

The Chimney in Milk Street, Bath

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The Chimney and the Site

Following a proposal in 1994 for a new housing scheme on the west side of Milk Street near the centre of Bath, it was learned that this development would involve the demolition of an unusual old chimney. Although little was known about the origin or history of this familiar local landmark (over 50ft high), it was felt by Avon Planning Department to be of sufficient interest as a rare relic of Bath's industrial past to warrant preservation. With its upper part missing and standing in a dilapidated and unprepossessing waste-paper disposal yard, it was not listed and no means could be found to save it. Nevertheless, as a condition for planning permission, provision was obtained for an archaeological assessment and record to be made of the site both above and below ground. This would not only include measured drawings of the chimney itself, but also a photograph record of the surrounding buildings to allow scaled drawings from rectified photographs to be created. This project was undertaken by Bath Archaeological Trust under the supervision of Mark Beaton.

The site originally formed part of a meadow known as King's Mead which was not built on until the latter half of the eighteenth century, Milk Street apparently being

then laid out as a back service road between the residential properties in Avon Street and Kingsmead Terrace. However, no buildings of any consequence were built at the northern end of Milk Street until the mid-nineteenth century, after this area became industrialised. The archaeological assessment was later able to confirm that no cellars existed on this site, nor any significant deposits that might relate to the chimney. It is thought that the chimney was built in the early 1880s when it first appears on the first ed OS map as part of a steam saw mill which also begins to appear at that time in the Bath Postal Directories. Its function and later history is still not clear, but by world war two the site was being used as a rag-and-bone yard or 'marine store' occupied by T. Davis. This area was heavily damaged during the Bath Blitz when the chimney lost its upper stage. Photographic views of the city in the late nineteenth century show that it also had an ornate moulded cap, in common with others which then existed in the area, such as that at the public baths at the bottom of the street by the quay. Some research was later carried out on the site by the late George Watkins, BIAS member and Research Fellow in the History of Technology at Bath University, but his material has not so far been located. In the meantime, it has been agreed to include below the relevant extracts from Mark Beaton's report, written prior to the chimney being finally demolished in August 1994.



Milk Street Chimney and surrounding buildings, 2 June 1994

(photo Marek Lewcun)

Recording the Site

Prior to demolition of the group of buildings around the unusual chimney on the west side of Milk Street, Bath, Avon County Council Environmental Practice required that it be recorded by photography and a measured survey taken with a view to allow scaled drawings from rectified photographs to be created. After discussion, it was agreed that it would not be part of the brief¹ to produce the scaled drawings. In addition measured drawings were made of the base and interior of the lowest stage of the chimney.

The photographic survey was carried out with a 2¼ in square format Mamiya C330 fitted with an 80mm lens using black and white Ilford FP4 film. In addition, the same film was used in a Nikon F2 35mm format fitted with a 35mm lens. The building complex was photographed from surrounding high buildings to provide over-all views. General shots including one or more elevations were also taken from the ground level. A full coverage of all elevations, internal as well as external, was taken for each of the three buildings and for the chimney. The southern elevation of the complex could not be recorded, except for a tiny portion of shed 3, as it was covered by thick climbing vegetation. Negatives and contact prints are currently with Bath Archaeological Trust. Prints and survey data will be deposited as required in the project brief from Avon County Council. Large prints of relevant areas for rectification can be made if and when it is decided to produce the drawings.

The measured points were obtained by surveying fixed points, such as comers of elevations, string courses, etc. with a Leica EDM and PenMap software running on a

GridPad pen computer. The resultant survey has been used to draw a simple 'wireframe' representation of the building complex in Autocad. Map references (for the relevant 1:1250 map square) and heights od can be read directly off any point in the drawing, by using the ID command. These xyz co-ordinates will then be used to identify points on the photographs if they are rectified for a scale drawing.

Comments

The complex had obviously undergone many alterations and partial rebuildings since it was first erected.

