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RUCHILL STREET CHURCH HALLS, GLASGOW
A MEASURED DRAWING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED BY WALTER McNEIL
TO THE MACKINTOSH SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE 1991



ELEVATION TO RYAN STREET

75327

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Note: * The originals of these drawings are available at Glasgow University, Hunterian Art Gallery.

PREFACE

Charles Rennie Mackintosh must surely be Glasgows best known Architect. The current acclaim and level of active interest aroused by Mackintosh far exceeds the little acknowledgement he enjoyed during his own lifetime. Unlike most of his contemporaries his work is widely known to many people both inside and outside of the architectural profession.

What distinguishes Ruchill Street Church Halls from the rest of Mackintosh's work is that they have been largely ignored. Thomas Howarth in his book "Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement" went so far as to question Ruchill Streets inclusion in his book dismissing the Church Halls as "not of particular importance". There exists very little information about Ruchill other than the drawings held at Glasgow University Hunterian Art Gallery. Ruchill Street Halls are truly a lesser known example of his work. The first chapter of the dissertation is devoted to a description of the building and an examination of its design. While second chapter compares Mackintosh contribution at Ruchill to the later addition of the Church by Neil C Duff. The third chapter attempts to assess the significance of Ruchill to Mackintosh's career. Finally the measured drawings (see Appendix) illustrate the Church Halls as built in 1900 prior to any subsequent modification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Ruchill Street Church Halls were built during 1899 and 1900 on a restricted north facing site off Maryhill Road in Glasgow. The site lay between Maryhill Central Railway Station and the Forth and Clyde Canal. The surrounding area was of significant industrial and commercial importance to Glasgow for along the canal edge there were many warehouses and factories (Drawing No.1). The area to the south of Maryhill Road housed the local population for whom the Church Halls were built.

The church halls were a Free Presbyterian mission founded by Westbourne United Free Church in order to establish a congregation within the Maryhill Area. The original commission for the church halls and a caretakers house was undertaken by the firm of John Honeyman and Keppie. Charles Rennie Mackintosh who at that time was a draughtsman in the practise was given a significant measure of autonomy in the design and execution of the Church Halls. By September 1899 Mackintosh saw the completion nearby of the more widely known Queens Cross Church, at which time, the construction of Ruchill Halls had been progressing for some 6 months. Sadly, the later main Church building was not designed by Mackintosh consequently Queens Cross Church is the only completed major example of Mackintosh's ecclesiastical work.

CHAPTER ONERUCHILL STREET CHURCH HALLS

The physical layout of Ruchill Street Church Halls is relatively simple but adaptable, the accommodation which Mackintosh has devised is capable of responding to the needs of a number of groups of varying size simultaneously. A plain entrance space is located off Ruchill Street, a committee room sits on one side with an access stair to the upper floor on the other. This entrance space connects directly to the main hall adjacent to which there is a small and useful annexe. On the upper floor there is a small hall, a second committee room, storage and toilets (Drawings 3 and 4). The accommodation can be varied due to Mackintosh's use of sliding screens which are used to separate the main hall from the annexe on the ground floor, and the committee room from the small hall on the upper floor. The planning provides a good range of room sizes and the screens provide a further additional degree of flexibility in their use.

The Caretaker house was constructed at the same time as the Church Halls. A living room and kitchen occupy the ground floor with two bedrooms and a bathroom on the upper floor. These levels are connected by a winding stair with a conical roof turret (Drawings 3 and 4).

The stair of the church halls and the caretakers house have been located so that they make a contribution to the elevation. They are expressed as small stair towers on the north and east elevations. (Drawings 5 and 6).

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The buildings are generally considered to be well planned although there has been criticism of the siting and planning on caretakers house. It is frequently said that the rooms are too small and receive very little light. More significantly however, Mackintosh's chosen siting of the house effectively sub-divides the site. The house is set well back from the street and it occupies a central location, this arrangement appears to have been favoured from an early stage. A sketch drawing (held at the University of Glasgow, Hunterian Art Gallery) marked "Preliminary Sketch for Ruchill Street Halls" (Drawing 2), illustrates an arrangement which is similar to what was eventually built. The obvious consequence of the addition of a future church building would be to produce a small courtyard required only for access between the house and the street. In the event the proportion and orientation of the resulting space permits little or no direct sunlight to penetrate.

Internally, the most significant space is the main hall on the ground floor. This interior is vaguely reminiscent of Glasgow School of Art Museum, sharing some importance features such as Art Nouveau timber trusses and roof glazing. There are differences however, at Ruchill three large timber bolted collar and tie beam trusses support a predominately slated roof while the trusses which span the GSA Museum supports a pitched roof which is entirely glazed. The GSA Museum roof and roof structure is supported on columns and is visually of light appearance, at Ruchill the organisation of the roof structure gives the impression of considerable strength and robustness.

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Mackintosh has paid particular attention to sculpting and framing between the trusses (Plates 1 and 2). The roof glazing is kept above this feature close to the ridge where it takes up a large proportion of the roof surface and so maximised the available daylight.

All of this is in stark contrast to the perimeter walls. These have timber panelling up to door lintol height with white painted plasterwork above. This expanse of plasterwork is broken by a small timber bead which traces the shape of the perimeter. Splayed side walls on either side of the podium cut across the main slope of the roof; the resulting geometry of this junction emphasise the height and space above the podium. The visual affect seems most appropriate in a small plain evangelical building (Plate 3).

There is one feature of the main hall which is not immediately apparent. The upper floor circulation leading to the annexe beyond the upper floor committee room make an uneasy almost ill-mannered path in to and over a corner of the main hall. Direct access to the small hall annexe can only be gained from the space over the ground floor hall. This is why the upper floor circulation extends in to what one might more reasonable expect to be part of the volume of the main hall. Also the tie of the main hall trusses and the floor joists of the upper floor occupy the same zone in section. Mackintosh has attempted to conceal this obtrusive portion of circulation between the back wall and one of the three large roof trusses nearby. An observer is aware initially of only the truss tie members. The arrangement does produce a curious section and prejudices the roof plan by increasing the number of surfaces and junctions (Roof Plan, Section Y-Y). (See Also Plate 4).

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This is unexpectedly an original feature for it is entirely consistent with what is illustrated on plan on the drawings at the Hunterian Art Gallery.

Mackintosh controlled the scale of the building by arranging the accommodation in to a modest group of small buildings. The image gained from the street is not an imposing one, no attempt has been made to manipulate scale to impress or imply authority. These buildings are no more imposing than a traditional group of agricultural buildings.

The visual language is modest too, it draws on Mackintosh interest in traditional Scottish domestic architecture. Windows are located only where they are required. The elevations are a simple composition of traditional elements, including steep roofs with overhanging eaves, parapets, cables, and chimneys. His own evolving style is given expression on the front elevation which is the only face constructed entirely in stone. The sandstone is carved into a number of curved details arranged in various planes principally around the main doorway and the ground floor committee room windows (Plates 7 and 8) which have stone mullions and curved transom pieces. Elsewhere only the window surrounds, copings and chimneys are of stone, external walls are roughcast using a dry dash containing sandstone chips.

The total tender amount for Ruchill was £2200, this was a low budget building in 1899, and obviously restricted the standard of finishes within the building. Mackintosh did not design any furniture for Ruchill, there are only a few simple fretwork details adjacent to the main stair. There is however a few decorative inset glass panels which can be seen in the main hall and annexe screens (Plate 4).

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During the course of the works it is said that Mackintosh's relationship with the client deteriorated due almost entirely to his own personal attitude. From an inspection of the job books (held at STB Keppie) for this period, it is quite evident that many of the tender amounts for individual jobbing items was exceeded. The reasons for these continual overspends are not given. Perhaps late changes by the client to finishes within the building may account for some overspending. However almost every item is exceeded often by as much as fifteen to twenty percent of the original tender amount. There can be little doubt that Mackintosh must bear much of the responsibility. Sadly his conduct and the disfavour he incurred during this period lost him the commission for the new church building.

CHAPTER TWORUCHILL STREET CHURCH

There must have been relatively early success in attempting to establish a sizeable congregation for within two years of Mackintosh completing the church halls work started on a new church building (Note 1). The site works began in 1903 and the completed building was dedicated in 1905.

Neil C Duff was the Architect of this English Neo Perpendicular creation. There are no compelling reasons for Duff's appointment, he had not worked as a Church Architect before Ruchill, nor did he afterwards. His clients were principally hotel and cinema owners, and his best work was for the Glasgow Savings Bank in 1899 at New City Road and at Shawlands Cross in Glasgow. Duff's early years were spent as a pupil in the firm of John Baird and James Thomson at that time probably one of Glasgows largest architectural practices; this period spans from (1876 to 1886). Upon his departure from this firm he appears to have conducted a long solo career. However the likelihood is that it is more than just coincidental that the job book (held at STB Keppie) for 1899 names a."N Campbell Duff and Son" as measurers. This job book entry establishes a connection between Duff and Ruchill prior to his design for this church. Mackintosh loss of favour with the client during the construction of the church halls had become evident. Whereas Duff at this time was known to the client, his work was uncontroversial and accredited. Duff appointment may have been a matter of convenience in these circumstances.

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The adopted style for the new church at Ruchill was English Neo Perpendicular, a style which emphasise horizontals and verticals, large windows and window tracery. This stylistic language would have been easily recognised and understood by the confirmed conventionalism and characteristic conservatism of the Presbytery. It is unclear whether the choice of this style is Duff's or is the result of the client imposing conditions with regard to the image of the new church.

Mackintosh's Church Halls have an elevation to the street which is entirely unconcerned with pretentious authority; there is not a hint of conventional religious symbolism to be seen. The new church departs not only in terms of style from Mackintosh's earlier contribution but also in materials being built in Lochbarbriggs and not a grey yellow sandstone. As can be seen from Ruchill Street the visual result of this particular union is not a happy one (Plates 5 and 6); among this group of buildings, there is neither any visual continuity nor an understanding dialogue between the work of two individuals.

