council attached a condition to the planning consent (Condition 9) that advised:

'No development works shall take place until the applicant or their agents or successors in title has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works. The works are to be undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) submitted to and approved in writing by Manchester Planning Authority. The WSI shall cover the following:

1. *A phased programme and methodology of investigation and recording to include:*
 - *Archaeological building recording (Historic England Level 3);*
 - *Archaeological watching brief and recording of previously hidden historic fabric;*
2. *A programme for post investigation assessment to include:*
 - *production of a final report on the results of the investigations and their significance.*
3. *Deposition of the final report with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record*
4. *Dissemination of the results of the site investigations commensurate with their significance.*
5. *Provision for archive deposition of the report and records of the site investigation.*
6. *Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the approved WSI.*

Reason: To record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible pursuant to policies EN3 of the Manchester Core Strategy (2012) and saved policy DC20 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester (1995) and the National Planning Policy Framework.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The principal aim of the historic building investigation, given the commercial nature of the project, was to provide a written, drawn and photographic record of the former 20th century public baths, coupled with documentary research prior to demolition.

The stated objectives of the archaeological investigation included:

- to carry out an archaeological survey commensurate with an Historic England Level 3-type historic building investigation of the 20th-century public baths buildings. This will comprise the production of measured survey drawings, coupled with a comprehensive photographic record and a written description;
- pending the results drawn from the historic building survey investigation, a watching brief may be required to monitor and record any hidden fabric during aspects of the stripping out and demolition of the building;
- to carry out documentary research to elucidate the development of the public baths;

- to present the results of the historic building investigation in a fully illustrated report that provides an account of the buildings origins, development and use;
- to produce an archive for the project;
- to make the results of the work publicly available via the deposition of the final digital report with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record and OASIS.

In addition, the historic building investigation may inform some of the research questions presented in the current North West Archaeological Research Framework (<https://researchframeworks.org/nwrf/>):

- *Ind01: What evidence is there for the impact of industrialisation on health, diet and natural resources?*
- *Ind23: What evidence do we have for the improvement of urban public health during this period?*
- *Ind85: How do public social buildings evolve, develop and change during this period?*
- *Ind88: How can the changing function of leisure buildings be captured?*

The historic building investigation was conducted following the ClfA Standards and guidance for archaeological building surveys (updated 2020), and was commensurate with a Historic England Level 3-type survey of Listed buildings (Historic England 2016).

Level 3 Recording

Photographic Archive: a comprehensive photographic archive for the building was produced utilising a high-resolution digital camera with a sensor size of at least 15 megapixels. All frames, excluding general contextual views, incorporated a graduated metric scale.

A plan showing the viewpoint directions of each photograph was produced, together with a full photographic index. The archive comprises the following:

- the external appearance and setting of the building, including a mixture of general shots and detailed views taken from perpendicular and oblique angles;
- general shots of the surrounding landscape;
- the general appearance of principal rooms and circulation areas;
- any external or internal detail, structural or architectural, which does not show adequately on general photographs;
- any internal detailed views of features of especial architectural interest, fixtures and fittings, or fabric detail relevant to phasing the building.

Site Drawings: measured survey plans and elevations and key cross-sections of the buildings were produced utilising a combination of laser scanning, rectified photography, reflectorless electronic distance meter (REDM) and manual survey techniques. The resultant data was then used as the basis of CAD drawings, which are included within the final report as figures.

Written Description: a description of the historic structures was maintained to Historic England Level 3 standard. The records are essentially descriptive and provide a systematic account of the origin, development and use of the buildings, which include a description of the plan, form, fabric, function, age and development sequence. The written description includes a summary of the building's past and present use, an account of any key architectural features, fixtures and fittings, and a discussion of the relative significance of each individual component structure within the wider baths complex.

In September 2023, acting on behalf of Caddwick Construction, a Written Scheme of Investigation for the recommended programme of works was prepared by Salford Archaeology, in consultation with Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS). Following the approval of this document by Manchester City Council, Salford Archaeology carried out the Historic England Level 3-type survey of the former Chorlton Leisure Centre in advance of its demolition. This allowed for a comprehensive photographic archive of the complex to be compiled utilising a high-resolution digital camera, coupled with the annotation of measured survey plans and elevations, and a written description. A subsequent watching brief during the demolition was undertaken by LWS Heritage due to the closure of Salford Archaeology.

1.3 Site location, topography, and geology

Chorlton Leisure Centre lies 3km southwest of Manchester City Centre, just south of Old Trafford, and 1.17km north of Chorlton Brook (centred on NGR 381708 394516). The Site is bounded by the Thirlmere Aqueduct to the north, Manchester Road to the west, a Metrolink tramline to the east and a grocery store to the south (Plate 1; Fig 1).

Topographically, the Manchester conurbation as a region lies within an undulating lowland basin, which is bounded by the Pennine uplands to the east and to the north. The region as a whole comprises of the Mersey River valley, whilst the rivers Irwell, Medlock and Irk represent the principal watercourses in Manchester. The Site lies at a height of 28.0m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) and is relatively flat.

The Site is located on a band of solid geology comprising sandstone of the Wilmslow Formation, formed between 252.2 and 247.1 million years ago during the Triassic Period. The solid geology is overlain by a superficial deposit of Glaciofluvial Sheet Deposits, Devensian Sand and gravel, which formed between 116 and 11.8 thousand years ago during the Quaternary period (British Geological Survey, 2021).

1.4 Designations

The Site does not contain any heritage assets that are afforded statutory protection, such as Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, or any Registered Parks and Gardens and does not lie within a Conservation Area. Chorlton Conservation Area, however, lies c. 400m south of the Site.



Plate 1: Recent aerial shot, showing the Site boundary looking north

2. *Historical Background*

2.1 *Introduction*

A more detailed historical background has been previously produced within the Desk Based Assessment (Salford Archaeology 2023) and the Heritage Statement (Buttress 2023).

Chorlton's history is closely linked with the development and growth of Manchester during the Industrial Period. The development of transportation links enabled the transformation of Chorlton from a rural agricultural town into developed suburb. The construction of the public baths was a reflection of ideological change to hygiene, cleanliness and welfare towards the public and how it defends against disease as a result of the developments of the industrial period. However, this became less relevant during the early 20th century as individual houses were fitted with a water supply. At this point the function of baths became more used for leisure, sport and fitness. Archaeological fabric and material culture of the industrial period survive in the buildings on site and the development of site is recorded in maps.

2.2 *Development of the site*

During the post-medieval period Manchester was an industrious and growing town, based upon its centralised textile and cloth finishing processes (ibid). The surrounding towns and hamlets contributed to Manchester's growth as it was used as a centralised market for the textiles (ibid). The Site during this period was a rural area that likely will have been utilised for agricultural use (Ibid). Chorlton's lands were sold in 1590 to Gregory Lovel and passed through the Mosley family before it was given to Egertons of Tatton (ibid).

Despite the boom of the Industrial Revolution in nearby Manchester, Chorlton remained rural in the 18th and early 19th centuries with only small-scale activity (Salford Archaeology 2023, p12). Based upon 1845 tithe maps, Chorlton's industry came in the form of brick manufacture with field names such as 'Brick Field' (HER 9714.1.2; 570m south-west of site) and 'Kiln Field' (HER 9714.1.1; c. 300m south-west of site) providing evidence (ibid). By the mid to late 19th century Chorlton had transformed from a rural area with a mainly agricultural economy to a suburb with the construction of a railway from Chorlton to Manchester as well as horse-drawn bus services (by 1864), opening opportunity for landowners to sell their fields for the construction of houses (ibid, p12-13). In 1880 Midland railway opened a station in Chorlton (c. 415m south of site) developing the transport infrastructure further (HER 9715.1.0) (ibid, p13). The Ordnance Survey maps spanning the turn of the 20th century are indicative of the effect of transportation on the development of Chorlton with significant residential growth (Plates 2 and 3). A tram service opened in 1907 rendering the horse-drawn buses obsolete and within the next 20 years the whole of Chorlton had been built over and developed (Salford Archaeology 2023).