Shed 1

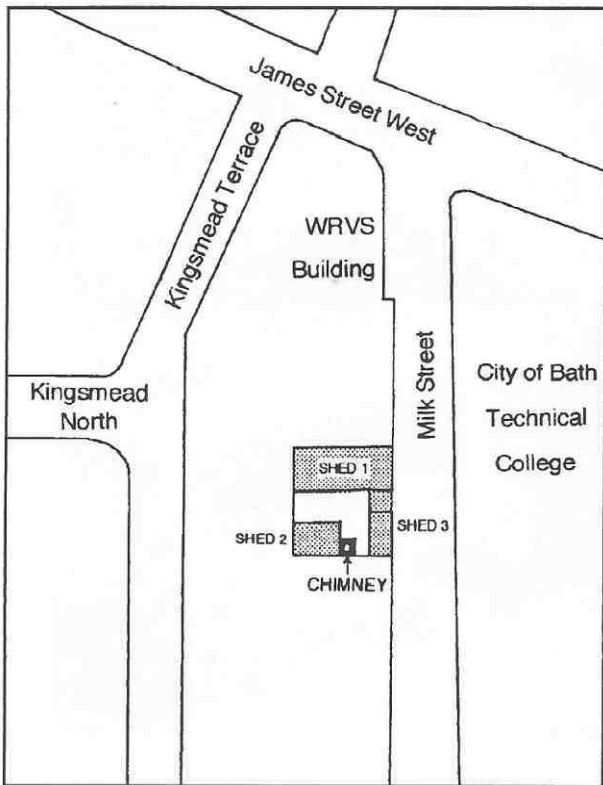
The large northern building had much concrete blockwork and a lot of reused, machine-cut Bath stone in its upper half, and indeed the last owner vouchsafed that it had been mostly rebuilt reusing older stone, in the last 30 years, after a fire. Evidence of the latter is visible on all of the buildings to some extent. Some older structure is apparent on the west elevation and the lower parts of the south and north elevations. Indications of a now-vanished external stair can be seen on the south elevation, west of the central doorway. The roof on shed 1 is entirely modern: corrugated asbestos over a lightweight metal frame.

Shed 2

The southwest building, seemed to be of one build but had had large windows, or openings, blocked. It was clearly built up to the pre-existing chimney, which formed the southern half of the eastern end of the shed. The roof was of traditional timber construction: three kingpost and tie beam trusses, covered in pan tiles. The western end was tripped. There was no ceiling.

Shed 3

The building in the southeast corner, had had the walls above its first floor, and the whole of the eastern facade, replaced. The break and change in masonry style and thickness is obvious. It may predate the chimney as its south wall continues west as the property boundary, and runs behind (south of) the chimney which was built free-standing. The masonry style of the lower part of shed 3 is indeed more akin to eighteenth century work than eighteenth century and similar to the lower, original masonry in shed 1. The southern gable end had been rebuilt in brick above the eaves level, and the whole external face at this end had been buttressed and rendered quite recently to stop collapse after other buildings here had been demolished. Consequently, no original detail is recordable here. An internal heavy timber structure is still visible, consisting of a joist running between the north and south walls at ground floor ceiling height, originally supported by two verticals: these latter now hang freely. It is not clear what their function was, unless they are part of the original internal stud wall subdivisions and floors. The external west face of shed 3 shows signs of extensive burning, presumably from the fire that destroyed shed 1. There is no evidence of internal damage. The roof is a modern metal structure similar to shed 1.



Location plan of the Milk Street Chimney

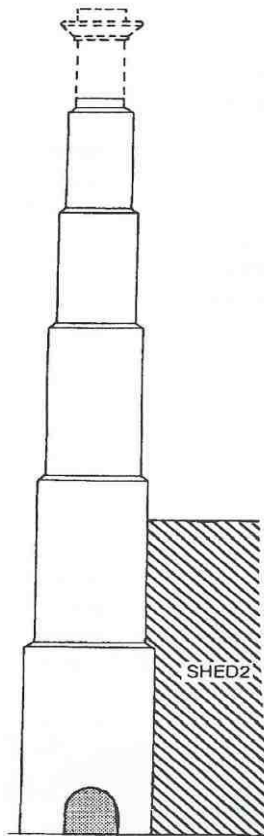
The Chimney

The chimney was probably built in the 1880s as part of the new steam saw mills on the site and, according to J.Davis, is of the 'Ziggernan' [Ziggurat] type, of successive square stages in Bath stone ashlar reducing in width. It now consists of five stages approximately 15.5 m tall but lost a further stage during world war two, only the stump of which survives. The remainder was made safe by the former lessee, Thomas Davis, and is now strengthened by external steel bracing.

