

# Recent Emergency Recording

by

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*This article is the fifth in a regular series on discoveries made during emergency recording work by some of the national agencies. As in previous years, there appears to be no shortage of unexpected discoveries to be recorded, such as a medieval hall house in Carmarthenshire and some fascinating nineteenth-century industrial survivals, including a coffin-furniture maker in Birmingham and a printer in Denbigh. Regular readers may notice that schools have featured in all but one of the past five years. Along with some other types of institutional buildings, schools are particularly vulnerable to change, especially when small buildings may become redundant as a result of economies of scale. As ever, we are most grateful for their help in providing information and illustrations to Richard Suggett of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and John Cattell and Peter Guillery, formerly of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, now of English Heritage. The editor would welcome comments on the value of this compilation and in order to assist those inquiring about a particular site contact names and addresses are given at the end of the article.*

## CARMARTHENSHIRE



Fig. 1

King's Court, Talley, Carmarthenshire, after storm damage  
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The King's Court, Talley  
(Tallyllychau)

The partial collapse of the roof and central chimney shaft during winter storms at the intriguingly named King's Court, Talley, unexpectedly revealed evidence for a much earlier core behind the late Georgian façade (Fig.1). After careful survey by RCAHMW, it became clear that King's Court was a late-medieval hall-house of

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Stephen Croad joined the staff of the RCHME in 1968 and took early retirement in 1996; he was Head of the National Buildings Record from 1981 to 1994.

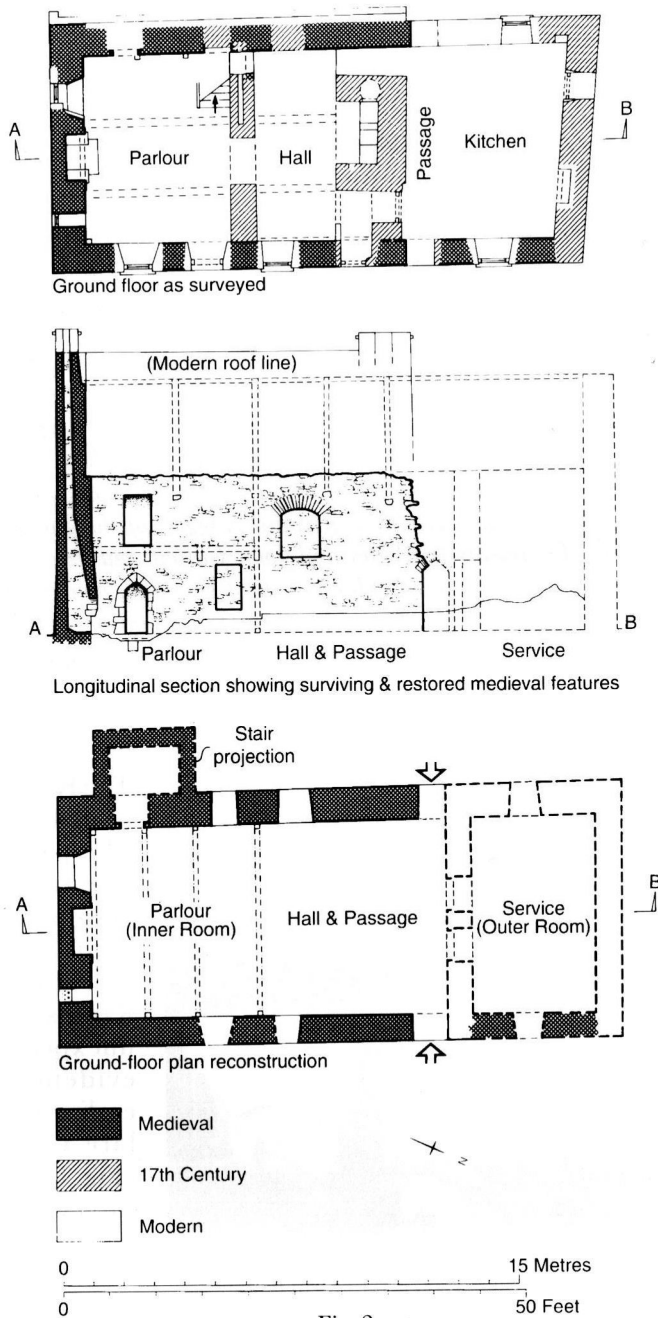


Fig. 2  
 King's Court, Talley, Carmarthenshire, plan as surveyed and plan and long section showing medieval detail  
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classic plan-type (Fig. 2) with a central hall set between inner and outer units. The open hall of three bays was lit by a large window, which had been truncated by the inserted ceiling. The upper-end storeyed parlour, heated by a hooded fireplace, was provided with access to the solar by a stair projection. Corbels for the roof trusses survived, but the medieval roof had been lost when the house assumed its Georgian guise.