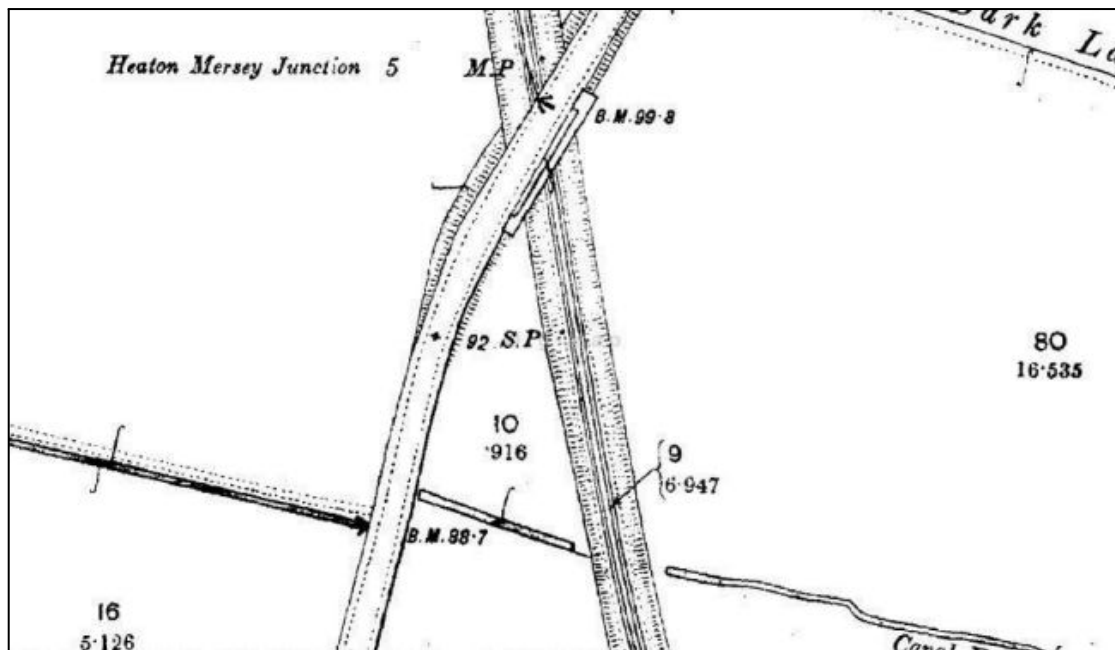


Plate 2: 1890s Ordnance Survey Map Extract of Site

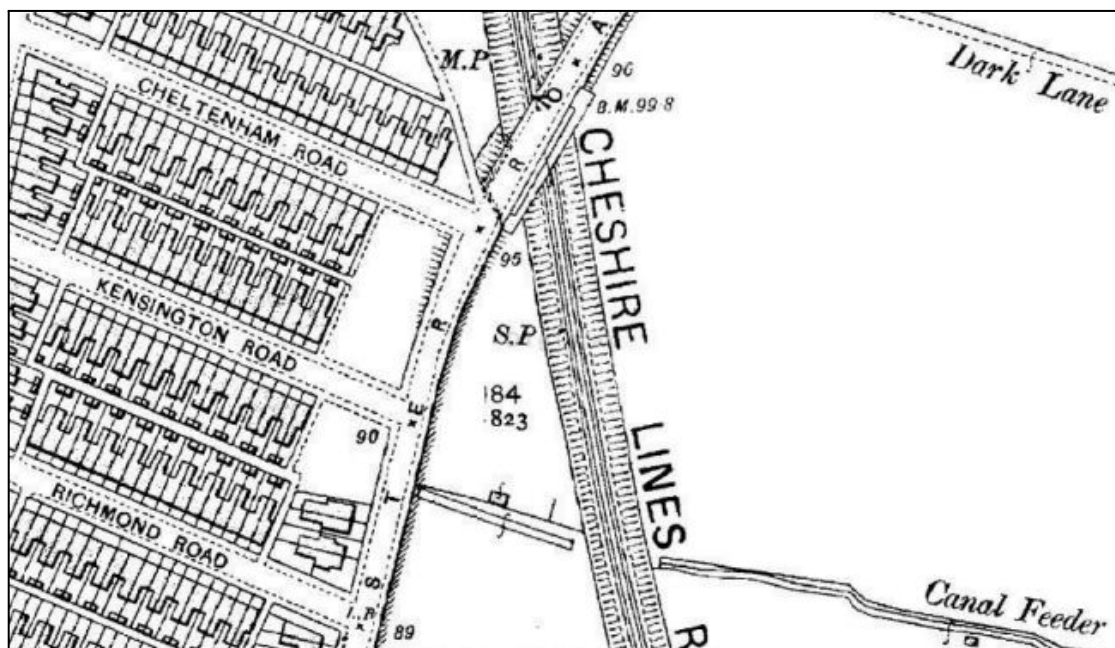


Plate 3: Extract from the 1907 Ordnance Survey Map

The Ordnance Survey map of 1907 shows a small structure to the southern end of the site (Plate 3). By the Ordnance Survey map of 1922 this building was extended to the west while the remaining parcel of land within the Site remained undeveloped (Plate 4).

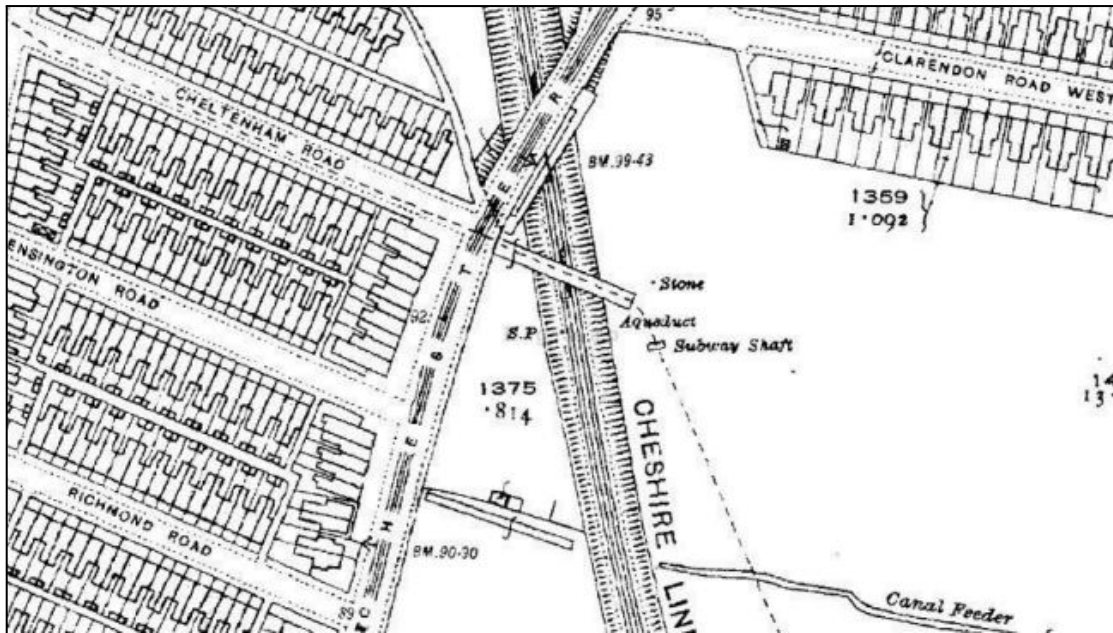


Plate 4: Extract of the 1922 Ordnance Survey Map Site

The Public Baths and Wash-Houses Act was introduced in 1846 and resulted in the construction of leisure centres with health and welfare provisions, reflecting the ideological change that promoted cleanliness to combat disease (Miller & Cook, 2021, p114). Due to the expansion of Chorlton, a public baths was constructed between 1922 and 1929 to promote cleanliness within the local area. Chorlton Baths was originally designed not to incorporate a public wash has and was purely designed for swimming, which represents a deviation from the format of 19th-century baths. The baths were designed by John Henry Price the City Architect on behalf of Manchester Corporation, who also designed Victoria Baths on Hathersage Road, Withington Public Baths, baths on Victoria Street in Bradford (Manchester) and Harpurhey Baths, together with a couple of public wash-houses. Chorlton Baths was originally designed in an Art Deco style and was constructed with brick with Portland stone panels to the principal elevation fronting Manchester Road. A photograph taken in 1929 shows the building to consist of a two-storey office block flanked by a separate female and male baths to the north and south (Plate 5). Internally, the baths consisted of a glass roof with facilities at around the outer edges of the pools (Plate 6).



Plate 5: Photograph of the front of Chorlton Baths on Manchester Road in 1929. Courtesy of the Manchester Local Image Collection

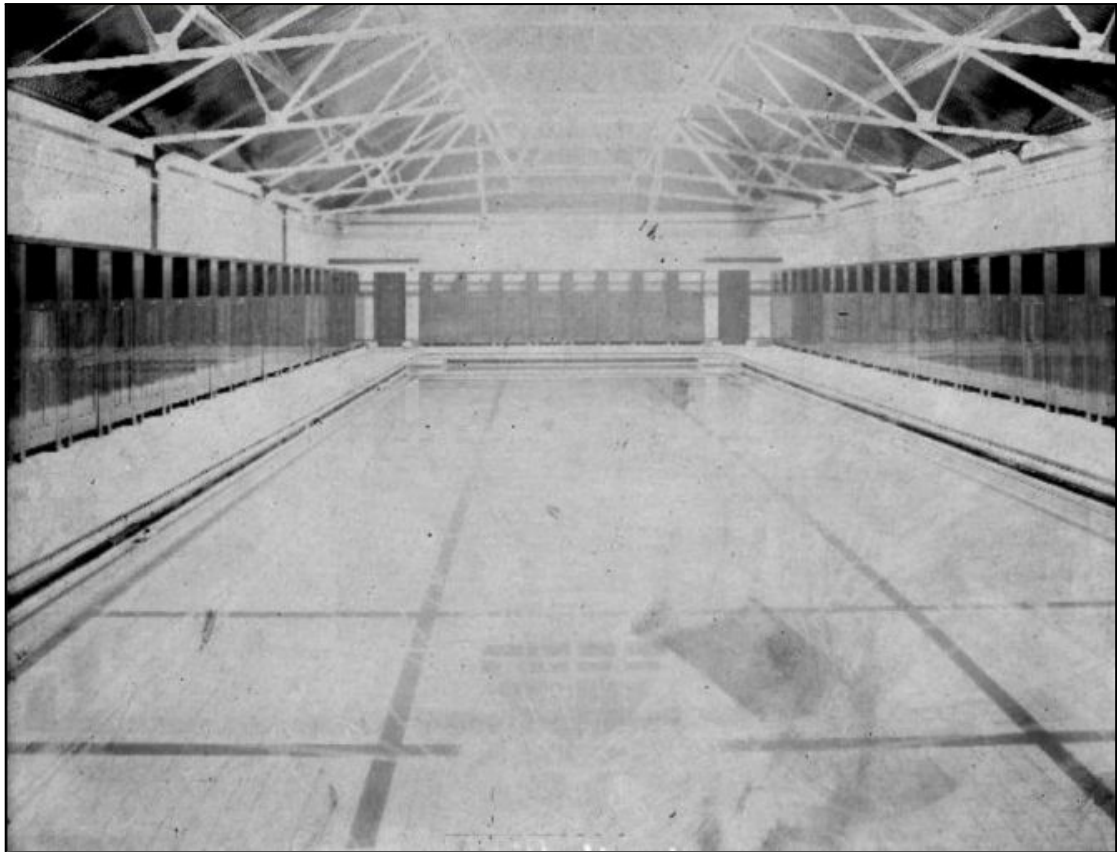


Plate 6: Photograph of the inside of Chorlton Baths. Courtesy of the Manchester Local Image Collection

The baths were first depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1933 which shows an irregular shaped building marked as 'Public Baths'. The two earlier buildings to the south had been demolished and a long building set back from the main body of the complex was constructed. This building would have housed the early boiler with access afforded by the western elevation (Plate 7).