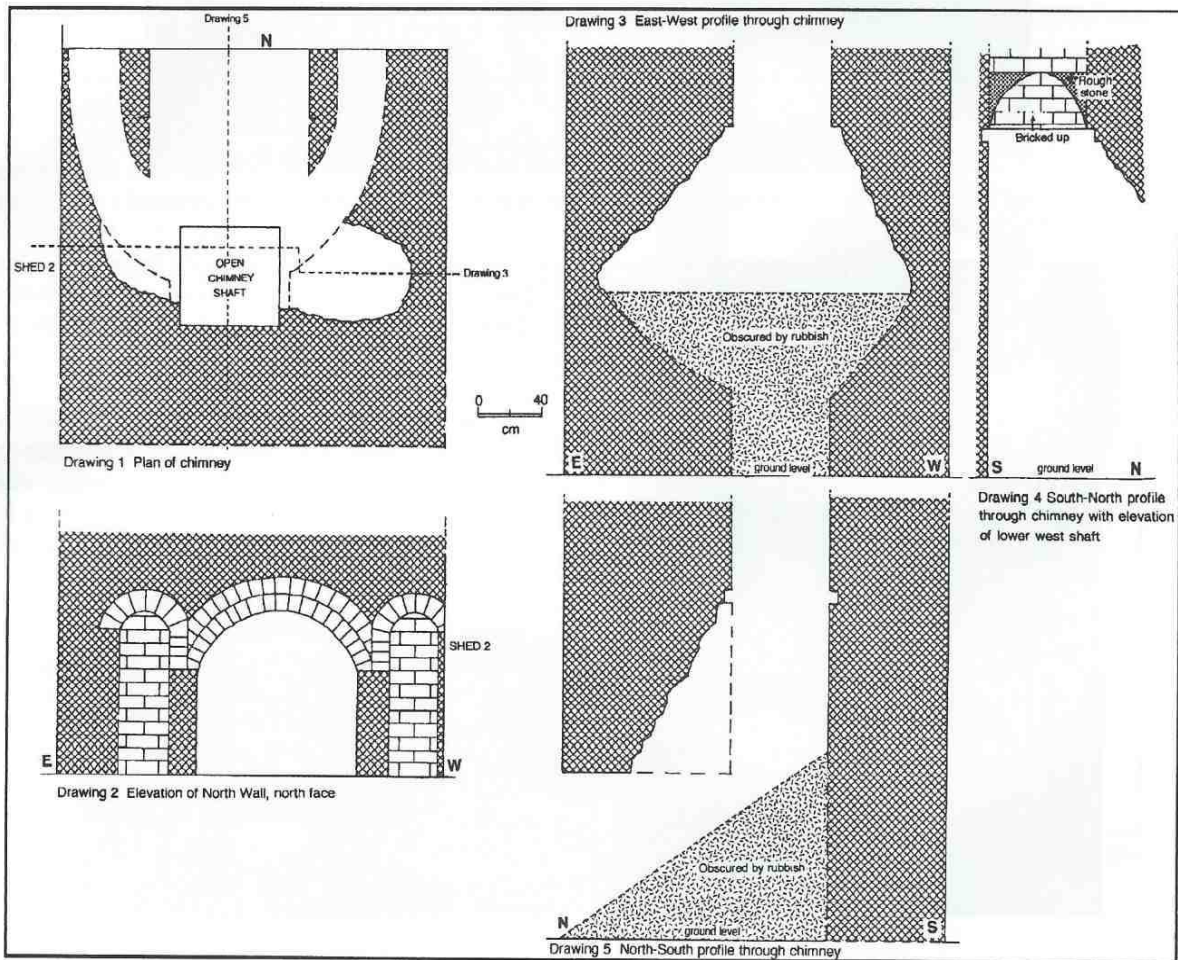
Internally it had a continuous square-section shaft, 50cm across, which started c2.1 m above the current yard level. Below this point there is a groove 5cm deep and 8cm high, running around the inside of the shaft (drawings 3,4,5). Above this groove there was a small arched opening on the west face, the full width of the shaft, then bricked up (drawing 4). The south face of the shaft continued to ground level, as far as could be seen because of debris. This was probably also the case with the east and west faces originally, but these had at some time been roughly hacked away to-