The most detailed drawings of the church halls which are available are kept at the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Art Gallery. If these drawings are an accurate record of what was actually built in 1900 it would appear that Duff must have made significant alternations to Mackintosh's work. For example the east and north elevations (Drawings 5 and 6) clearly show that the caretakers house has a plain gable with a chimney at ridge level facing east. This gable would have abutted the new church and restricted daylight.

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The original gable appears to have been cut down, the roof formed into a hip. The chimney flues have been diverted and accommodated within the wall of the new church. The same elevations show a long wall and basement steps which give access to a space below the main access stair.

This space may have been a boiler room, the plan (Drawing No.6) also reveals what appears to be a coal chute. From Ruchill Street this boiler room has been closed off, the steps and wall removed and a large slab has been cast over the area. The original window has been removed and the opening has been reformed as a doorway. In front of this doorway a new glazed timber screen and door has been placed. Finally on the street edge of the courtyard immediately adjacent to this area a Gothic entrance canopy has been erected making an unconvincing connection between two buildings.

Clearly Duff made some significant alterations to Mackintosh's work at Ruchill, however these alterations do not account for all of the differences which exist between what is evident to visitor and what is illustrated on the drawings held at the Hunterian Art Gallery. These inconsistencies may be attributable to either omissions during the draughting of the drawings or to later refurbishment works. Obviously this is entirely unconnected with the work of Duff. The roof glazing over the main hall appears on the drawings in plan and in section, but not elevation. There is no indication at all of roof glazing over this small hall on the upper floor, what is indicated is a space which is lit solely by artificial means.

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This must surely be a further graphic omission by the Draughtsman, for there is no other practicable means of daylighting the small hall. From an inspection of the roof timbers it is clear that they are not original. The whole roof appears to be constructed in modern dressed pine which has been given a black ash stain. There is a collar member between each fifth pair of rafters. This contradicts what is illustrated on section (drawing no. 5). The existing arrangement appears to be the result of a refurbishment which involve the replacement of roof glazing and roof structure.

There were three further periods of building work all of which were undertaken by Duff. Strathclyde Regional Council Archivists Department hold most of the drawings relating to these periods. The works include the formation of a vestry, session house and hall (drawing dates from 1904). A hall on the north edge of the site dating from 1910, and a further hall from 1919.

CHAPTER THREEAN APPRAISAL

Ruchill was significant to Mackintosh's career insofar as it was contemporary with Queens Cross Church; for it is during this period he was given almost complete control and responsibility for individual projects. This new measure of autonomy for all matters from design to directing operations on site was a reward and a recognition of his contribution to the practise of John Honeyman and Keppie. Mackintosh had joined the firm as a Draughtsman in 1889 and he had enjoyed a good working relationship with Keppie spanning a decade. Mackintosh gained valuable experience during these years as he assisted Keppie on a number of projects. These include Craigie Hall, the Glasgow Herald Building, Queen Margaret College and Martyrs School.

Prior to Ruchill, Mackintosh had enjoyed the successful completion of the first phase of Glasgow School of Art and later the completion of Queens Cross Church provide him with his earliest triumphs. The Art School in particular was large and complicated and posed a substantial design problem; Ruchill is clearly comparatively very modest. Most of Mackintosh's attention and energy would have been absorbed by the construction and design of the Art School and Queens Cross Church during this period.

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There are features at Ruchill which appear in earlier and later buildings, for example, at Windyhill in Kilmacolm, at Hillhouse in Helensburgh and particularly in Mackintosh's competition entry for the Art Lovers House the stair is prominently located in plan and powerfully exploited in elevation. Other features also continually re-appear throughout his work these are often associated with his interest in the Scottish Domestic and Baronial tradition. Gables, slated roofs with low eaves and traditional wall treatments such as roughcast and stone surrounds to windows and doorways figure prominent. However he is not obediently imitating tradition, the chimneys and dressed stone coping which appear in his work are not present in Scottish Domestic Architecture but they are derived from it. Also at Ruchill there are features which are clearly derived from nature. This Art Nouveau detailing finds only very limited expression internally in the screens, some small panel of lead glass and timber trusses. Externally Art Nouveau forms and features are only present in the stone carving around the entrance and the committee room windows. When compared to the complexity and richness of the detailing to the west wing of Glasgow School of Art, Ruchill's facade is simple and very modest.

Perhaps one of the most notable aspects of Mackintosh's association with Ruchill is that his personal attitude to and difficulty with the client. This aspect of his personality first emerges at Ruchill and continues to re-appears throughout his working life.

CONCLUSIONS

It must be concluded that Ruchill Street Church Halls are as Thomas Howarth describes them as being "not of particular importance". Certainly they are of little significance to the development of Mackintosh as an Architect. The siting of the caretakers house and the consequential difficulties associated with the inclusion on the site of a later church would have posed an additional and unnecessary difficulties for Mackintosh. Ruchill is only of modest architectural merit, there are no new features and nothing manifestly memorable or remarkable. The job appears to have been a mere addition to Mackintoshs workload which would at that time would have been overshadowed by Queens Cross Church and Glasgow School of Art.

NOTES

- (1) It was normal practise for the Presbytery to firstly build a small mission or Church Hall in a Parish or Locality. After a congregation had been established a main church building was subsequently built.

- (2) This is also a period when the supply of grey yellow sandstone was not always certain in the Glasgow area. A slow transition to the use of red and Locharbriggs stone was by 1900 well established.

APPENDIX 1

Honeyman and Keppie, Job Book 1899

Pages 187 to 192 inclusive.

Man.	Age	Measurements	Weight	Notes
97	May 29	Naam Thieb work.	700	Robert McCrea T. Lou.
5	July 14	John Kirkwood	450	do
9	Nov. 31	ATD Anderson.	100	Robert McCrea T. Lou. including boundary
3		W. A. Taylor.		do do do
1		James, Willie T. Lou. shinned with thumb	1590	4 3/4
6		Robert, M. Lou. T. Lou.	1376	10 9
2		Hutchison T. Lou.	1501	13 10
4		Peter Miller. shinned with thumb	1390	19 4
7		Moses Barlas.	1392	6 8
4		S. Morgan T. Lou.	1442	
1		Mr. Lewis T. Lou.	1550	0 0
8		R. C. C. T. Lou.	1614	0 0
2	Sept. 29	Wright Jones work.	113	2 4
9	Oct. 19	Wick T. Regie.	713	5 4
5	Nov. 8	Mr. Brown.	777	12 8
1		Hutchison T. Lou.	929	6 11
8		H. H. Milling	685	19 6
3		S. Morgan T. Lou.	448	19 5
4		W. W. Lee T. Lou.	766	11 6
8		W. Ferguson.	717	2 8
3		James Mober T. Co.	753	19 5
4		Spital T. Lou.	735	
4		Hutchison T. Lou.	720	9 1
4		Alex. Murray T. Lou.		
4		John Cochran. Jr.		
4		W. M. Fellers T. Lou.		
			853	8 2 1/2

resthouse, The Ch Mission

Slater work.

H O Massey.

John Anderson.

Mr Ross T. Hon.

John Wood. Hon.

McCann Hill.

Plaster work.

Wm Jarvis.

R. J. McGinway

Geo Rome & Co.

Wm Kelley & Co.

Wm Jones.

John Ybles.

Miss Calder & Co.

Joe Longdon.

Plaster work.

Regdon & Co.

Mr Johnston T. Hon.

Wm Anderson.

John Kellan.

Miss Spier Hon.

Thomas Jany.

McMahon Hon.

St. Keville Hon.

146

✓ 168 2 11.

198.

✓ 154.

134

89 17 6 1/2.

87 9 10

81 19 1

✓ 75 10

✓ 79 6 4

91 8 2.

90 12

68 16.

90 12.

136

135

✓ 141 4 4.

✓ 140

138

136 5 3

150.

✓ 132 6 11.

132 11 11.

Sept. 28.

Sept. 14

✓ Mr. Street Hon.

✓ Mr. Street Hon.

60.

124 9 10 1/2.

Oct. 27.

Joseph Traydon.

40

May 29

Joseph Traydon.

65 11 2.

Oct. 10

Nov. 8

Hugh Keville Hon.

Hugh Keville Hon.

50 0 0.

178 6 10 1/2.

measures fee. 3. 10.

Watson, the Church Mission.

Expediting & Reckoning

Wm Peterson T. Hon.

L. Watson T. Hon.

W. Anderson.

Wm. E. E. T. Hon.

Wm. Young.

W. E. Allen.

Wm. G. W. T. Hon.

James Johnston T. Hon.

James Nyblom T. Co.

Painter Work

Wm. E. E. T. Hon. West Can. Hall. St.

A. Anderson T. Co. 233. St. Vincent St.

W. E. E. T. Hon. 233. St. Vincent St.

Chas. Culham T. Co.

Nov. 22 James Tuttleton. electric bells.

" " " - Lathum Screen

Dec. 2 " " " window blind

1901. Nov 29. AG Ludlay allowing on door board & decoration 5 4 6

1 39 1 3.

41 0 0

42 13

42

44 1 3.

42

33 4

40

38 5

Nov 8 Hugh Swadlow T. Hon. Gas fitting & filling
Pine across fee 137 65 19 6 1/2

1900. Nov. 8 J. C. Bowie T. Co. painter work. 87 1 9 1/2
Pine across fee 11/10

1900 Jan. 29 At J. Main T. Co. Rd. Wm. Siding 96 16 8

Feb. 5 Street. Wm. Siding Co. sets furniture. 99 8 9.

Feb. 14 Buchanan & Rice. Putty. 29 11 6.