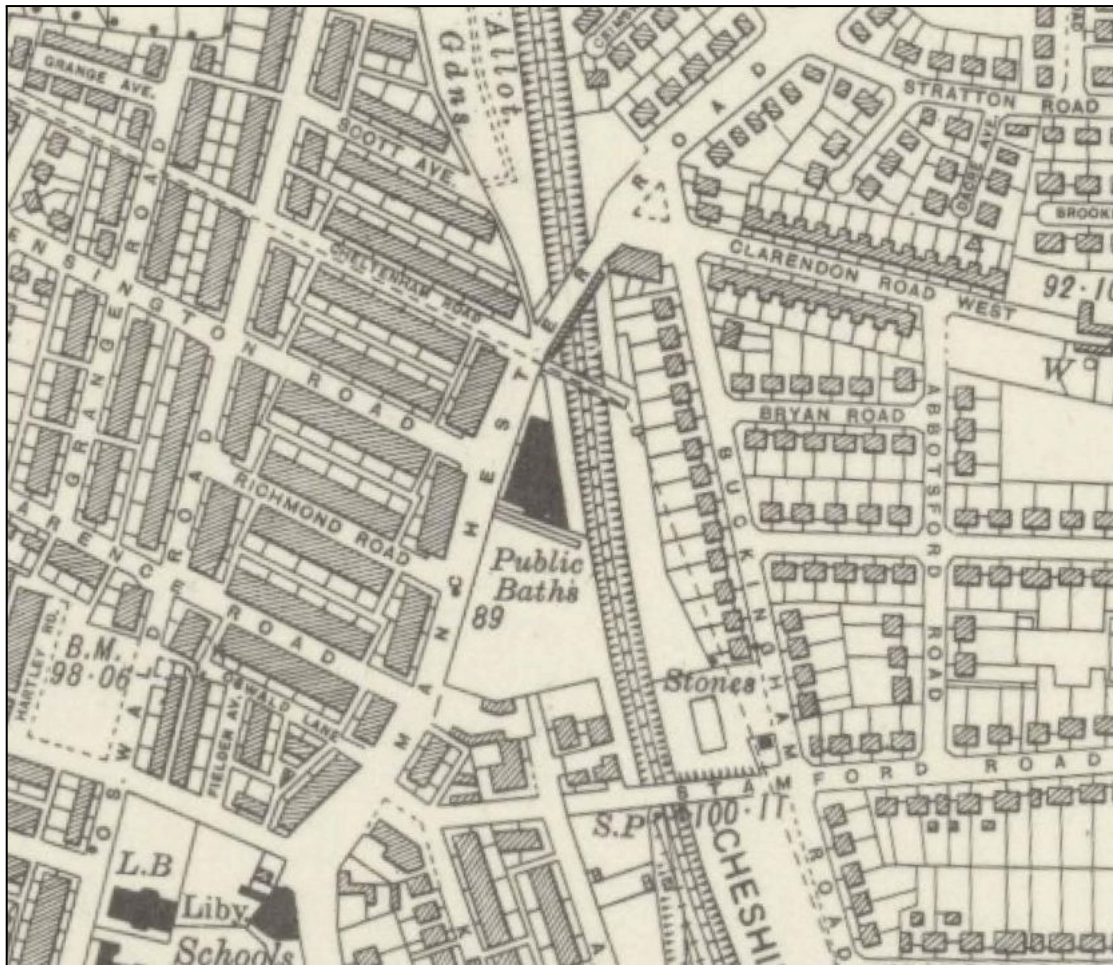


Plate 7: Extract of the 1933 Ordnance Survey Map showing the Public Baths known as Chorlton Baths

The Ordnance Survey map of 1952 shows the footprint of the baths to be consistent throughout the mid-20th century (Plate 8). The chimney was situated to the south-eastern end, further suggesting the long southern building was a boiler house (Plate 8). During the mid-1970s the complex expanded with the construction of two buildings adjoining the eastern elevation of the female baths. These were tall single-storey buildings and housed three squash courts which were granted planning approval 1975 by Manchester City Council (Planning Ref: F02040/LA).

3. Building Investigation

3.1 Introduction

The programme of historic building investigation undertaken at the former Chorlton Leisure Centre consisted of a Historic England Level 3 standard. The initial survey was undertaken in June 2023 and focused on the external elevations of the leisure centre. A follow up visit was undertaken in July 2023 to record the interior of the buildings previously inaccessible areas during the demolition and ground breaking phase.

The site comprised a two-storey office and reception building, two single-storey buildings that housed the separated male and female baths, three attached single-storey buildings contained changing rooms and a 1970s two-storey building to the east which contained squash courts. The baths and changing room buildings were constructed in brick with Portland Stone pilasters, which was a prevailing Manchester practice for large public buildings during the 1920s. The office building was constructed in a T-shape with the principal building to the west and a smaller building to the east.

3.2 External descriptions

The western elevation formed the principal façade fronting Manchester Road and comprised the western elevations of the female bath to the north, the reception to the centre and the male bath to the south (Fig 2; Plate 9). The western elevation of a plant room was set back at the northern end of the elevation.



Plate 9: General view of the western elevation of Chorlton Leisure Centre, looking east

The female bath was constructed in a three-stretcher English Garden Wall bond with a Portland stone plinth rising 2'8½" (0.83m) from ground level. The flat roof had a stepped Portland stone parapet wall capped with stone copings (Plate 10). The elevation was divided into four equal recessed brick sections with projecting Portland stone panels. The panels comprised Portland stone pilasters with moulded Doric order capitals. The recessed central panel housed a 2'6" (0.76m) wide window aperture. The openings were blocked with brick infilling and plywood was fixed to the outer face (Plate 11). A cellar light, which was infilled with brick, was also set within each of the stone panels.



Plate 10: General view of the western elevation of the female baths, looking east



Plate 11: Detail of the Portland stone recessed panel at the northern end of the western façade, looking east

The male bath's western elevation was constructed in a three-stretcher English Garden Wall bond with a Portland stone plinth rising 2'8½" (0.83m) from ground level. The pitched roof was a modern replacement, however the original stepped parapet wall with Portland stone with stone copings had been retained (Plate 12). The elevation was divided into two equal recessed brick sections flanking a projecting Portland stone panel to the centre. The stone panel had Portland stone pilasters with moulded Doric order capitals. The recessed central panel housed a 2'6" (0.76m) wide window aperture. As with those to the female baths, the opening was blocked with brick infilling and a plywood was fixed to the outer face (Plate 12).



Plate 12: General view of the western façade of the male bath, looking east

Two doorways were situated at the centre of the brick panels, affording access into the building (Fig 2). These comprised moulded Portland stone surrounds with the openings blocked with modern steel mesh fixed to the timber doorframes (Plate 13 and 14). The southern doorway was accessed by a set of concrete and brick steps due to the ground level slopping away from the building (Plate 13). A blocked 1'5½" (0.44m) wide window had been situated to the northern end of the façade (Fig 2). The lintel and sill were removed with the opening infilled with modern brick (Plate 14).



Plate 13: The southern doorway within the male bath western elevation, looking east



Plate 14: The blocked northern doorway and windows to the western elevation of the male baths, looking south-east

The western elevation of the attached boiler house was set back (14m) from the male bath. This had largely been obscured with vegetation; however, some features could be observed. The elevation was constructed from a three-stretcher English Garden Wall bond with a light ash mortar. The pitched roof was obscured below a brick

parapet wall with stone copings and a Portland stone string band at eve height (Plate 15). A block round-lit window was situated to the centre of the elevation. Directly below this was a concrete lintel for the loading bay doorway, which was obscured by the overground vegetation (Plate 15).



Plate 15: General view of the western elevation of the attached plant room, looking east

The western elevation of the office and reception building was constructed in a three-stretcher English Garden Wall bond rising to two storeys with a small basement (Fig 2; Plate 16). The centre of the elevation had been constructed with Portland stone that projected out 4½" (0.115m) from the main body of the building (Plate 16).



Plate 16: General view of the western elevation of the office and reception building, looking south-east

The ground floor of the office and reception building comprised a central window aperture flanked by two doorways that originally afforded separate access into the male and female baths (Fig 2). The window consisted of moulded stone reveals and lintel with a projecting sill (Plate 17). The timber-framed window was obscured externally by modern steel mesh (Plate 17). Directly below the sill was a recessed frieze with a timber bracket fixed to a central stone embossment (Plate 17).



Plate 17: Detail of the central window aperture of the office building, looking west

The northern doorway originally afforded access into the female baths which was later modified to form the principal entrance into the complex. The doorway consisted of a moulded stone surround and a recessed frieze with 'FEMALES' carved into the stone, flanked by two floral motifs (Plate 18). The southern doorway was of similar design, but with 'MALES' carved into the frieze (Plate 19). The northern doorway was modified during the latter half of the 20th century with access afforded by a concrete ramp, whilst the southern entrance retained the original concrete steps (Plates 18 and 19). The doors to each of the openings were obscured by modern security steel mesh.



Plate 18: Detail of the northern doorway affording access into the female baths, looking west



Plate 19: Detail of the southern doorway affording access into the male baths, looking west

The first floor comprised three recessed window apertures with an oversailing moulded stone cornice situated at ceiling height. The 3'1" (0.93m) wide windows comprised Portland stone surrounds with 12-light timber framed sash windows with horns (Plate 20). The frieze above had the inscription 'PUBLIC BATHS' to the centre (Plate 20).



Plate 20: Detail of the first floor of the eastern elevation, looking west

The basement comprised a central doorway with a moulded Portland stone surround and a projecting stone hood mould. The door within the opening was obscured by modern steel mesh. A partially visible inscription carved into the stone frieze read 'THIS STONE WAS LAID BY ALDERMAN JAMES BOWIE' (Plate 21).