Stone-built hall-houses are not numerous in west Wales, but the particular interest of King's Court lies in its location some 100 metres south-west of Talley Abbey. The house seems to have been sited within the outer precinct of the Premonstratensian abbey. Domestic buildings rarely survive in a monastic context and it is not easy to interpret the significance of this house. It is possible, but by no means certain, that the hall was the residence of a bailiff or steward and the post-Reformation survival of the house relied on its secular role in estate administration. The lordship of Talley (the former abbey granges) remained in Crown hands after the Dissolution and it seems probable that King's Court acquired its name because the courts for the Crown were held in this building. Research on this fascinating building continues.

#### CORNWALL

##### Goonvean China Clay Works, St Stephen in Brannel

The pumping engine at the Goonvean Clay Works near St Austell survives almost intact, but has received little regular maintenance since it was last used in the 1950s. Originally built by Harveys of Hale in 1863, the engine was used at several Cornish mines before being re-erected on its present site, in a newly-built engine house, in 1910. Various components of the engine were replaced or altered during its working life, including the cast-iron main beam, known locally as a bob, and parts of the steam valves. The bob was replaced in 1928, and was reputedly the last in the world to be cast. The engine house is located close to the edge of a large open-cast mine, its main function being to pump slurry containing kaolin up from the floor of the mine. The engine, engine house and nearby associated buildings were recorded by the former RCHME team in summer 1999.

The engine house is typical of the proportions, stone construction and ornamental detail seen at several other sites in this part of Cornwall (Fig. 3). It was built end-on to the vertical shaft, which was set back from the edge of the pit (now covered over), with a 1.5 metre thick wall supporting the pivot of the bob. The top section of the heavy timber pump rod, which formerly extended the full depth of the main shaft, still hangs from the outer end of the bob. The roof of the engine house recently has been replaced. The boiler house, attached to one side of the engine house, is of shuttered-concrete construction, as are the massive foundations of the engine house itself. The boilers have been removed, but the flues and parts of the steam pipes to the engine remain in situ, and the circular stone chimney survives a short distance away.

Inside the engine house, the components of the engine are arranged on five levels, with two floors above ground level and two small basements adjacent to the



Fig. 3  
 Engine House,  
 Goonvean China Clay  
 Works, St Stephen in  
 Brannel, Cornwall  
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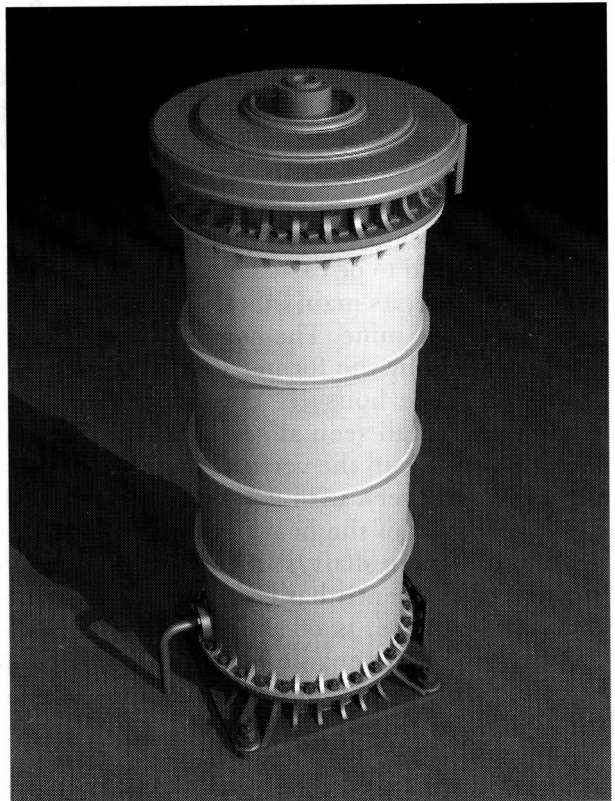