Mar. 7 James Tuttleton on Lathum Screen. Electric bells & blinds. 14 13 6.

Apr. 7 E. S. Allen T. Hon. Jule boots & trunk. 7 3 2.

" Th. James Comstock T. Hon. Heating 134 16 0.

W. Boyle T. Hon. head. table Heating Stand. 4 15.

Nov. 8 E. S. Allen T. Hon. Lumber. # to

Nov. 8 J. C. Bowie T. Hon. Draft T. Hon. 58 6 6 1/2

6 0 0

4 0 0.

4 11 0

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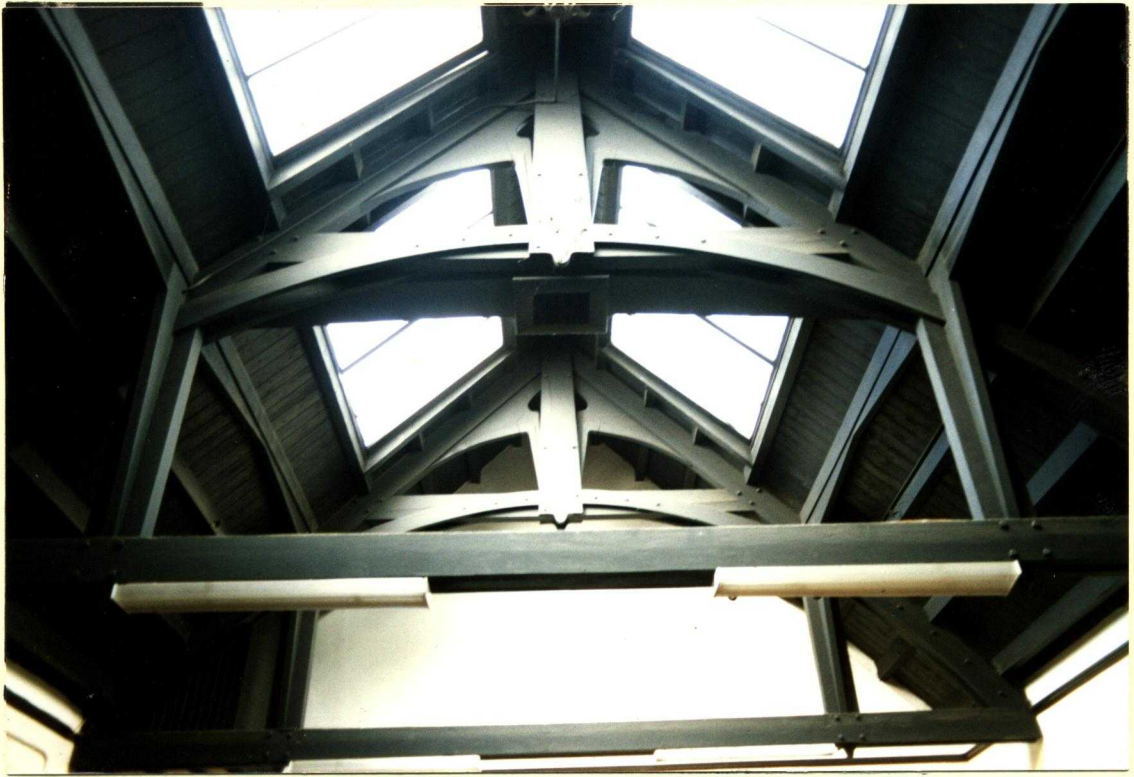