Plate 21: Detail of the inscription above the doorway affording access into the basement, looking west

The northern elevation of the complex was formed by the northern elevation of the female baths (Plate 22; Fig 3). This was constructed in a three stretcher English Garden Wall bond with a Portland stone plinth and parapet wall capped with concrete copings (Plate 22). The elevation contained two blocked windows to the eastern and western ends. These had been infilled with brick with vents inserted into the upper section of the blocking (Plate 22).



Plate 22: General view of the northern elevation of the female baths, looking south

The eastern elevation was constructed in a three stretcher English Garden Wall bond and comprised two gables to the south and an angled elevation to the north (Fig 2; Plate 23). The northern section was largely obscured by the 1970s constructed squash courts, but some elements had been observed. Two blocked windows were situated to the southern end of the section. The 1'5½" (0.44m) wide apertures consisted of gauged brick flat arched heads with projecting sandstone sills. The openings were infilled with modern bricks (Plate 24).



Plate 23: General view of the northern section of the eastern elevation, looking west



Plate 24: Detail of the blocked windows within the northern section of the eastern elevation, looking south-west

This section of the elevation contained a dogleg extension to the east which contained a fire exit doorway. The extension was constructed in modern brick laid in a stretcher bond arrangement. The doorway comprised a steel lintel with a concrete threshold and housed a flush timber fire door within the opening.

The southern section of the elevation contained two projecting bays with gable walls. Each gable was constructed with a small obtuse angle to the northern half of each. These were constructed in a three stretcher English Garden Wall bond. The southern half of the gables contained two sets of window apertures to the ground floor and basement. The 2'7½" (0.79m) wide apertures consisted of gauged brick flat arched heads with projecting sandstone sills. The openings were infilled with modern bricks (Plate 25). A further set of windows were situated within the southern wall of the southern projecting bay. These were also 2'7½" (0.79m) wide apertures comprising gauged brick flat arched heads with projecting sandstone sills. The openings were infilled with modern bricks (Plate 26).



Plate 25: Detail of the blocked windows within the southern half of the gable walls, looking west



Plate 26: Detail of the blocked windows within the southern elevation of the southern bay, looking south

The southern elevation was largely obscured by vegetation and the adjacent property to the south of the site (Fig 3; Plate 27). The single-storey stepped elevation was built in a three stretcher English Garden Wall bond with a small parapet wall capped with concrete copings (Plate 27). A Portland stone string course was situated at ceiling height.

The Portland stone plinth and entablature to the eastern elevation continued around and terminated 8'1½" (2.47m) in from the eastern end. The elevation contained two blocked windows at the western end with each infilled with brick and a modern terracotta vent was inserted to the upper section of the blocking (Plate 27).



Plate 27: General view of the southern elevation of the male baths, looking north-east

3.3 Internal description

Internally, the baths had largely been modified during the latter half of the 20th century with only parts of the original baths having been retained. Due to the fire in 2023 some areas of the building could not be recorded safely.

Principal access into the complex was afforded by the doorway within the original female entrance. The doorway was recessed within the opening and comprised moulded timber architraves housing a pair of timber fire doors and a 15-light transom window above (Plate 28). The jambs and head to the recess were tiled with white glazed 6" (0.15m) squared tiles (Plate 28).



Plate 28: Detail view of the principal entrance into the leisure centre, looking west

The doorway entered a reception room, (Room 1, Fig 4), comprising a concrete floor and a false suspended ceiling. The walls were tiled with white glazed 6" (0.15m) squared tiles with a band of decorative tiles at a height of 1.8m (Plates 29 and 30). The original flat ceiling with a concave cornice was partially observed after the removal of one of the ceiling tiles (Plate 31).

The southern wall had been remodelled with the insertion of a large reception window with modern timber architraves and desk (Plate 32). The western wall contained a large doorway that afforded access into Room 2. The opening comprised moulded timber architraves rising from square pedestals (Plate 29). A pair of replaced timber fire doors with modern door furniture was housed within the opening (Plater 29).



Plate 29: General view of Room 1, looking east



Plate 30: Detail of the decorative wall tiles



Plate 31: Detail of the original ceiling of Room 1



Plate 32: The inserted reception window within the southern wall of Room 1, looking south-west

Room 2 (Fig 4) comprised a concrete floor and a false suspended ceiling. The walls were tiled with white glazed 6" (0.15m) squared tiles with a band of decorative tiles at a height of 1.8m (Plates 33 and 34). The original flat ceiling with a concave cornice was partially observed after the removal of one of the ceiling tiles. The room acted as

a hallway affording access into the female bath to the north (Room 3), changing rooms to the east, the male bath to the south-east and the reception office to the south.



Plate 33: General view of Room 2, looking east



Plate 34: Detail of the decorative wall tiles

Room 3 (Fig 4) housed the original female baths and contained several aspects of the original 1920s décor (Plate 35). The room comprised tiled floor and walls with a high ceiling with exposed timber beams that supported the timber ceiling (Plate 35). The western wall contained three blocked windows with glazed bullnose brick reveals and sill with a flush concrete lintel. The openings were infilled with concrete and tiled over (Plate 36).

The floor was of maroon glazed tiles with stone edging around the pool. The pool (22.7m long by 7.46m) contained the original glazed white tiled floor and walls with a green tiled band at the upper edge (Plate 37 and 38). During the watching brief the floor of the bath was largely uncovered. The white tiles bordered a series of centrally set rectangles of glazed green tiles (Plate 39).



Plate 35: General view of the female pool (Room 3) prior to the demolition, looking north

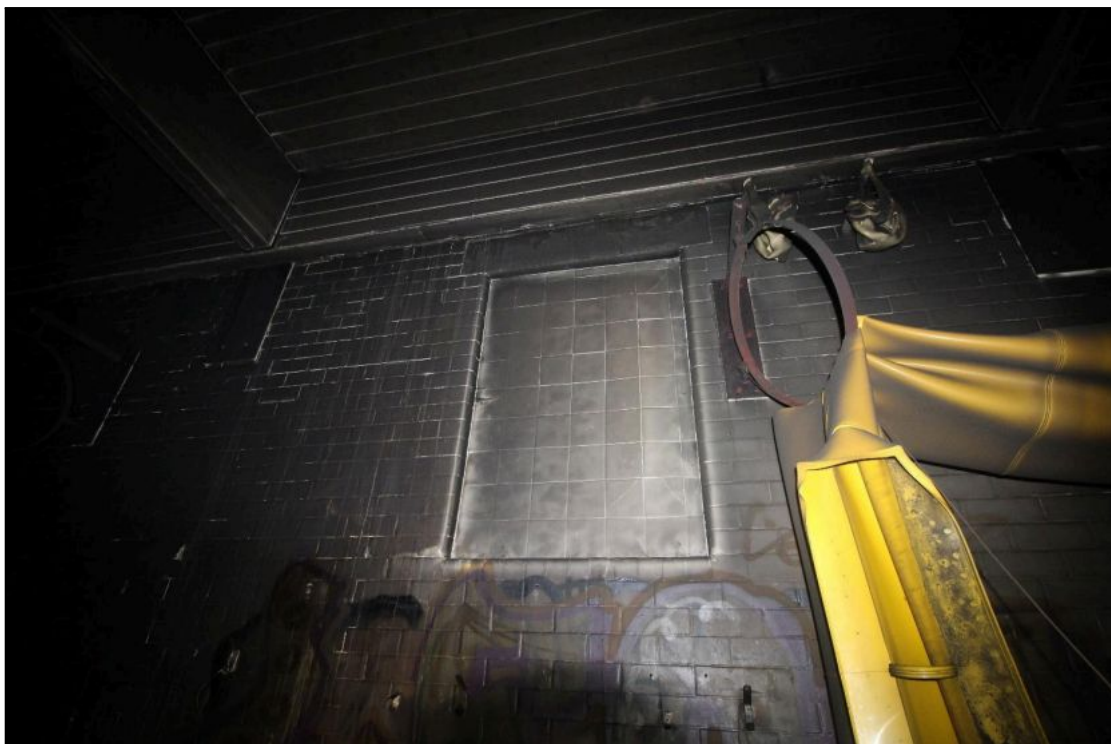


Plate 36: Detail of the blocked window within the western wall of Room 3, looking west



Plate 37: Detail of the female pools tiled wall and floor



Plate 38: Detail of the female pools tiled wall and floor during the watching brief



Plate 39: Detail of the female pools tiled floor during the watching brief

Two of the original small slipper changing rooms were situated to the northern end of the room. These were constructed in glazed brick walls, with a tiled floor and ceiling. A doorway with a flat arched head afforded access into each cubical. The doors were modern replacements (Plate 40).



Plate 40: The north-western changing cubical within the female baths

The doorway within the south-eastern corner afforded access into a corridor (Room 4), which led through into the original female changing rooms to the north (Rooms 5-7) and the male changing rooms to the east (Rooms 8 and 9, Plate 41). The corridor comprised a concrete floor, a false suspended ceiling and painted glazed brick walls. All architraves, doorframes and doors within the corridor were of modern replacements. A small storage room situated to the north-eastern corner of the corridor contained the original tiles of the changing rooms. The eastern wall was divided by bands of blue, white, and decorative tiles at 1.8m forming a tiled dado. The lower fill was of square blue glazed tiles whilst the upper fill was of square glazed white tiles (Plate 42).