Fig. 4  
 Pumping engine at Goonvean China  
 Clay Works, St Stephen in Brannel,  
 Cornwall. The 4.2 metres high main  
 cylinder is shown as a computer-  
 generated image to enable it to  
 appear without the intervening first  
 floor and other attached components  
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bob wall. The main cylinder, which is of fifty inches (127 cm) internal diameter, is bolted to the ground floor and extends upwards into the first floor (Fig. 4). The steam valves, along with associated pipework and control gear, also occupy the ground and first floors and are attached to the side of the cylinder facing the bob wall. The second storey is an attic that houses the bob. The two small basements were vital to the operation of the engine. Each housed a cataract, a type of governor that was commonly used to regulate the valve gear of Cornish pumping engines.

DENBIGHSHIRE

Gwasg Gee, Chapel Street, Denbigh

Gwasg Gee, the oldest surviving press in Wales, with a strong tradition of Welsh-language printing, was visited by RCAHMW during a period of technological change to computer-based printing. The premises in Chapel Street (Fig. 5) have been occupied continuously by the press since the 1830s and are substantially unchanged

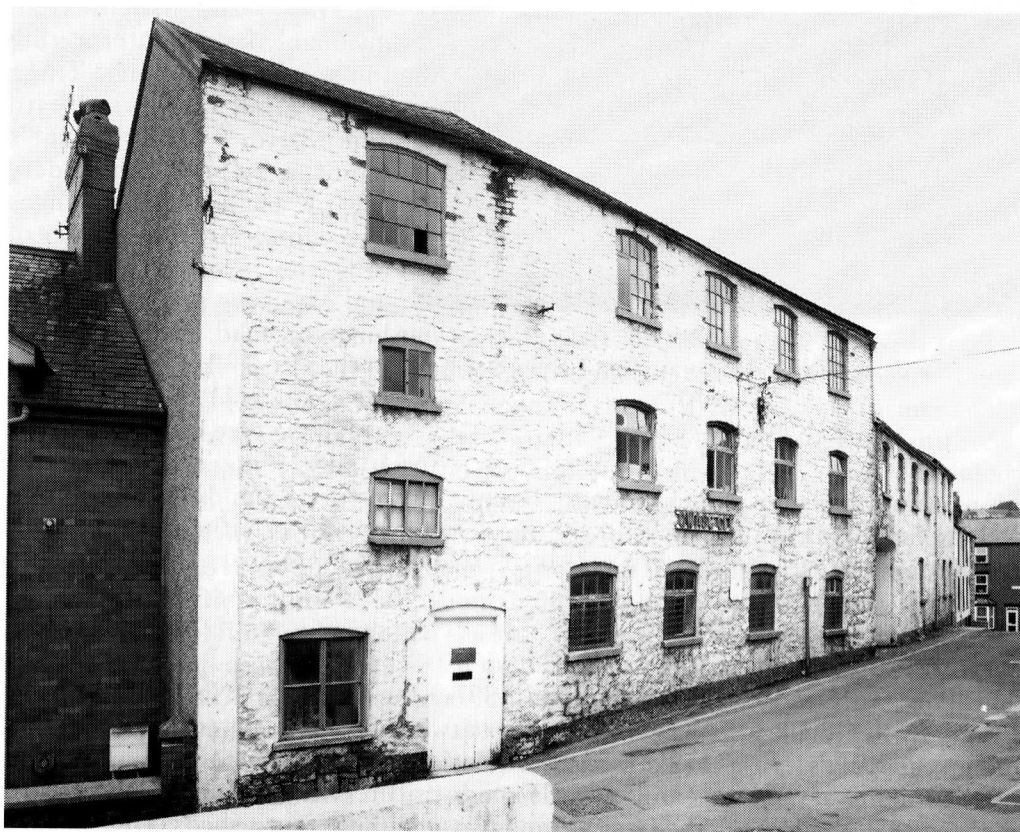


Fig. 5

Gwasg Gee, Chapel Street, Denbigh, front elevation of c.1850

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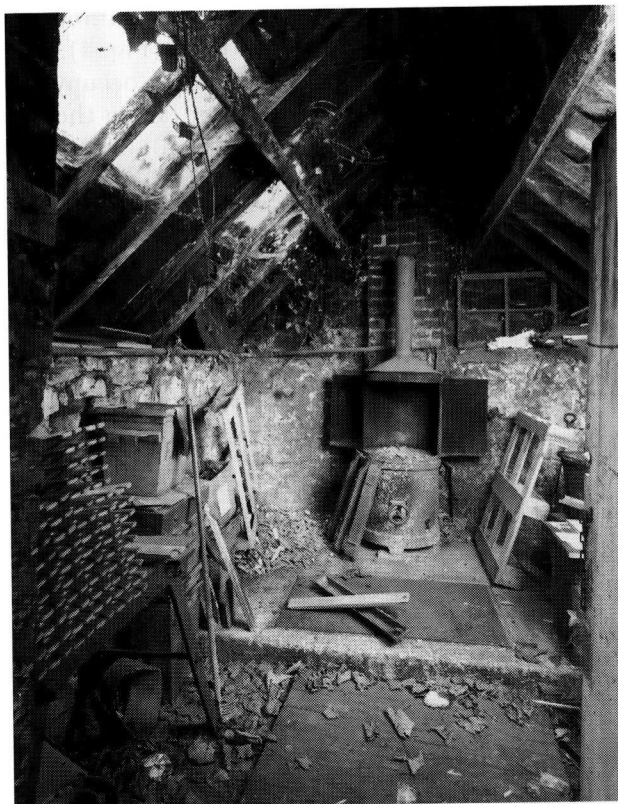


Fig. 6  
Interior of melting shed at Gwasg Gee, Chapel Street,  
Denbigh  
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since mid-nineteenth-century enlargement. The press buildings are arranged around a courtyard, which was overlooked by the beady-eyed proprietor, the radical liberal Thomas Gee, from a first-floor bay window near the entrance into the yard. A detailed Welsh-language description of a visit to Gee's Printing Office in its mid-Victorian heyday by the journalist 'Y Gohebydd' (*cf.* P. H. Jones in *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*, 40 (1991), 9-28) provides an invaluable key for interpreting the surviving buildings. These range from paper store to compositors' and editor's rooms, print shop and bindery (Fig.6). Technological changes have simplified the number of processes involved in printing and extensive premises are no longer needed. Redevelopment of the site is likely unless plans for a National Printing Museum at Gwasg Gee can be realised. It may be noted that there are