PLATE 1 - TRUSS OVER MAIN HALL



PLATE 2 - DETAIL BETWEEN TRUSSES



PLATE 3 - MAIN HALL FACING PODIUM



PLATE 4 - MAIN HALL AND ANNEXE



PLATE 5 - ELEVATION TO RUCHILL STREET

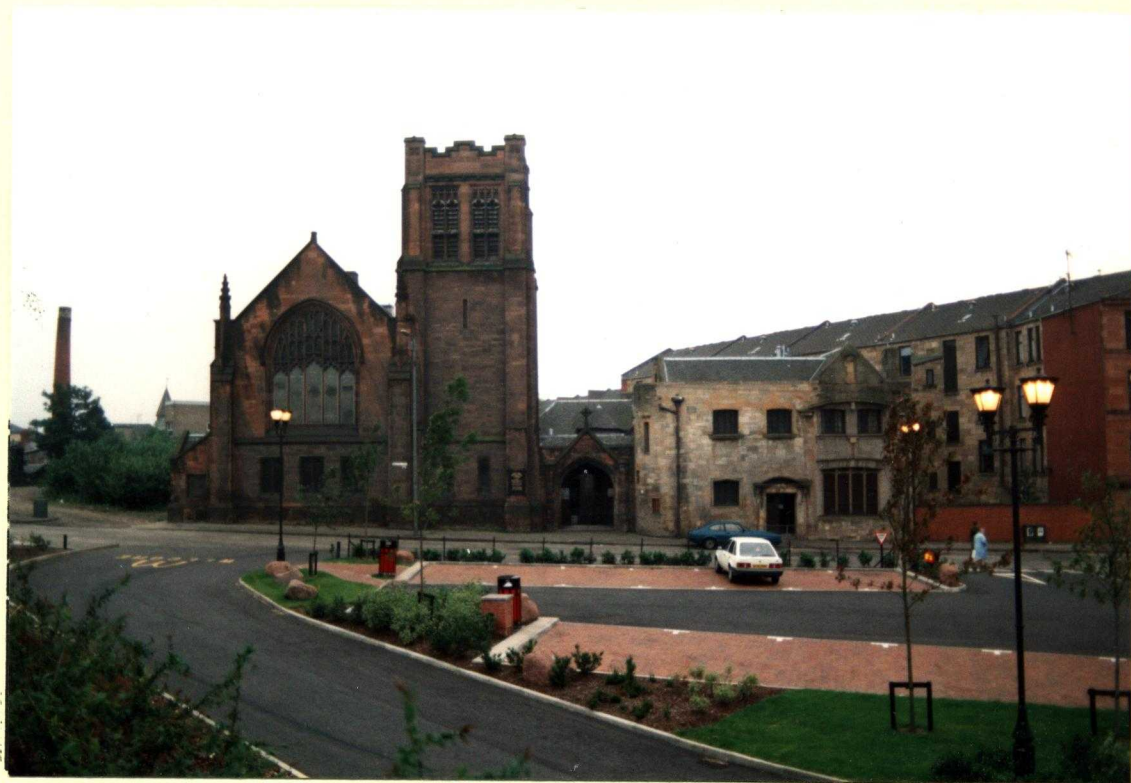


PLATE 6 - ELEVATION TO RUCHILL STREET SHOWING LATER CHURCH

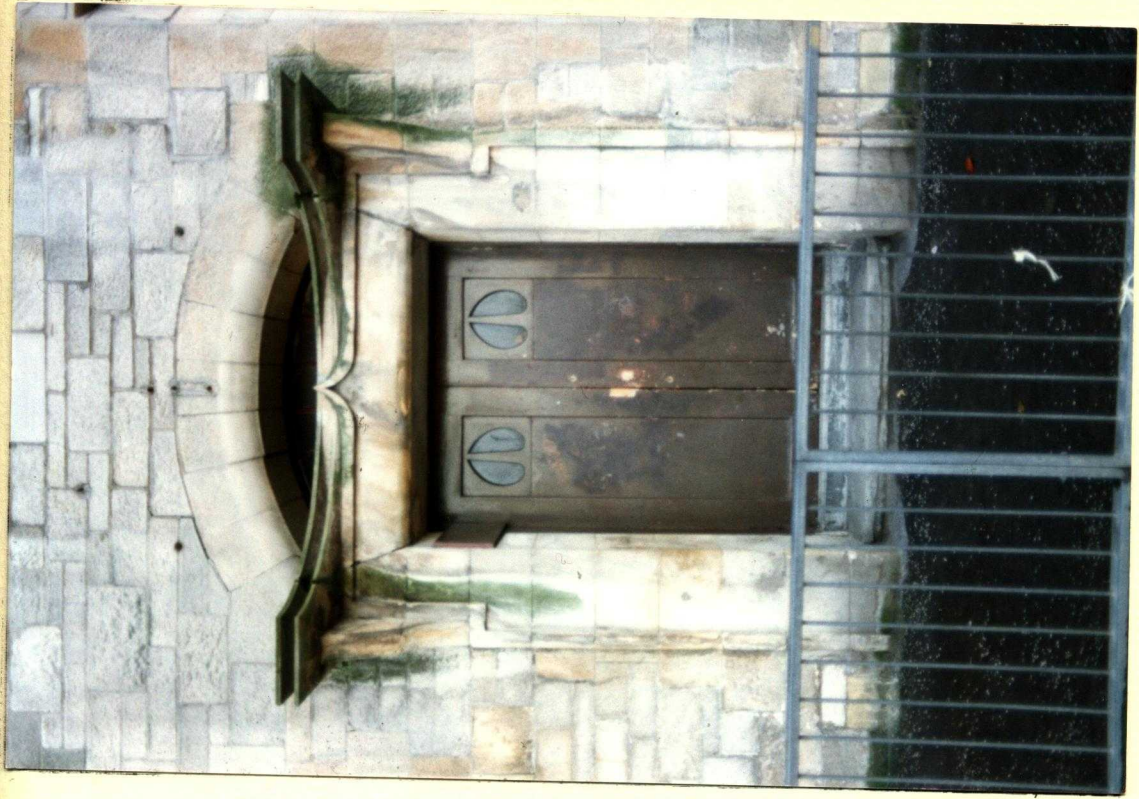


PLATE 8 - STONEWORK DETAILS AT ENTRANCE



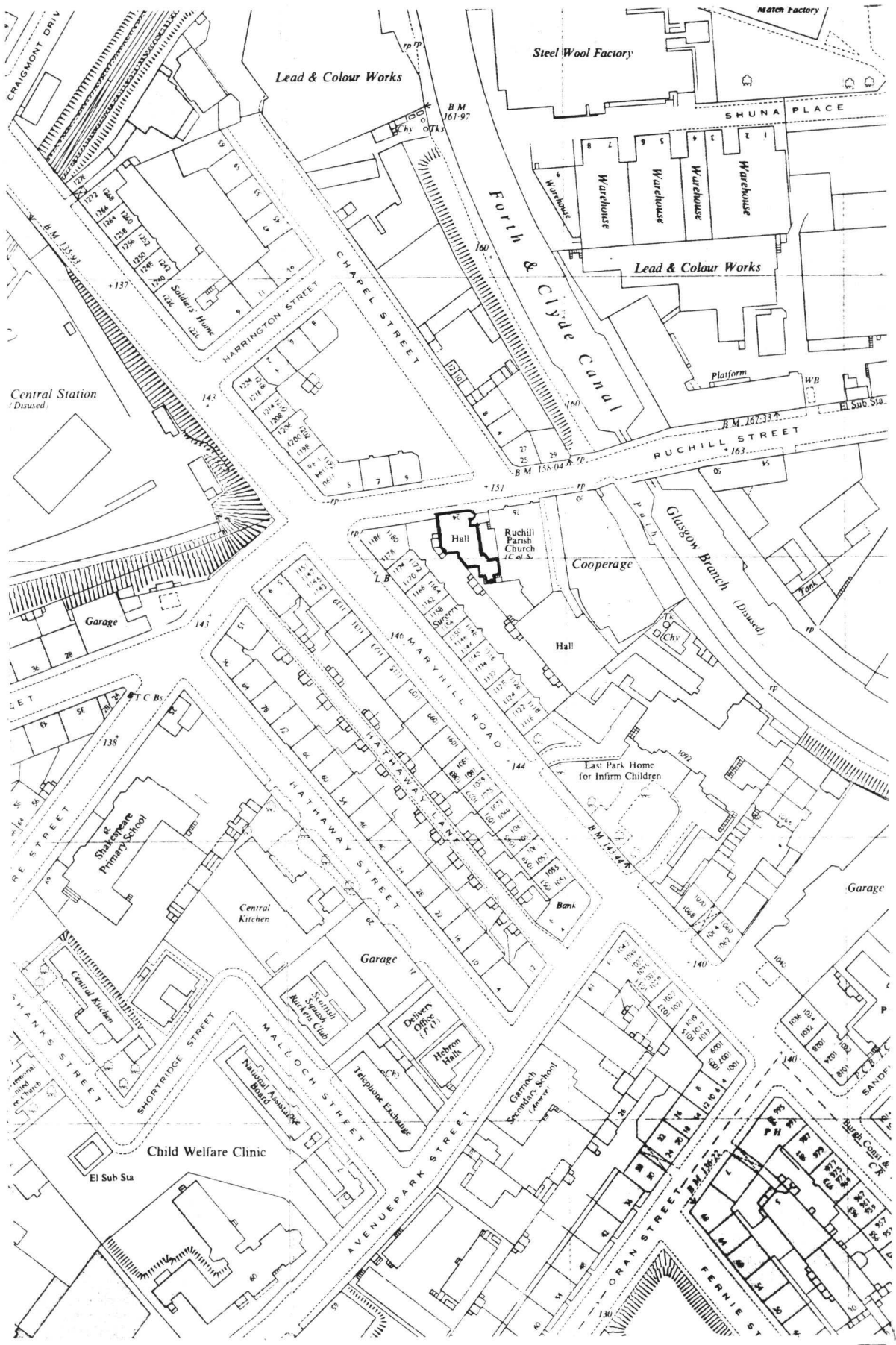
PLATE 7 - STONEWORK DETAILS AT COMMITTEE ROOM WINDOWS



PLATE 9 - NEWEL AT FOOT OF STAIR

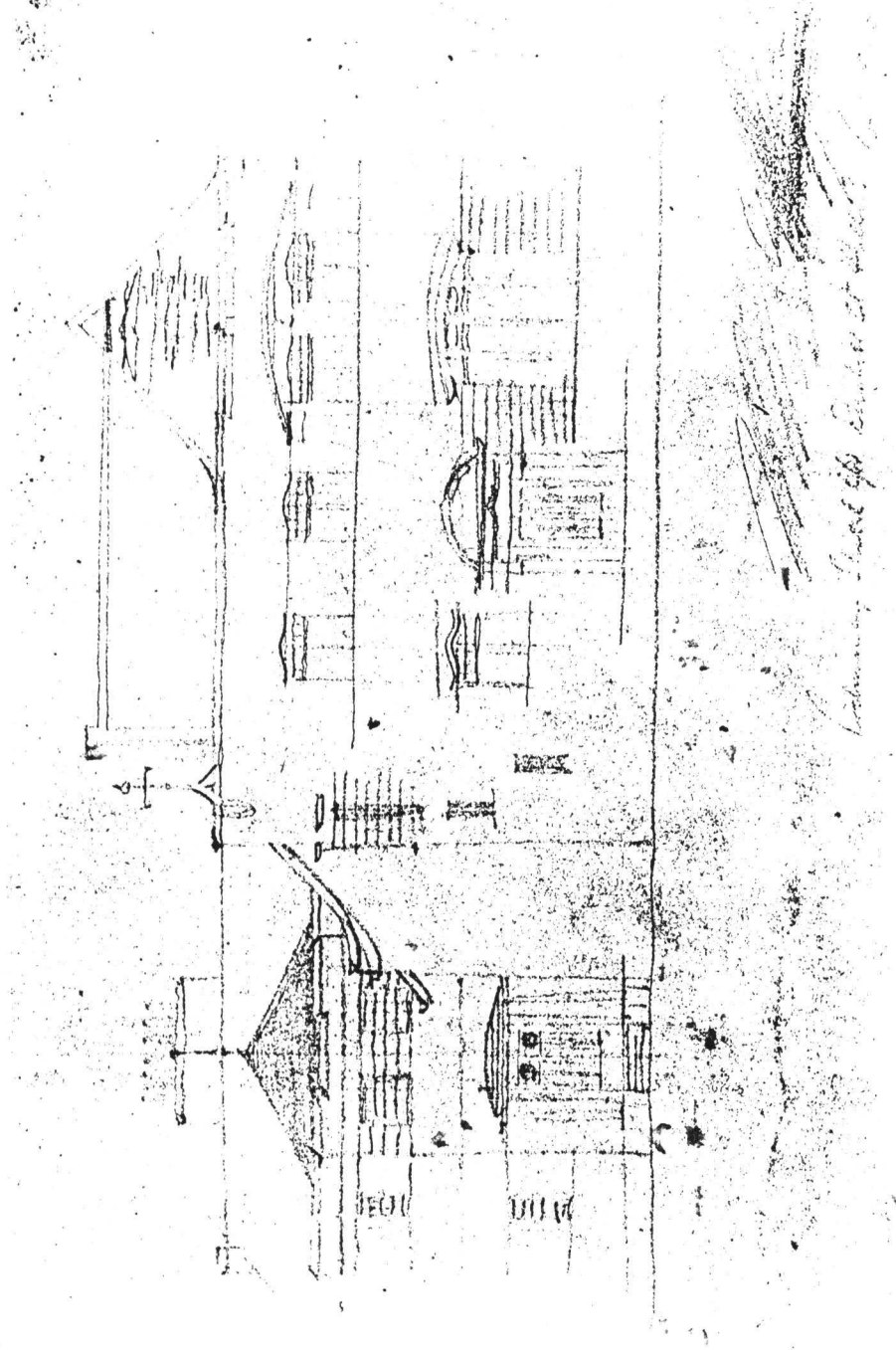


PLATE 10 - FRETWORK DETAILS AT STAIR

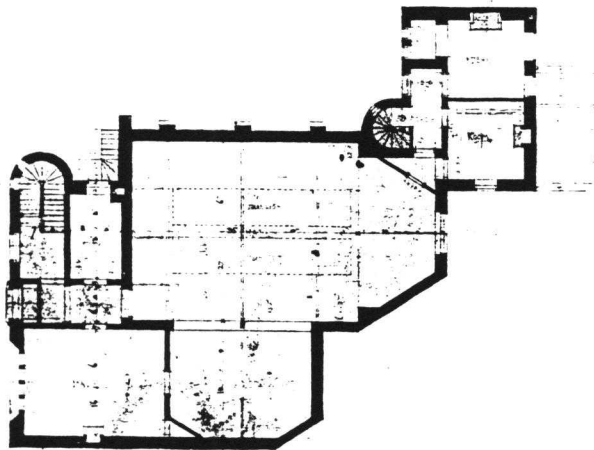


DRAWING 1 - LOCATION PLAN

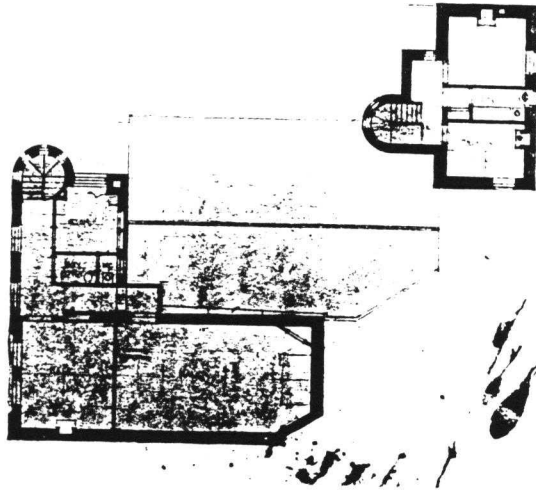
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DRAWING 2 - PRELIMINARY SKETCH FOR RUCHILL STREET HALL