Plate 41: General view of the corridor affording access into the changing rooms (Room 4), facing east

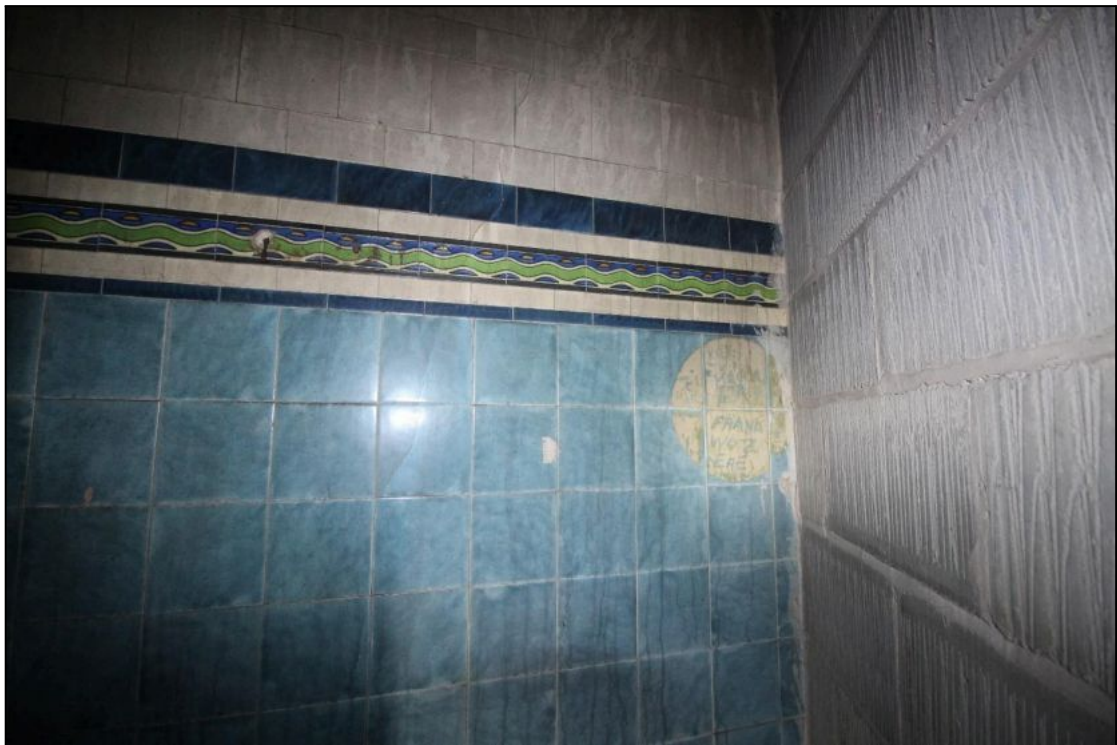


Plate 42: Detail of the original tiles within a cupboard, facing east

The western doorway within the northern wall of the corridor entered the female changing rooms (Rooms 5-8). These rooms had been heavily modified during the latter half of the 20th century with the use changed to fitness rooms. The rooms comprised plasterboard walls, a false suspended ceiling and linoleum covered floor (Plate 43). Due to this alteration the female changing rooms were relocated to the south of Room 4.



Plate 43: General view of the modified changing rooms (Rooms 6 and 7), facing north

The original male changing rooms was divided into several rooms which also contained the newer female changing rooms to the east (Fig 4). All rooms within this area comprised false suspended ceilings, linoleum floors and modern wall panelling (Plates 44 and 45). It was noted that during the removal of these late 20th century interventions that formed part of the watching brief, no historical features were observed.



Plate 44: General view of the modified male changing rooms (Rooms 8), facing south-east



Plate 45: General view of the modified changing rooms (Rooms 9), facing south-east

The original male pool to the southern end of the complex was heavily modified with the pool infilled, and a modern gymnasium timber floor was installed (Plate 46). The modern corrugated steel roof had been supported by modern L-section angle iron trusses (Plate 46). During the demolition of the building the original fabric of the male pool was uncovered. The pool comprised glazed cream and green tiles to the floor

and cram tiles to the walls. A drainage channel was partially retained within the wall and was constructed with glazed cream bullnose tiles (PLate 47). The floor tiles were laid directly upon a bed of 0.1m (4ins) thick concrete. During the remodelling of the complex in the 1980s the pool was instilled with sand and stone and capped with a 0.1m (4ins) concrete slab (Plate 47)



Plate 46: General view of the gymnasium now occupying the location of the original male pool, looking south-west



Plate 47: Detail of the male pool's tiled wall and floor during the watching brief, looking north

The eastern wall of the gymnasium contained four doorways affording access into Rooms 18-22. The northern room, Room 18, comprised of plasterboard walls, a false suspended ceiling and a carpet floor (Plate 48). One of the eastern ceiling tiles was damaged allowing the original glazed brick wall and flat ceiling to be observed.



Plate 48: General view of Room 18, looking east

Rooms 19-21 had retained the original fabric consisting of concrete floors, flat ceilings and glazed brick walls (Plate 49). The eastern wall of Room 19 and 20 contained a blocked window with glazed bullnose brick reveals, sills and lintels. The window frames had been removed with the openings infilled with modern concrete blocks (Plate 49).



Plate 49: General view of Room 19, looking east

The boiler house was accessed by the doorway at the eastern end of the southern wall of Room 17. The opening was modified with the replacement of the timber architraves and door; however, the glazed brick flat arched head of the original opening had been retained (Plate 50).

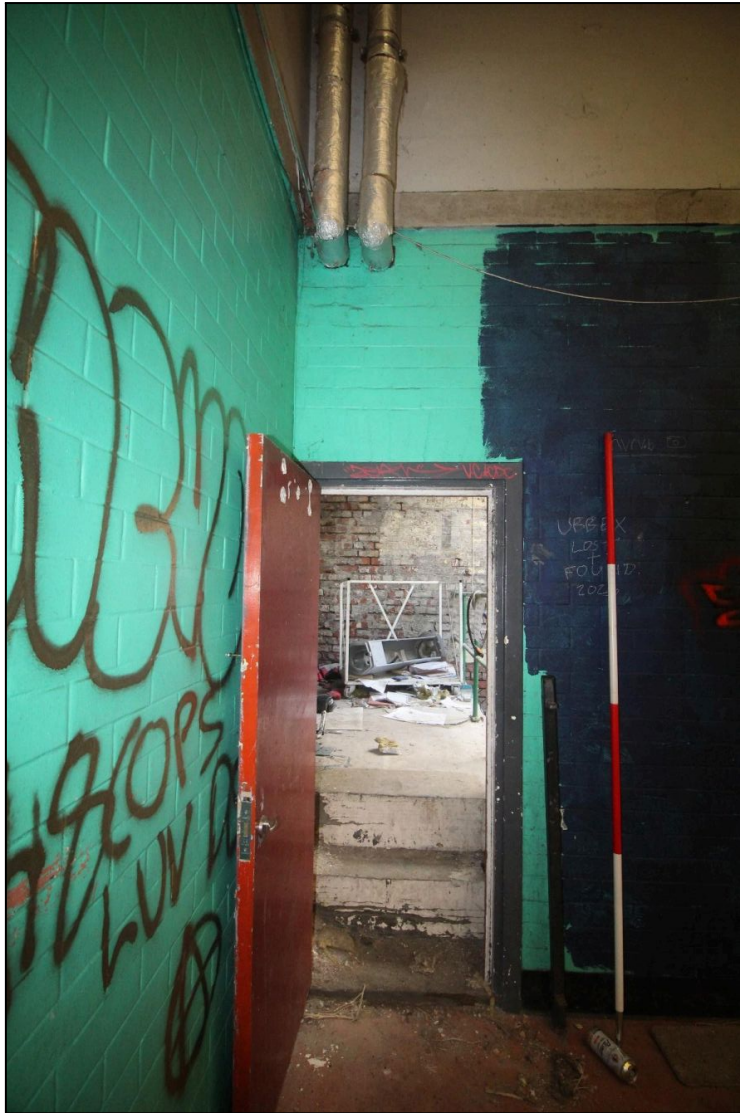


Plate 50: The remodelled doorway affording access into the plant room from the gymnasium, looking south

The boiler house was divided into two sections with the western section (16.4m by 3.79m) originally housing a boiler. The rooms (23 and 24) were constructed in red brick with an open ceiling and a concrete floor that was on two levels (Plate 51). The roof was constructed with concrete beams and contained two L-section angle-iron framed lantern skylights with replaced clear glass glazing. The lower section of the room was afforded descending access by a steel ladder and by a doorway to the western end of the northern wall from the basement. All features associated with the boiler had been removed, however areas of heat scarring was partially observed on the side walls.



Plate 51: The western room of the plant room, looking west

The eastern room, (Room 25), was afforded ascending access by a set of concrete steps located at the south-eastern corner of Room 23 (Fig 4). This room contained an early 21st-century boiler and calorifier system and associated pipework (Plate 52). The room comprised brick walls, a concrete slab floor with a pitched ceiling having modern fireboard that fireproofed the roof (Plate 52). The eastern wall formed the gable wall of the plant room with an external doorway situated to the southern end (Plate 52). The doorway afforded access onto the eastern end of the boiler house roof with a small privy situated to the north-eastern corner (Fig 4).

The privy (Room 26) was constructed in a three-stretcher English Garden Wall bond with flat roof below a small parapet wall capped with concrete copings (Plate 53). The doorway entering the privy had retained the original timber doorframe and flush concrete lintel (Plate 53). Internally, the sanitaryware had been removed, however, a steel bracket which supported the gravity fed cistern was situated high on the northern wall.



Plate 52: The eastern room of the plant room, looking east



Plate 53: The outside privy at situated to the north-eastern corner of the plant room

A set of stairs were located at the south-western corner of the office building which afforded access to the basement and the first floor (Fig 4). The ascending staircase to the first floor was a quarter turn closed stringer timber staircase with timber risers and treads with modern aluminium stair nose covers (Plate 54). A small toilet was situated at the quarter turn landing with late 20th century sanitaryware. The room comprised a concrete rendered floor, plaster rendered walls and a flat ceiling. The western wall contained a single window aperture consisting of moulded timber architraves, a flat timber internal sill and housed a two-light timber framed window with obscured glass glazing (Plate 55).