no printing museums which actually occupy former press buildings apart from Robert Smail's Printing Works in the Borders town of Inverleithen preserved by the National Trust.

#### LONDON

##### Western Goods Shed, King's Cross, Camden

The Western Goods Shed was built in 1897-9 for the Great Northern Railway Company to provide a separate facility for outward-bound goods traffic at its chief depot, the King's Cross Goods Yard. It was designed to overcome the delays caused by the mixing of outwards and inwards goods traffic, both of which were handled in three 1850s buildings – the Granary and two adjoining transit sheds. The Western Goods Shed formed part of a nation-wide programme of upgrading their key collection and distribution points undertaken by the G.N.R. in the late 1890s, at a time when it was facing severe competition from the Great Central Railway.



Fig. 7

The Western Goods Shed, King's Cross, Camden, London: aerial view from the west in 1997, with the Regent's Canal in the foreground

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Designed by the company's Chief Engineer, Alexander Ross, the building was a simple two-level shed of about 380 feet (115 m) by 170 feet (52 m) with tracks entering on both floors. It was sited over, and made partial structural use of, a disused canal basin in the south-western part of the yard. An existing former coal-drops building and an adjoining railway viaduct also were adapted to fulfil new roles in the building. In about 1915, the high-level shed (Fig. 7) was extended northwards by the construction of a range of timber-framed, north-lit trusses, presumably to enable longer trains to be loaded under cover. The Western Goods Shed continued to serve outwards goods traffic – and the Granary and transit sheds the inwards traffic – until 1938, when their roles were reversed. In the 1980s, when British Rail finally abandoned the site, the building was converted for use by light industry and road haulage.

The Western Goods Shed is of considerable interest as a very early example of a steel-framed building in Britain, albeit one with external load-bearing brick walls. It has further value for the railway historian as it is a fairly well preserved example of this obsolete and fast-disappearing class of building.