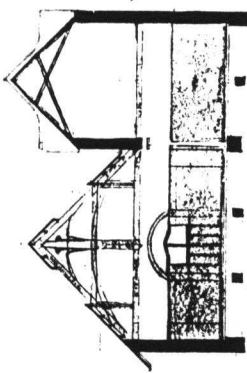
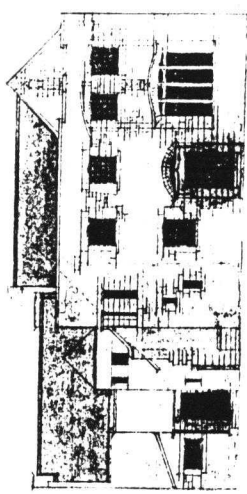
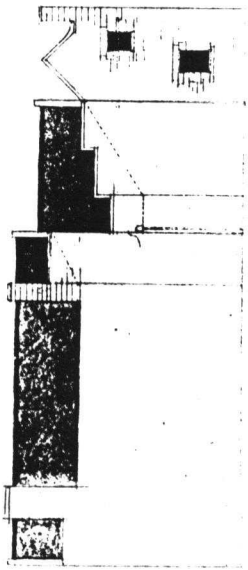


DRAWING 3 - GROUND FLOOR PLAN



DRAWING 4 - UPPER ROOM PLAN

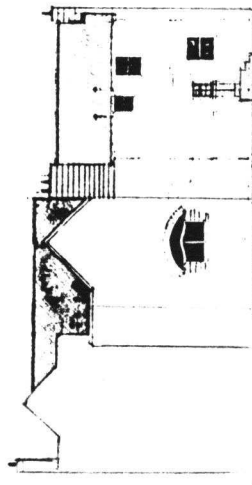
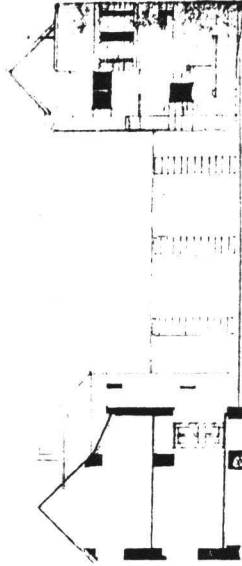
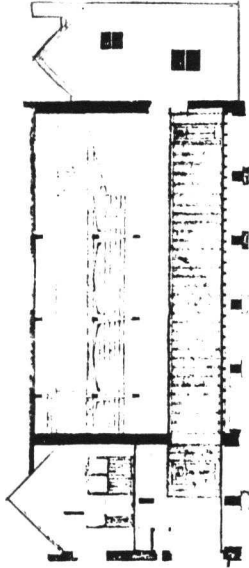
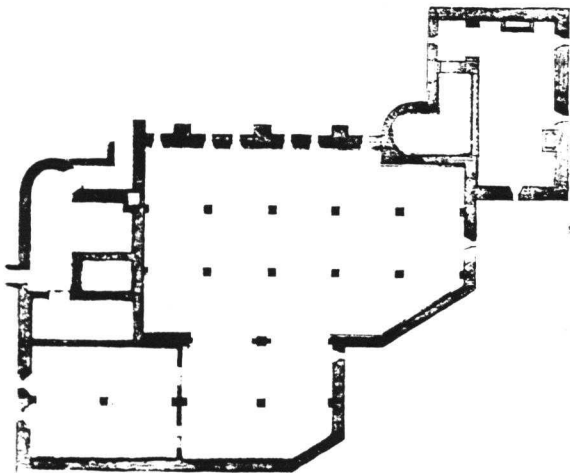




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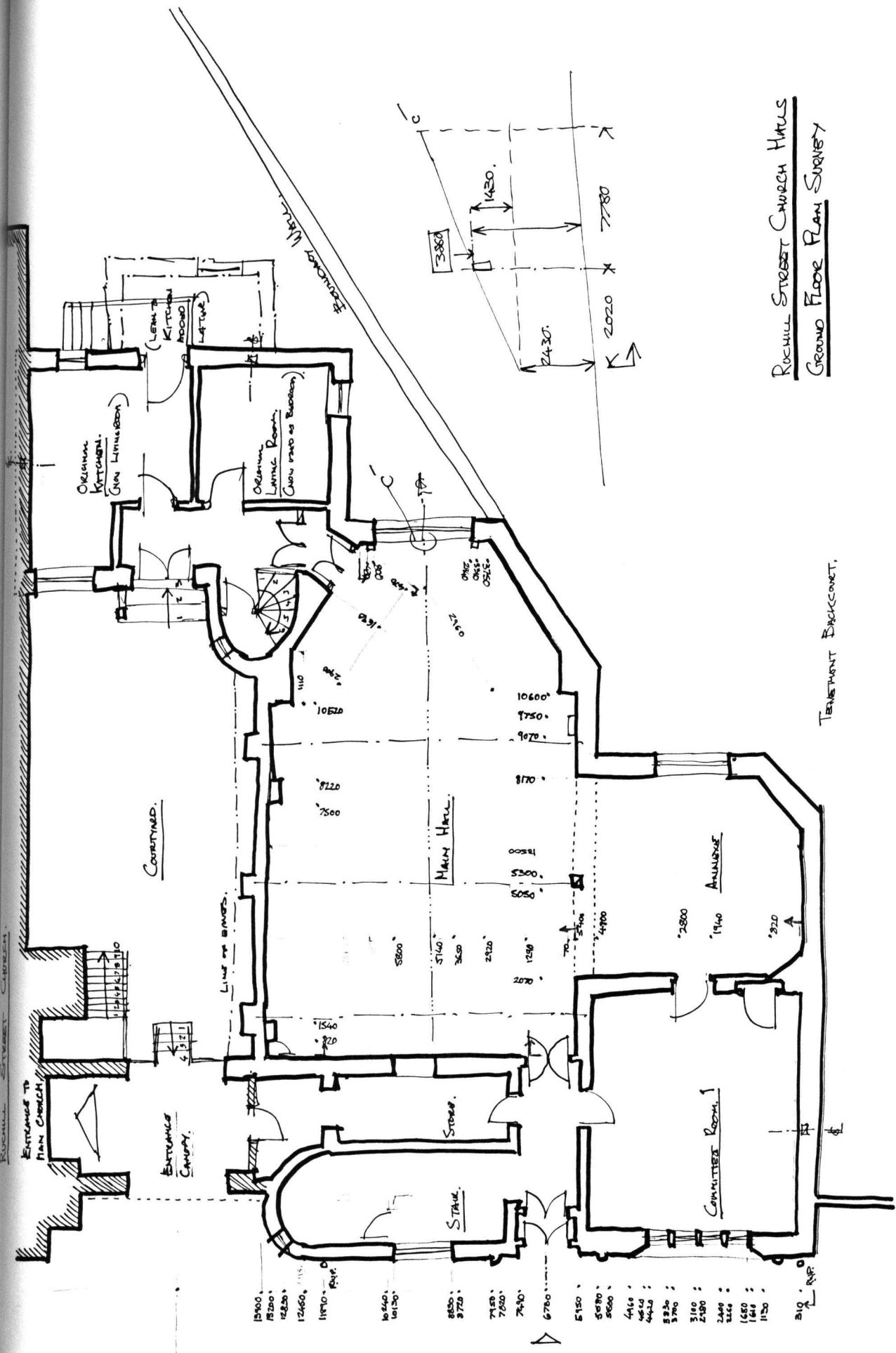
DRAWING 5 - CROSS SECTION AND ELEVATIONS TO EAST, WEST AND NORTH



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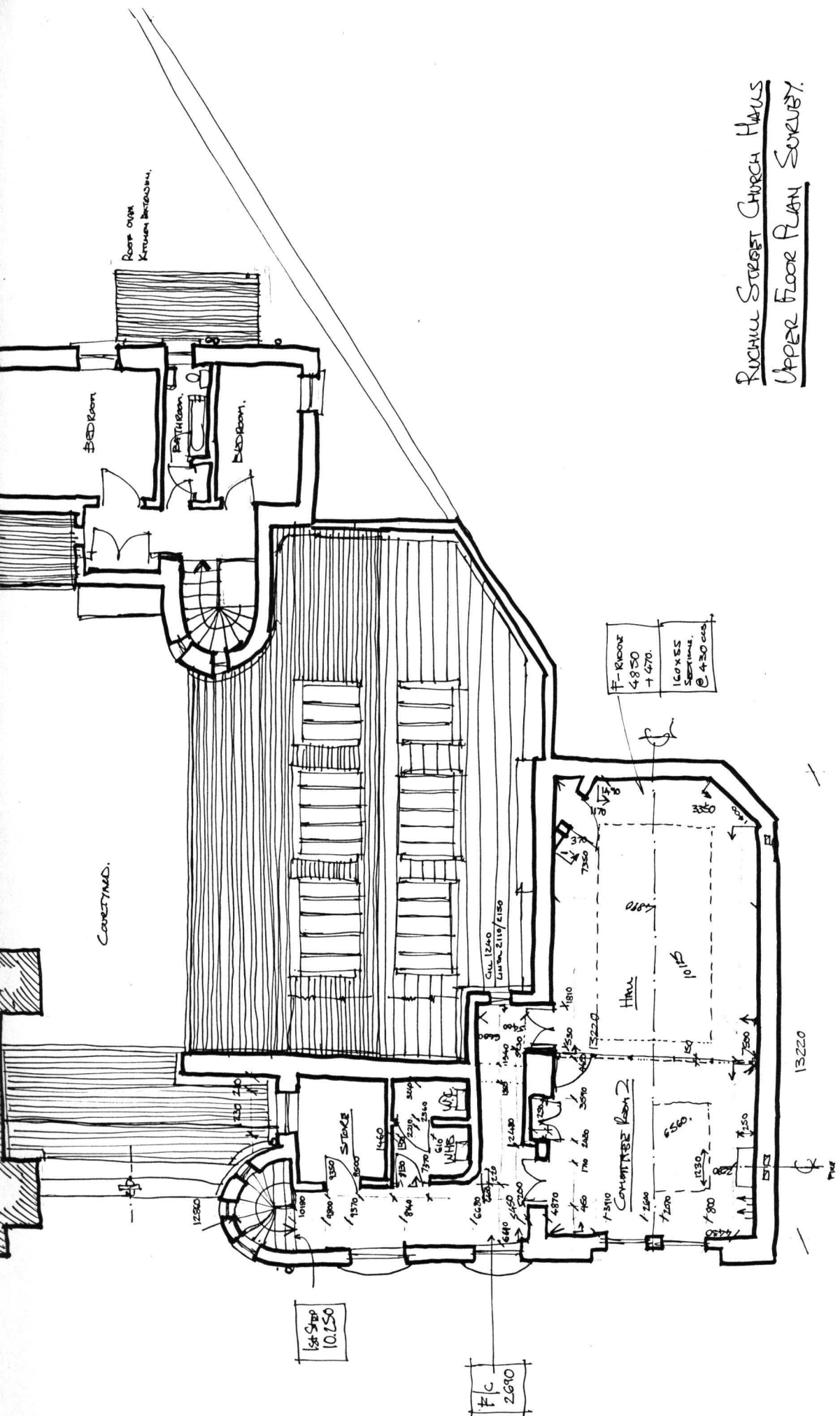
DRAWING 6 - BASEMENT PLAN, LONGITUDINAL SECTION, CROSS SECTION THROUGH CARETAKERS HOUSE AND ELEVATION TO SOUTH"