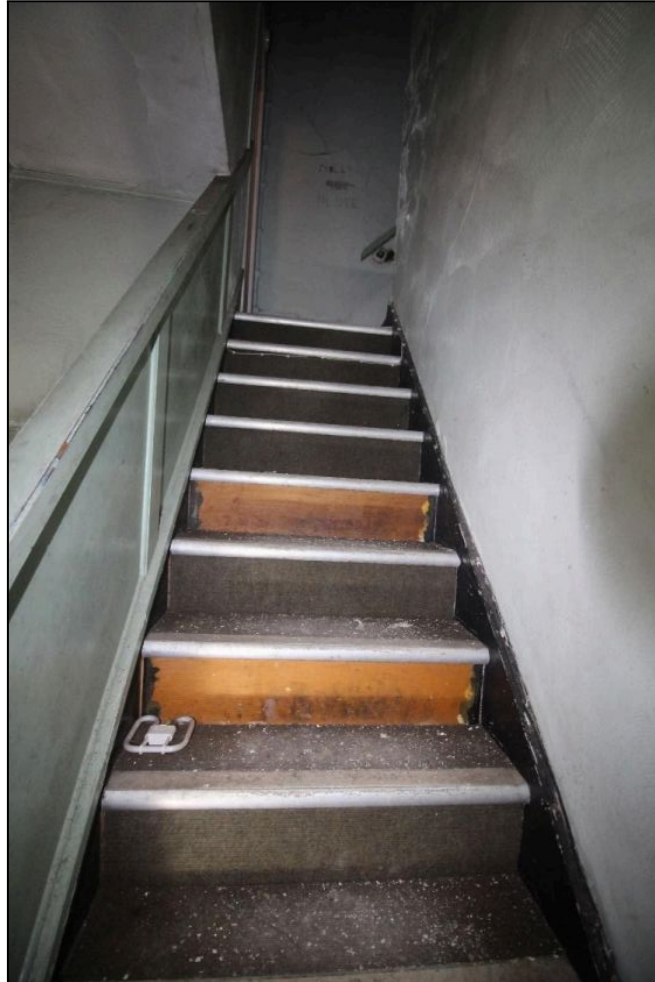


Plate 54: The timber staircase affording vertical access to the first floor of the office building



Plate 55: The toilet within the quarter turn landing

The first floor was heavily damaged by the recent fire, with most of the rooms unsafe to survey, however, some could be recorded from the doorway.

The first-floor landing (Room 31) afforded access into a long narrow corridor which comprised a timber floor, lath and plaster walls and ceiling (Plate 56). The doorways entering Rooms 32-35 consisted of modern timber doorframes and doors.



Plate 56: The first-floor corridor within the office building, looking east

Room 32 was situated to the south-eastern corner of the first floor and comprised a timber floor, lath and plaster walls and ceiling (Fig 5; Plate 57). The walls were divided into two sections with a moulded timber picture rail with the upper fill painted white and the lower fill having been wallpapered (Plate 57). The eastern wall contained an interconnecting doorway that afforded access into a small hallway (Room 33). The moulded timber architrave around the opening obscured the timber doorframe, whilst the door had been removed (Plate 57).



Plate 57: General view of Room 32 on the first floor of the office building, looking north-east

Room 34 was situated to the south-western corner and comprised a timber floor, lath and plaster walls and ceiling with concave coving (Fig 5; Plate 58). The western wall contained two window apertures measuring 3' (0.91m) wide with moulded timber architraves and a timber internal sill (Plate 58). At the centre of the southern wall was a projecting chimney breast. The fireplace was infilled with a modern vent inserted into the centre of the original opening (Plate 59).



Plate 58: General view of Room 34 on the first floor of the office building, looking west



Plate 59: Detail of the chimney breast at the centre of the southern wall of Room 34, looking south

Room 35 was situated to the north-western corner and comprised a timber floor, lath and plaster walls and ceiling with concave coving (Fig 5; Plate 60). The western wall contained a single window aperture measuring 3' (0.91m) wide with moulded timber

architraves and a timber internal sill (Plate 60). The northern wall of the room contained a projecting chimney breast, with the fireplace infilled (Plate 60).



Plate 60: General view of Room 35 on the first floor of the office building, looking west

The office space to the east of the main building and the smaller building were afforded access by a second corridor, Room 33, comprising a timber floor, lath and plaster walls and ceiling with concave coving (Fig 5). The floor and ceiling had suffered extreme fire damage, which restricted access to the offices within the eastern half of the building.

Descending access into the basement was afforded by a set of concrete steps with the stairwell consisting of plaster render brick walls and sloping stairhead (Plate 61). The doorway within the northern wall of the basement landing retained the original timber doorframe, although the door had been removed prior to the survey.



Plate 61: The stairwell descending to the basement, looking east

The basement was a low-level area with a maximum height of 1.75m and consisted of painted brick walls, a concrete floor and ceiling (Plate 62). The basement was primarily used for the utilities and extended below the entire footprint of the main building above. The basement was divided into several rooms with access around both pools. All rooms, except for one in the north-east corner had been stripped of any historical fixtures and fittings and replaced with late 20th-century fixtures, including all pipework.



Plate 62: General view of the basement area, detailing the modern pipework that had replaced earlier cast-iron pipework

The north-eastern room contained the two original cast-iron calorifier cylinders that were bolted to concrete plinths. The water would have originally been filtered within these tanks through sand and gravel then reheated by heat exchanger coils then sent back to each of the pools. The original cast-iron pipework around the tanks had been retained, however, these had been bolted to later 20th-century pipes that transported the treated water out to each of the pools with metric bolts (Plate 63). This system was superseded by the modern calorifier which was installed in the 2003/04 constructed plant room, located on the rear to the boiler house (Plate 52).



Plate 63: The two calorifier tanks within the basement

4. Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The historical building investigation of Chorlton Leisure Centre has provided a valuable opportunity to record a 1920s constructed Public Baths known as Chorlton Baths. It has also enabled a review of the available documentary material to be combined with the physical evidence embedded in the historic fabric to produce a detailed narrative of the building's development. The investigation of such a site also addresses questions posed within the research agenda of the North-West Regional Framework.

4.2 Chorlton Baths

The Public Baths and Wash-Houses Act was introduced in 1846 and resulted in the construction of leisure centres with health and welfare provisions, reflecting the ideological change that promoted cleanliness to combat disease (Miller & Cook, 2021, p114). However, this became less relevant during the early 20th century as individual houses were fitted with a water supply. At this point the function of baths became more used for leisure, sport and fitness. With this change in use for more leisurely activities during the interwar years Chorlton Baths was constructed between 1922 and 1929 on undeveloped land between Manchester Road and the Cheshire Lines Railway.

The baths were designed by John Henry Price the City Architect on behalf of Manchester Corporation, who also designed Victoria Baths on Hathersage Road, Withington Public Baths, baths on Victoria Street in Bradford (Manchester) and Harpurhey Baths, together with a couple of public wash-houses. These earlier baths were designed elaborately to help combat disease but also had a strict hierarchy of dividing the classes and sexes and typically included a first class male pool, a second class male pool and a female pool. This layout also included separate entrances into the building. Price's earlier bath designs conformed to this and with Victoria Baths having an extremely elaborate internal design. It has been suggested that his aspirations when designing Harpurhey Baths had reduced, however the function and layout were largely the same (Heritage Architecture 2004).

Due to the increasing availability of domestic water supplies and washing facilities during the early 20th century and further into the interwar period, many of the baths' original functions were lost. However, the gradual increase in 'spare time' of the working classes led to the development of swimming as a leisure pursuit. With this change in primary function Price's design of Chorlton Baths reflected this with and was only constructed with a male pool and a female pool.

The Chorlton Baths were primarily brick built with Portland stone panels in an Art Deco style. The layout included separate male and female baths, changing rooms, a boiler house and a two-storey office building. This layout did not divide the classes, only the sexes. The basement contained the original cast-iron calorifier tanks with the original pipework in situ during the survey. Both pool houses originally contained glass lantern roofs as seen on a photo from 1929. The female pool was the only extant pool during the initial survey and retained the original green and white glazed tiles to the walls and floor.

During the latter half of the 20th century the complex had undergone multiple alterations. During the 1970s the complex expanded with the construction of three squash courts that were housed within two buildings adjoining the eastern elevation of the female baths.

Further remodelling of the baths was carried out in 1984, with the infilling of the male baths and subsequent conversion to a sports court. The original footprint of the pool had been retained during this alteration and it was noted during the watching brief the pool was infilled with a sand and stone deposit and capped with a concrete slab. During this phase the roofs to both pool houses were remodelled and the alteration to the changing rooms formed additional toilets and showers was undertaken. It is possible that the name changed to Chorlton Leisure Centre during this period. (Salford Archaeology 2023, p23).

A new plant room on the roof of the boiler house had retrospective planning consent granted in 2004. This was originally constructed in 2003 and consisted of a new brick structure situated to the south-eastern corner directly above the original boiler house. This plant room housed the more modern calorifier system, making the tanks in the basement redundant.

The leisure centre continued to be used until its closure in 2015 and has been vacant succumbing to squatters, vandalism and a fire in 2023.

4.3 Conclusion

The conclusion drawn by the archaeological building investigation is that due to the modern interventions most of the historical features had been removed, but those original features that survived have been recorded by the historical building investigation and the subsequent watching brief during the demolition of the building. However, due to the unsafe condition of the buildings a watching brief was maintained to record any undiscovered historical features, which was included in this report. Accordingly, it is recommended that no further investigation should be carried out during the redevelopment of the former Chorlton Leisure Centre.