No. 20, Blackheath Park, Greenwich

The death of the architect Peter Moro (1911-98) prompted the making of a photographic record by RCHME of this modest family home in Blackheath. Moro



Fig. 8

Living room and study in No. 20 Blackheath Park, Greenwich, London

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designed the house for himself and it was built in 1957-8. Widely recognised as one of Britain's seminal post-war houses, it is a skilful demonstration of what is now termed the 'Contemporary' style. It has a simple functional exterior of brick, insulating blocks and plate glass, combined with innovative internal planning that places the emphasis on openness and spatial flexibility. This break from tradition is seen clearly in the living and study areas, which are shown here (Fig. 8). These uncluttered and well-lit spaces are only notionally subdivided by the almost free-standing fireplace. As a 1958 article on the building in *Country Life* observed, 'privacy is comparatively unimportant in a servantless house'.

Abbey Street British Schools, Bethnal Green, Tower Hamlets

The former Abbey Street British Schools (Fig. 9) in Bethnal Green were built in 1839 for the Spitalfields and Bethnal Green British School Society. They were designed to accommodate 500 children aged six to fifteen in a poor district where previously only one in nine received schooling. Capacity was immediately exceeded, with 660 enrolled in 1840 and 830 in 1853. In what was a relatively large and architecturally grand early school building, these children were taught in a long single-storey stock-brick range with a classical west front of thirteen bays. This front was embellished with stucco dressings, pilastered centre and end bays, ornamental acroteria, and a central bell turret. It fronted onto Abbey Street, which



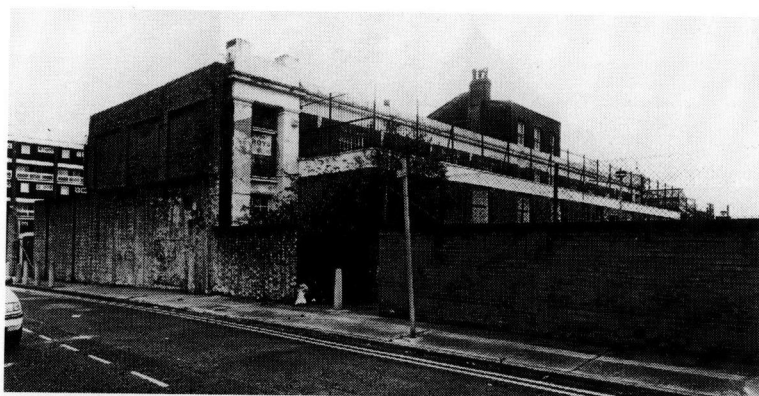


Fig. 9  
Former Abbey Street  
British Schools,  
Bethnal Green, Tower  
Hamlets, London  
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no longer exists. Two large schoolrooms, for boys and girls, were entered from the end bays and separated by central spaces that incorporated two storeys in the same height, for a schoolmaster's house and a visitors' room. It was built to conform to the rigidly codified Lancasterian system of education. The British and Foreign School Society was established in 1814, arising from the Royal Lancasterian Society, founded in 1810 to disseminate the educational ideas of Joseph Lancaster (1778-1839), a Quaker who had run his own school in Southwark since 1799. The schoolrooms were simple rectangular spaces – designed for the hundreds of 'unclassified' children to sit together in rows facing the front, with spaces for small monitored groups, and inner end platforms for the masters. The former boys' schoolroom is no longer furnished, but it remains sufficiently little altered so as to make it possible to visualise the original teaching regime. In 1841, a two-storey infants' school for 394 children was added to the east, at right angles across the playgrounds, to designs by William Wallen, who may have been the architect of the 1839 building. In 1872, the main range was altered by the addition of a low classroom along the front and by the raising of the central block in place of the bell turret. School use ceased around 1900, but was resumed and continued until 1990, since when the buildings have been disused.