ROCHILL STREET CHURCH HALLS
GROUND FLOOR PLAN SURVEY

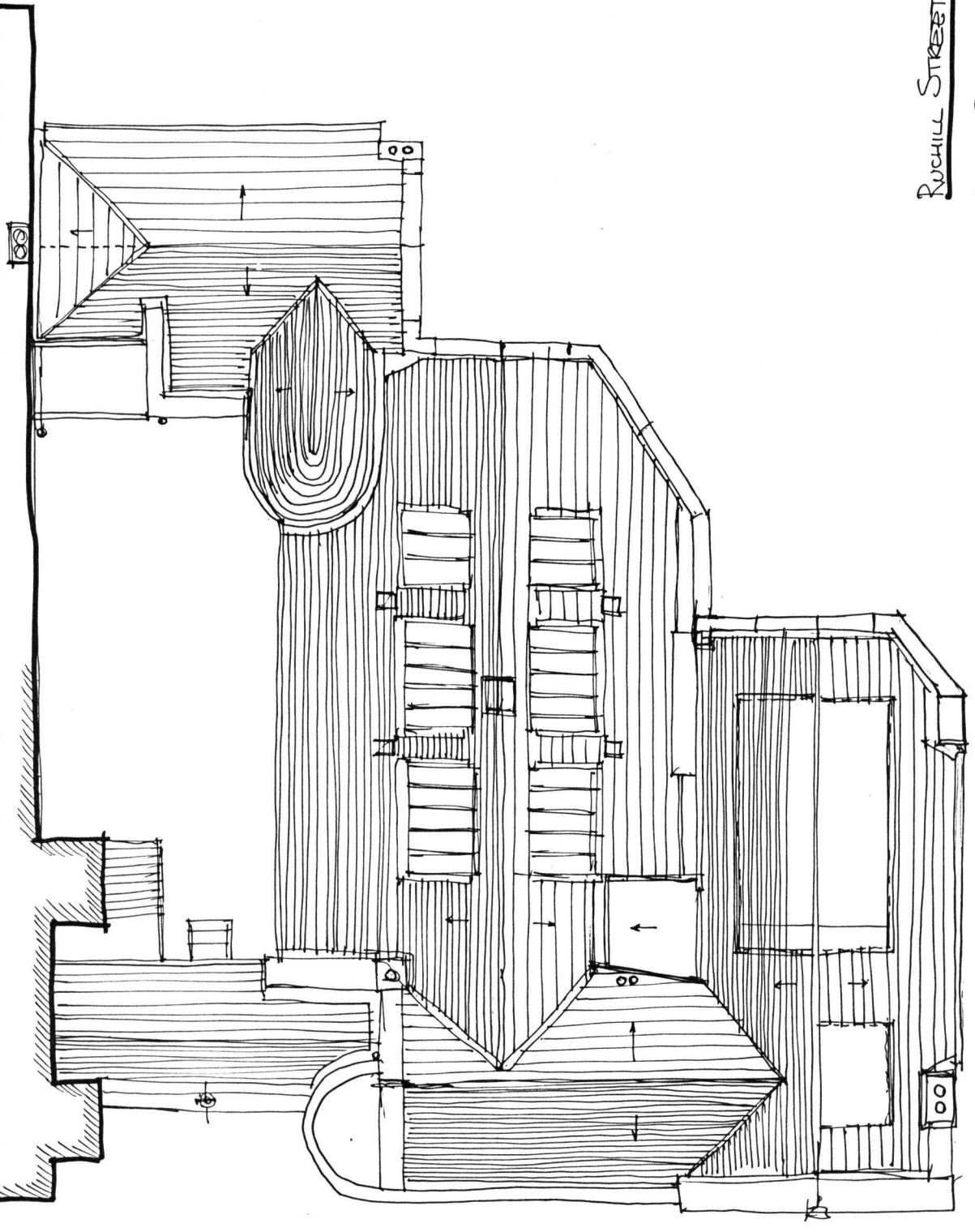
TENNMENT BACKCOURT.

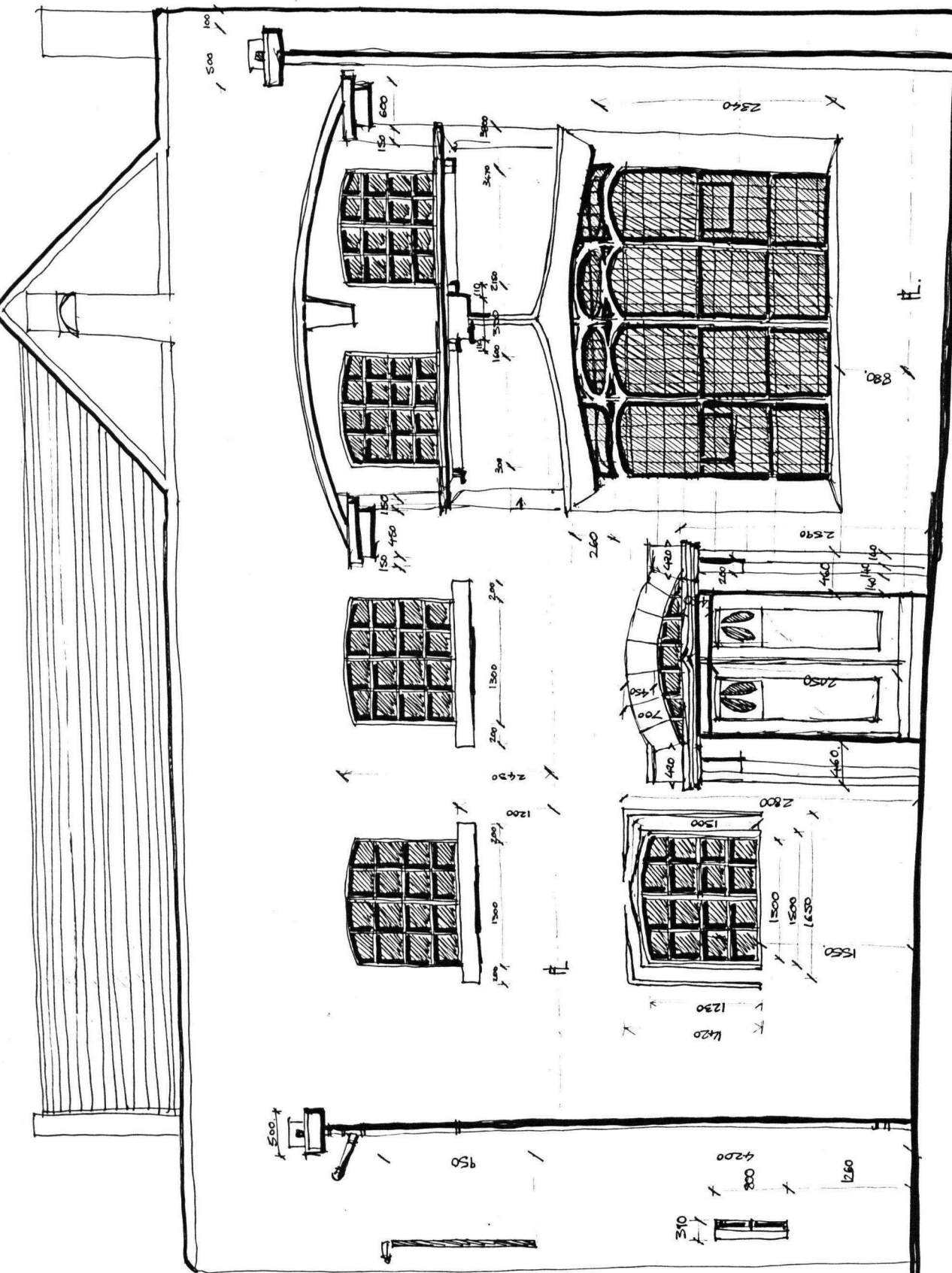
RICHILL STREET CHURCH HALL
UPPER FLOOR PLAN SURVEY.