5. Sources

5.1 Cartographic Sources

Cartographic sources

Ordnance Survey 1:1056 County Series Map of 1845

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Ordnance Survey 1:1056 County Series Map of 1908

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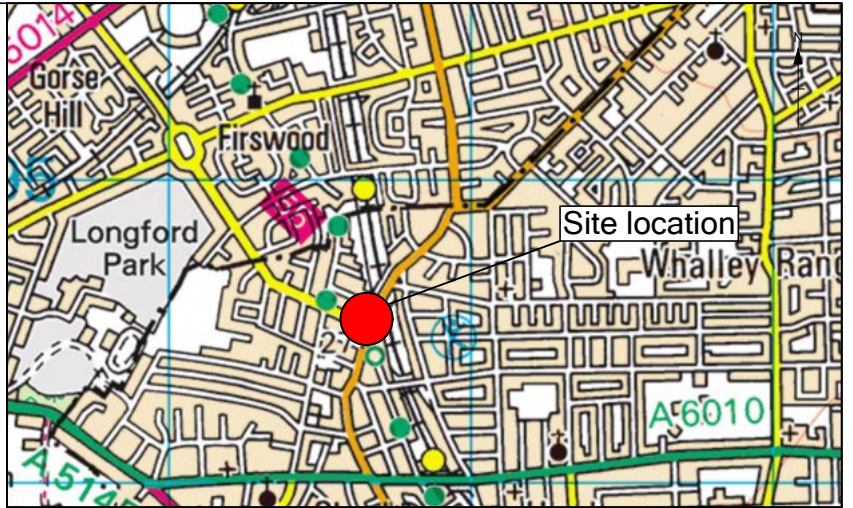
Acknowledgements

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The historic building investigation and watching brief was carried out by Lewis Stitt who compiled the report, along with the illustrations. The report was edited by Lewis Stitt, who was also responsible for project management.

Appendix 1: Figures

- Figure 1: Site location map
- Figure 2: West and east elevations of Chorlton Leisure Centre
- Figure 3: North and south elevations of Chorlton Leisure Centre
- Figure 4: Ground floor plan
- Figure 5: First floor plan

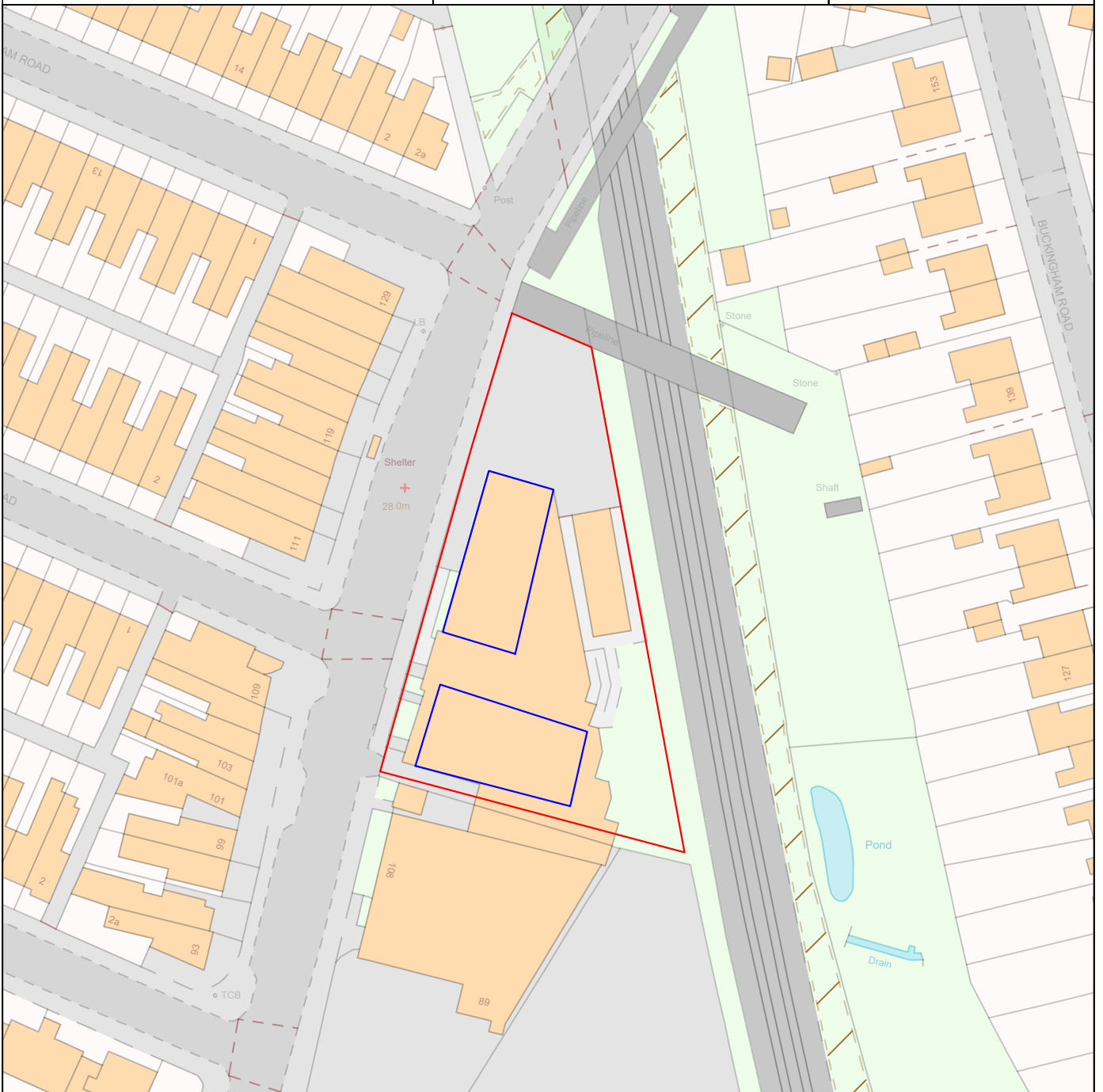


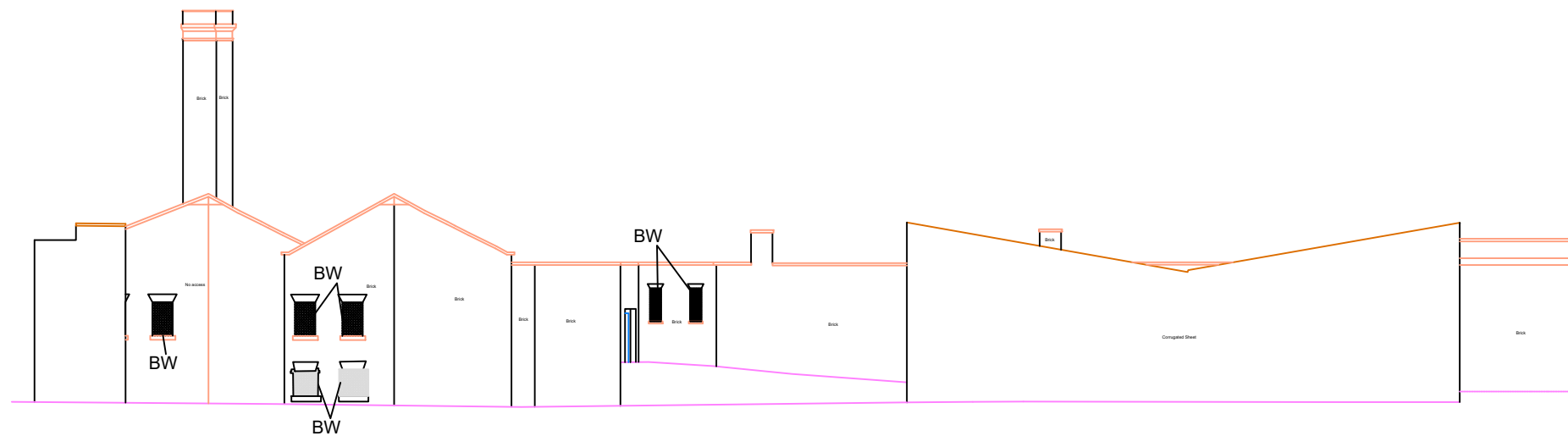
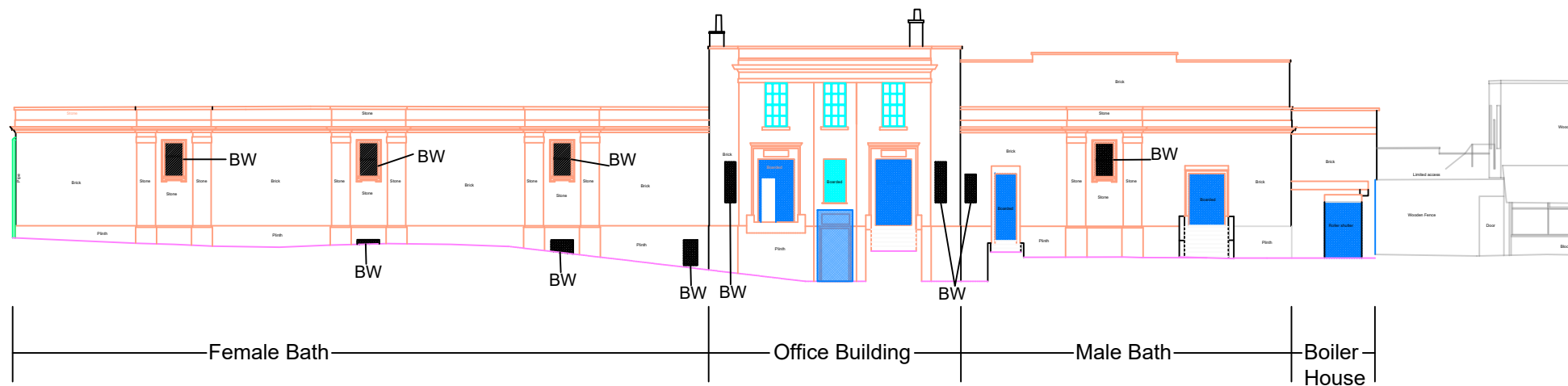
Chorlton Leisure Centre, Manchester Road, Manchester

Figure 1: Site Location with the redline boundary and the location of the watching brief in blue