#### MONTGOMERYSHIRE (Formerly DENBIGHSHIRE)

##### Glas-hirfryn, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant

Glas-hirfryn is one of the most sophisticated timber-built vernacular houses to have been visited by the Welsh Royal Commission in recent years (Fig. 10). It is an early box-framed storeyed house with a stone lateral chimney. The position of the fireplace and the very fine timber detail are indications of a house of high status. The timber work is lavish: the house is jettied on two sides and close studded throughout with (now concealed) decorative framing of lozenge type on the upper floor of the main front. The heavily-beamed interior is particularly impressive with roll-moulded beams defining a ceiling of six panels with similarly moulded counter-changing joists. At the intersection of the main beams in the hall there is an exquisite boss of stylised oak leaves (Fig. 11). The design of the boss expresses



Fig. 10

Glas-hirfryn, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant,  
Montgomeryshire, as recorded in 1998 before  
further collapse

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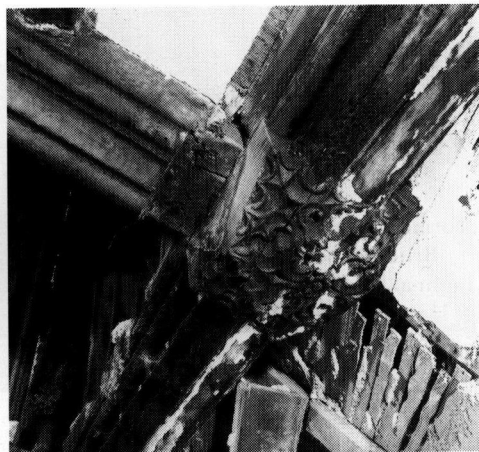


Fig. 11

Glas-hirfryn, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant,  
Montgomeryshire: detail of moulded  
ceiling beams and central boss

*RCAHMW Crown Copyright*

the delight in oak carpentry that is evident throughout the house.

Glas-hirfryn was abandoned as a dwelling about 1964 when a new farmhouse was constructed. The house was used as a farm store, but has become increasingly derelict over the past few years and was visited by RCAHMW following a listed building consent application for total demolition. Many fine timber houses in the Welsh Marches have been destroyed in the second half of the twentieth century and it is always a matter for deep regret that a house constructed some 400 years ago by skilled craftsmen should disappear in our time.

#### WEST MIDLANDS

Newman Brothers, Brass Coffin-Furniture and Shroud Manufacturers, Nos. 13-15, Fleet Street, Birmingham

The Jewellery Quarter of Birmingham currently is undergoing rapid change. The Emergency Recording Team of the former RCHME has undertaken a survey of the buildings relating to the jewellery and metal trades. The project is funded by Birmingham City Council, English Heritage and English Partnerships, and the aims are to gain a better understanding of the architectural development of the area and the significance of individual buildings and manufacturers. During the course of the survey, the team recorded the premises of Newman Brothers, brass coffin-furniture and shroud manufacturers. The company is one of only three remaining coffin-furniture makers in England. The trade is now dominated by the production of coffin furniture made from resins, finished to look like metal. Although Newman Brothers adapted to these changes, while continuing to produce metal goods, it is destined to cease trading in the near future, owing to the lack of demand



Fig. 12

Newman Brothers, Nos. 13-15 Fleet Street, Birmingham, elevation of 1892

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Fig. 13

Interior of the press shop at Newman Brothers, Nos. 13-15 Fleet Street, Birmingham

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for more expensive metal goods, loss of skilled labour and competition from abroad. The building, although unlisted and unremarkable externally (Fig. 12), retains all its nineteenth-century machinery, fittings, furniture and dies, giving a sense of stepping back into the last century.

Newman Brothers was founded in 1882 and ten years later moved into purpose-built premises in Fleet Street. The building was designed by Richard Harley of Birmingham and is typical of medium-sized nineteenth-century factories in the area. It comprised a front block containing warehousing on the ground and first floors, with a first-floor office and showroom, and a workshop on the top floor. To the rear lay a narrow courtyard surrounded by workshops, casting shops and a stable. A steam engine was housed at semi-basement level at the eastern end of the yard. At the centre of the yard was a small single-storey building housing stores and a 'dippy shed' – where brass castings were dipped for cleaning in chemicals. The front range retains its original goods hoist and the three-storey workshops to the rear house numerous hand presses, made by various Birmingham companies, for the stamping of decoration into small metal fittings. A battery of four drop-stamps, for stamping decoration into larger fittings, remains in working order in the press shop (Fig. 13). The shaking barrels for the polishing of metal fittings also survive. The line-shafting that drove the drop stamps and the shaking barrels remains in situ (although now powered by electricity). The future of these buildings with their machinery and fittings remains uncertain.

For further details of any of the buildings described above or for general information on their emergency recording work, please write to the representative of the relevant agency:

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