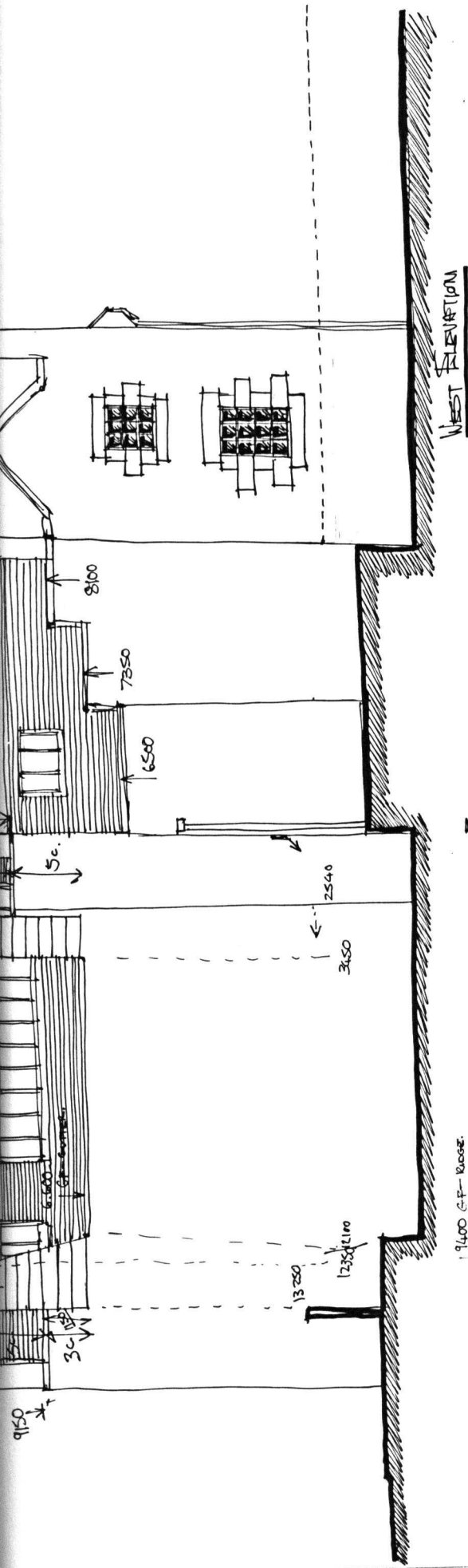
RUCHILL STREET CHURCH HALLS

ROOF PLAN SURVEY

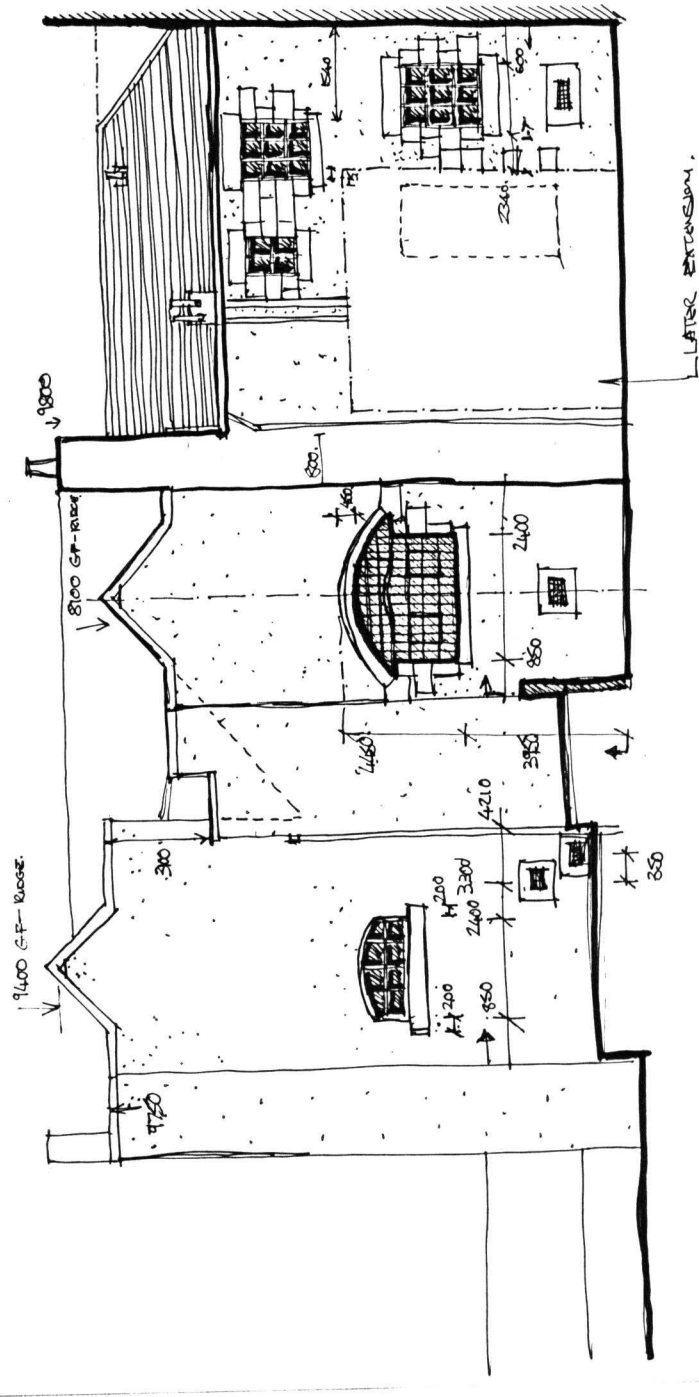




ELEVATION TO RICHMOND STREET

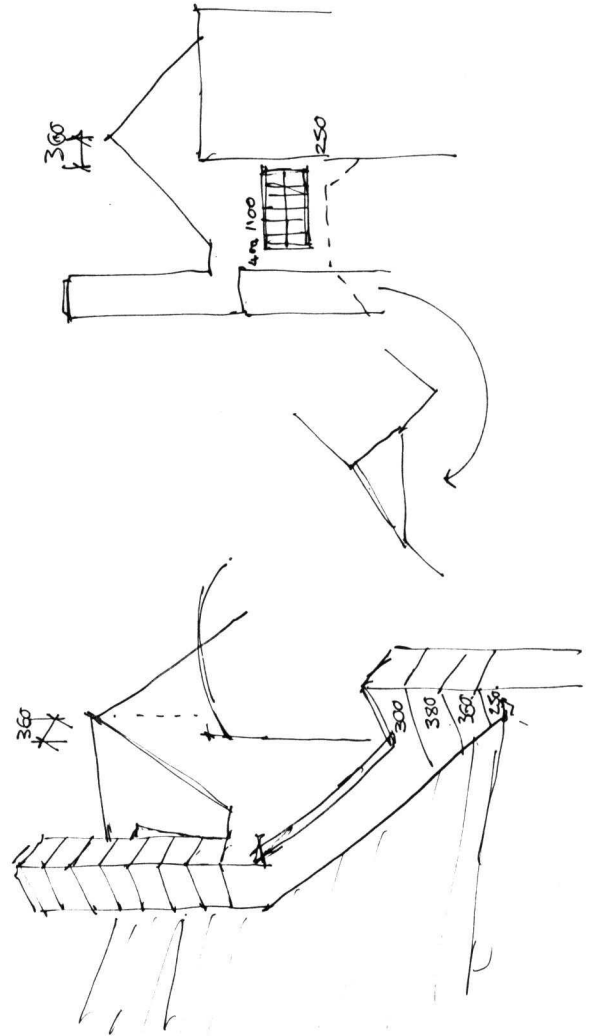
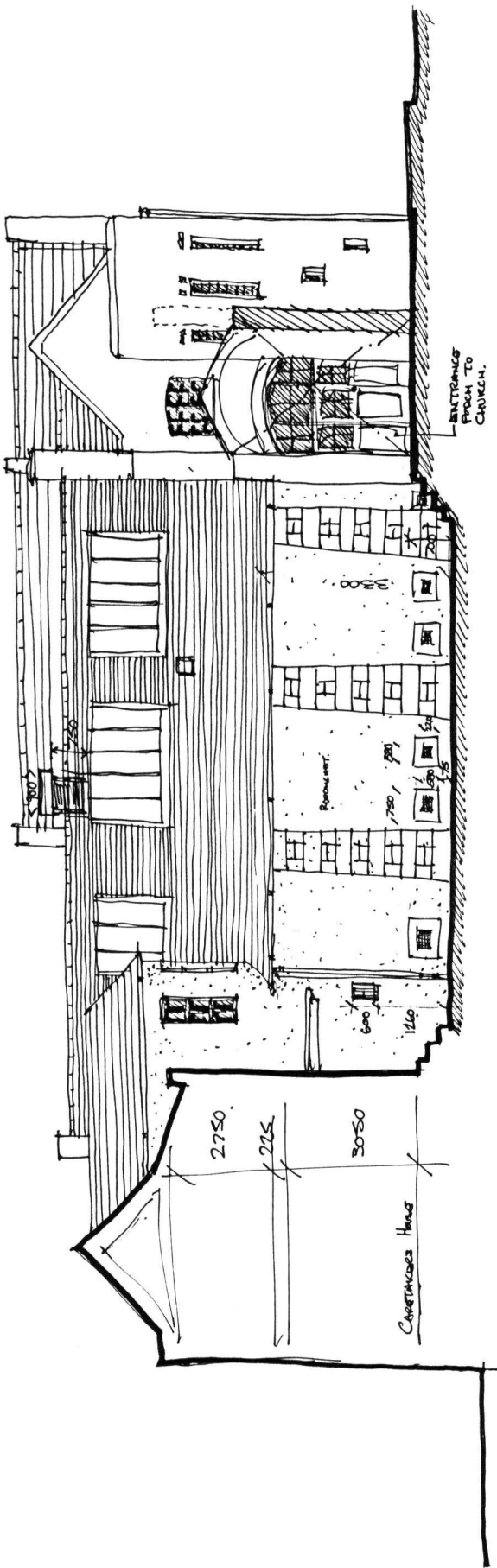