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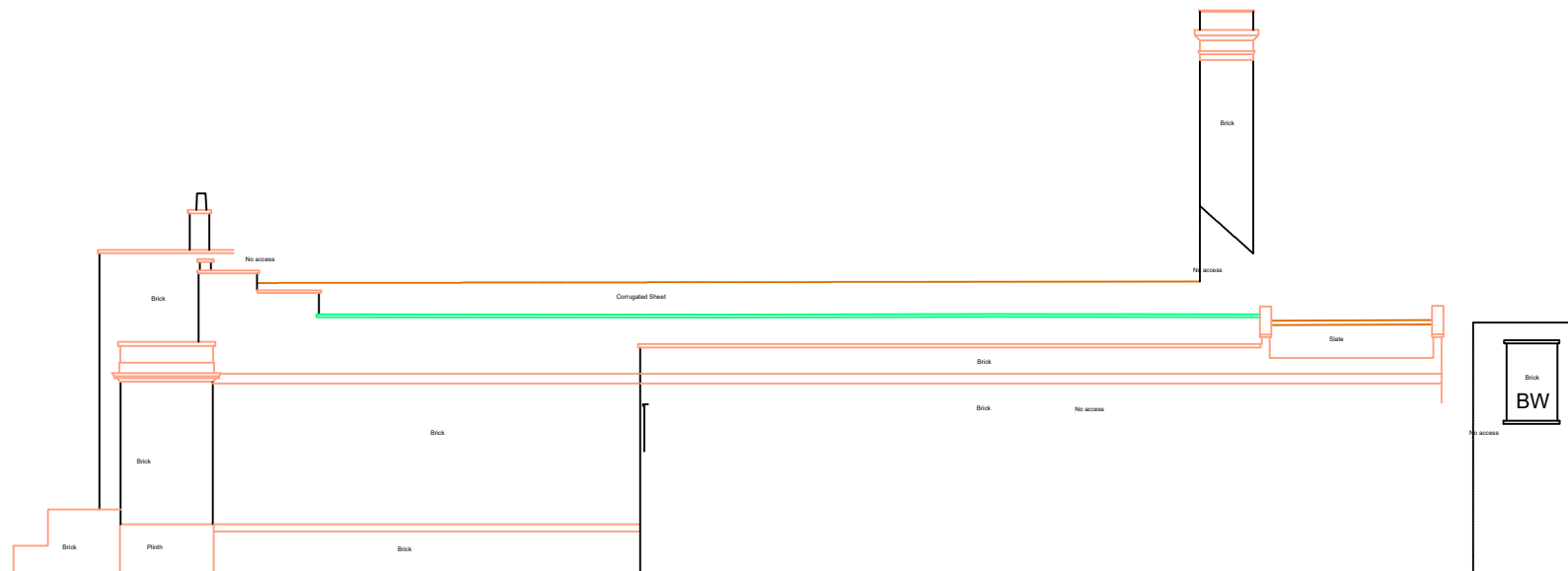
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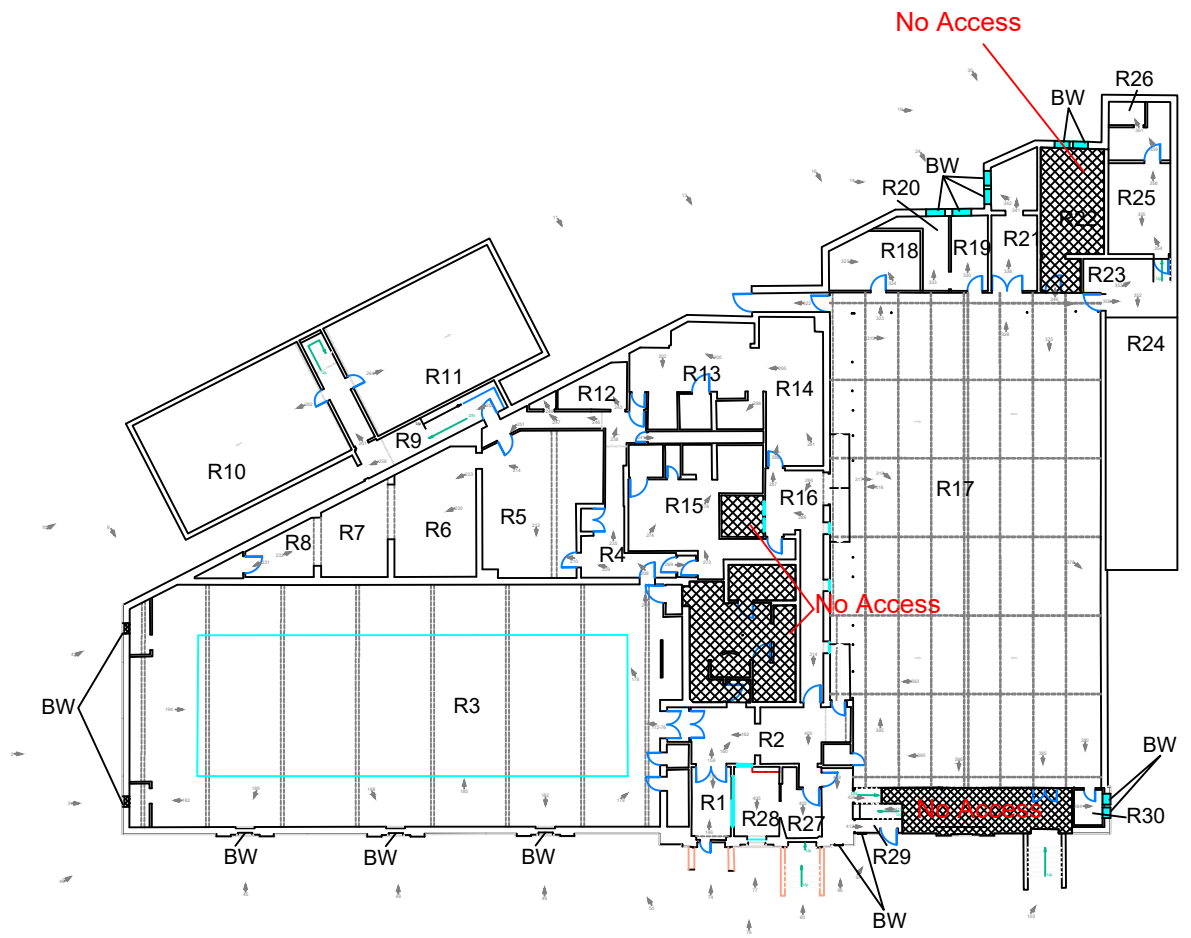
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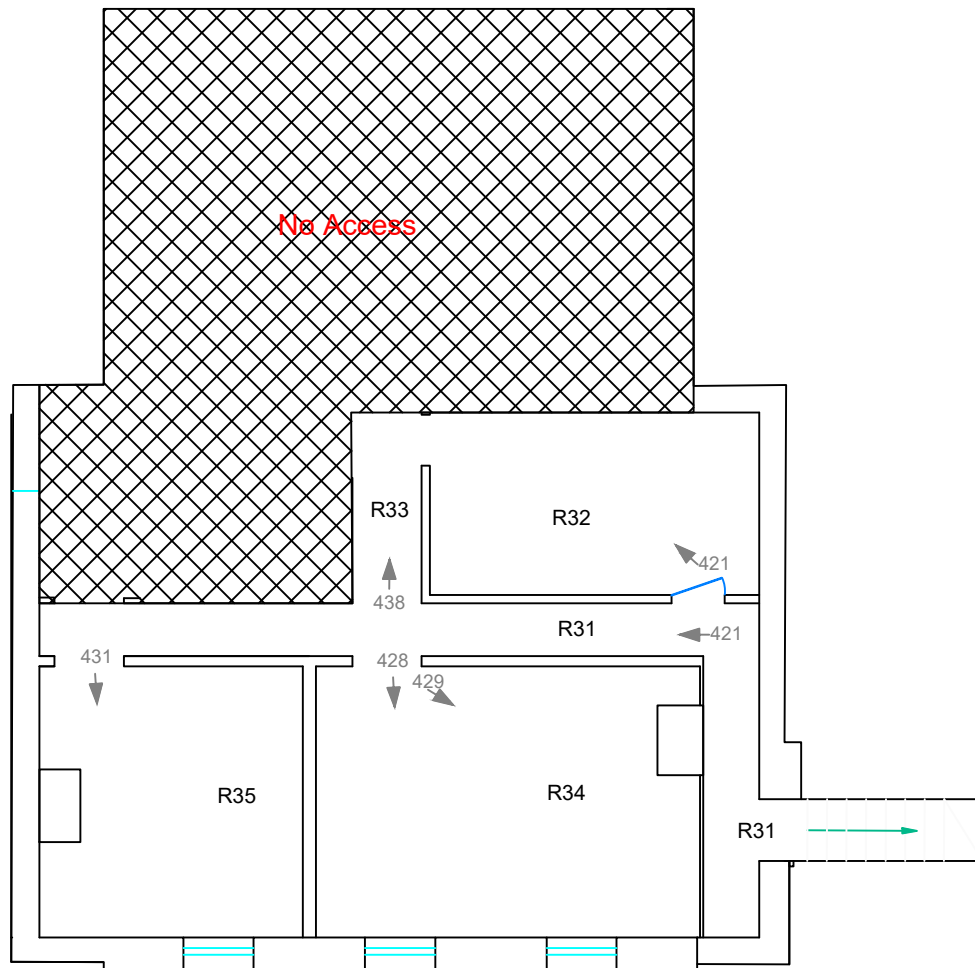
Chorlton Leisure Centre, Manchester Road, Manchester
Figure 2: West and East Elevations

Key:

 Brick	 Window
 Stone	
 Door	







Chorlton Leisure Centre, Manchester Road, Manchester

Figure 5: First floor plan

z ←

Key:

- Brick
- Stone
- Door
- Window
- Photo Direction

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