wards the outside of the chimney, leaving only 20-25cm between the inside and outside faces of the stack (drawing 3)² The flue entrances were to the north side of the chimney. There were originally three vaulted openings, consisting of a large 1 m wide off-centre opening flanked by two narrow ones 30 cm wide and now bricked up, all approximately 1 m high to the underside of the arch. The central opening led straight to the shaft, while the two outer ones curved inwards to join it. From the outer face inwards, approximately 40 cm survived of the vaults, beyond which they have been hacked away upwards towards the ledge (drawings 1 & 2). There was no sign of any machimney or boiler fixings.

The chimney was constructed of limestone blocks with an ashlar face all round. The arched entrances were of brick, and the internal ledge at 2.1 m constructed of brick and possibly other stone, perhaps indicating it to be a later insert to receive a metal ember grid.



North elevation of chimney showing probable design of missing section



Plan, elevation and profiles of Milk Street Chimney

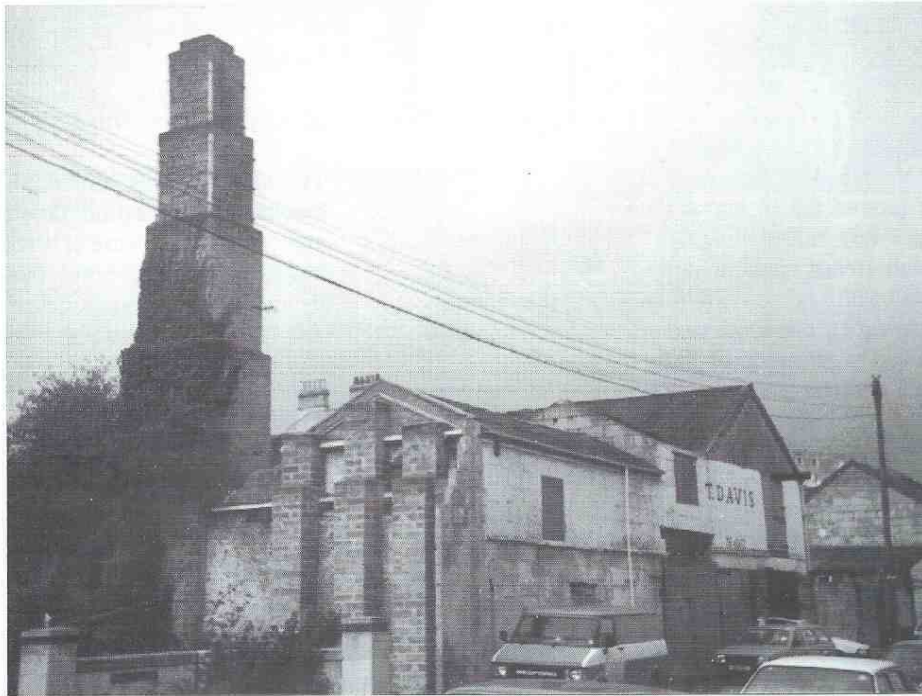
Summary

The building complex consisted of three sheds and a chimney arranged around a yard. The existing complex was largely of nineteenth century construction, with later re-building, especially of Shed 1. Shed 3 may have predated the rest of the buildings, possibly from the first development of the area in the 1750s or so, but had been heavily modified; its floor level was lower than the others. Shed 2 was contemporary with the chimney, built c1880, or later, having been built on to it. All the buildings showed evidence of considerable modification during their exis-

ence and were in a very poor condition. Demolition was imminent. The chimney has now been demolished and the site redeveloped.

References

1. ASMR9490 Proposal site: former saw mill buildings and chimney at 1 Milk Street, Bath. ACC 1994
2. After removal of rubbish from outside the base of the stack, a hole was later found in the east face about 15cm in diameter and about 1m above yard level. It was centrally inserted in the face apparently connected with the hollowed out section inside.



Milk Street Chimney viewed from the south east, 21 March 1994 (Photo Marek Lewcun)



Milk Street Chimney viewed from the south west, 15 June 1994 (Photo Marek Lewcun)