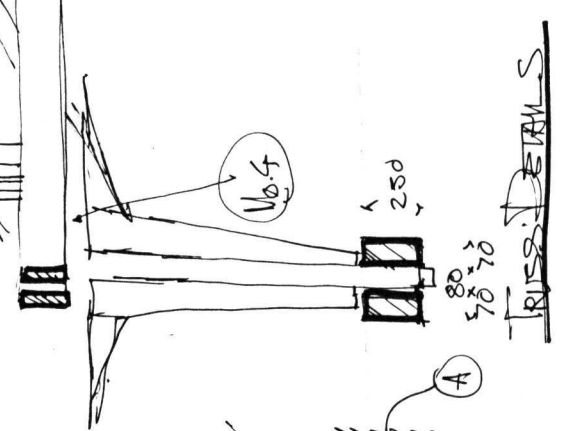
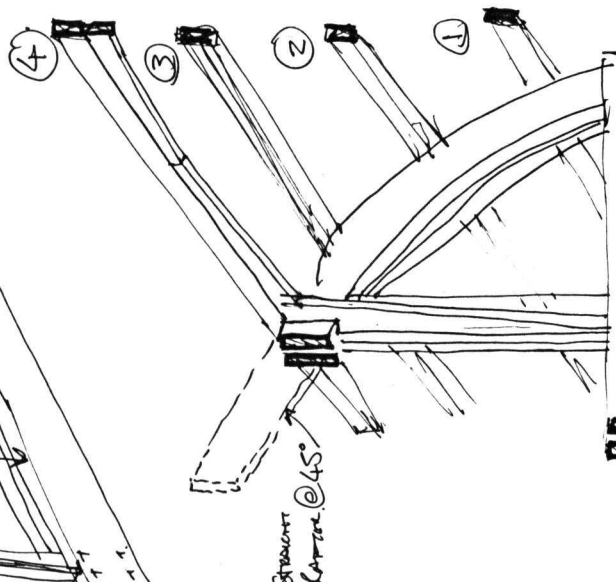
WEST ELEVATION



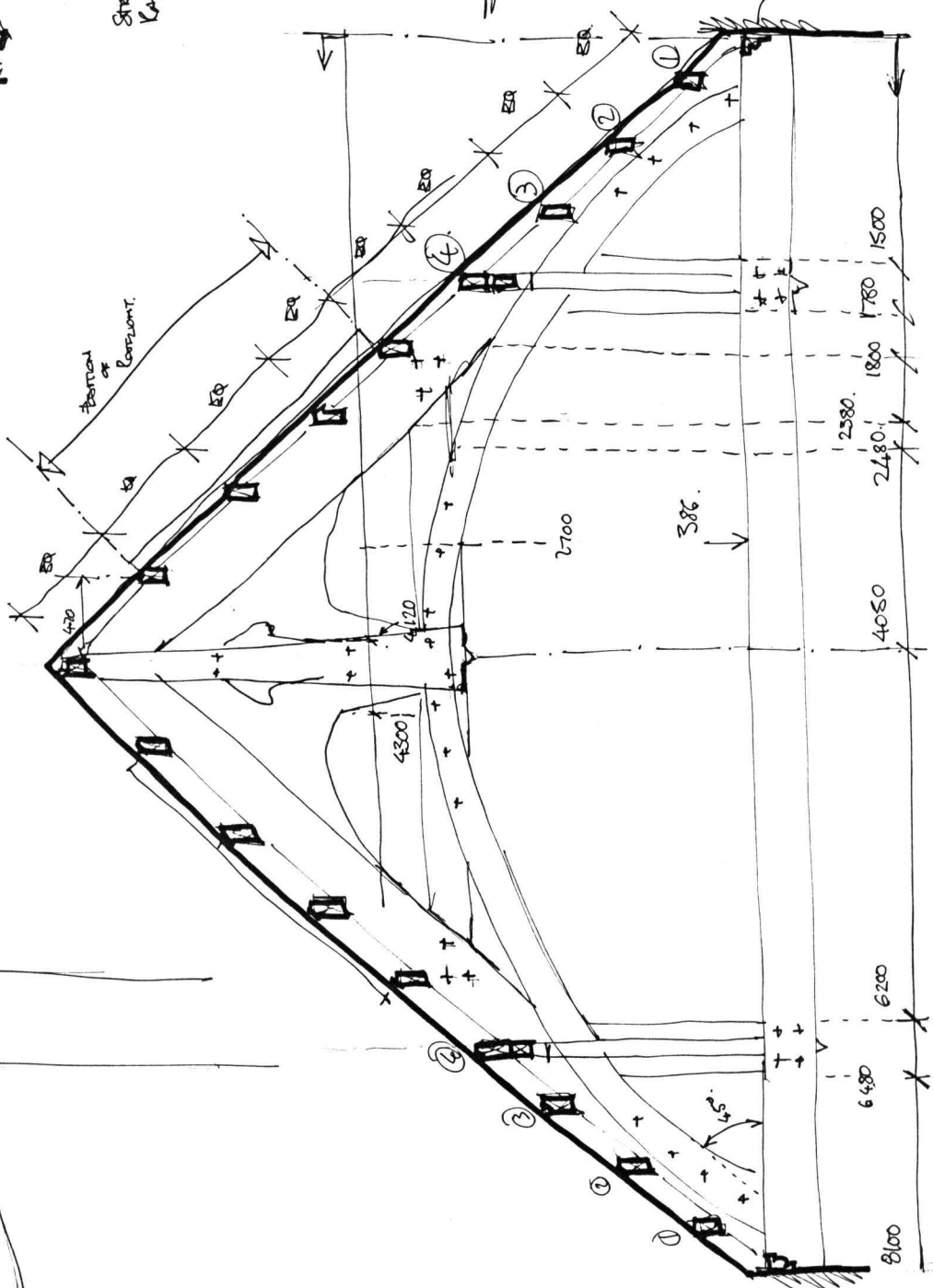
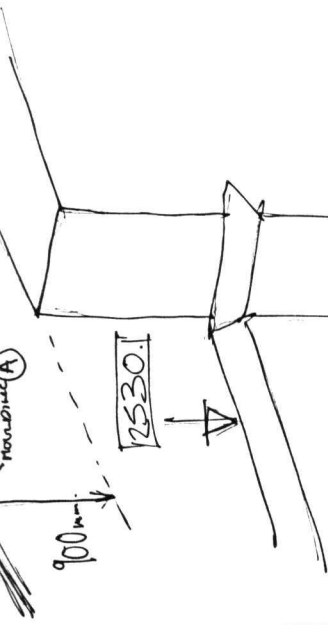
SOUTH ELEVATION

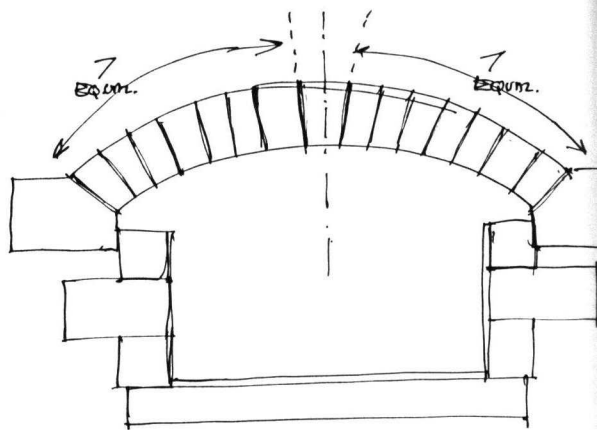
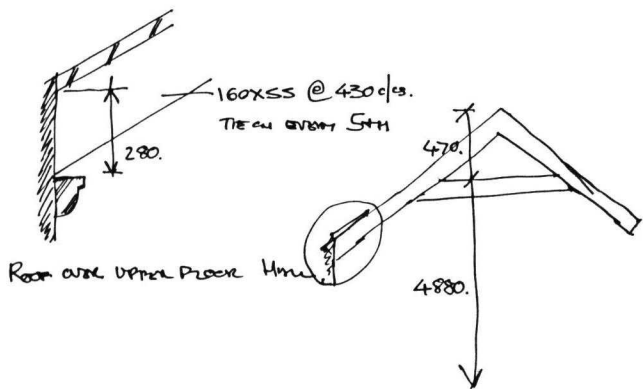
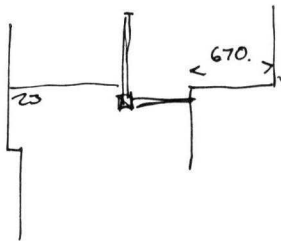
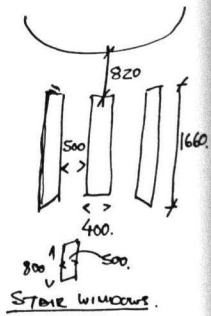
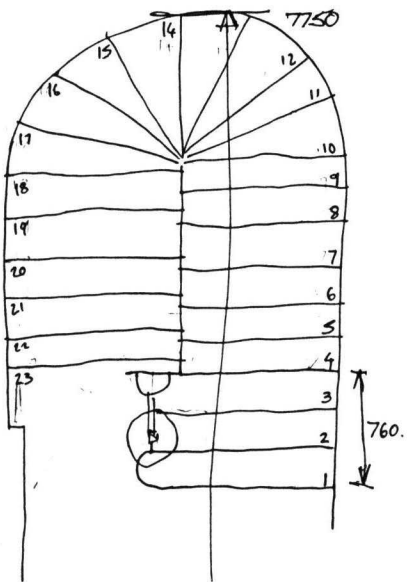
LATER EXTENSION





TRUSS DETAILS





STONE WINDOWS TO Hm WINDOW

