

# Building 488: Combined Dining Room and Institute

NGR: SP 51385 25498

Recording Level: 3

## Location

This building is located within Area OA12D, south of the parade ground and to the south of Barrack Block 485.

## History/ Function

The building had not been constructed when the 1937 aerial photograph was taken, but appears with a camouflaged roof on the aerial photograph of 1942, close to the newly constructed 'H' plan barrack blocks.



Designed in the Art Deco style by the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings' architect, JH Binge, the building was constructed to the drawing number 8055/38.

The building was designed to accommodate 750-800 corporals and airmen. Planned across two floors with a vertical division in the centre between the dining area and institute, there were two dining rooms, one on the ground and one on the first floor. The institute was also on both floors with a supper room on the ground floor and games, reading and writing rooms on the floor above. The ground floor division could be removed when needed to create a space for functions. A stage was at the left-hand side of the ground floor supper room with dressing rooms to either side. The kitchens and food storage and preparation areas were to the rear of the dining rooms, and were single storey with the exception of the first floor service rooms to the rear of the upper dining room (Francis 1996).

The Institute was latterly known as 'The Lamplighter', the sign having been removed from the left of the central entrance door several years before the building was recorded. On the 'Welcome to Britain...' site plan of 1982, it is listed simply as the 'Dining Hall / Rec Center'(sic). The *website raf-upper-heyford.org* often refers to the building as the 'Chow Hall', reflecting its function as a dining room.

The building may not have strictly adhered to the standard plan, which is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Some drawings survive which refer to previous work carried out: a 1981 first floor plan relating to the office partitions which were extant at the time of recording (albeit in a partially collapsed state), with a set of elevations which include only the first floor windows. In 1986, a plan was drawn relating to an overhaul of the catering and dining facilities on the ground floor, although these were only partially carried out.

## Description

A two storey Art Deco building with wings to either side and a small single storey central entrance block form the dominant front elevation (Plate 488.1); a range of single storey connected units form the rear service buildings, with the exception of a small range of rooms bridging the central yard entrance (Plate 488.2) (Fig.488.1).

The protected flat roof, constructed from reinforced concrete, overhangs the dark reddish brown permanent brick walls. The concrete first floor pad extends to the elevations and forms a continuous lintel for the windows. It stops short of the front elevation of the wings which are of uninterrupted brickwork other than the apertures. Vents are built into the walls and are created from pieces of ceramic tile mortared together to form an open vent (Plate 488.3).

The footprint of the main structure of the building is as-built, with the exception of the front entrance block, extended from the central doorway, and the two open porches added to the front entrances of the wings at either side of the front elevation. These three original white art deco doorways are obscured by the later additions and brown paintwork (Plate 488.4). The original narrow, shallow white-painted concrete canopy survives over the central doorway, although it is almost completely obscured by the later entrance block extension (Plate 488.5).

The later entrance extension is an elongated octagon in plan and has a central walkway roofed in curved plastic. According to photographs posted on the *website raf-upper-heyford.org* (not reproduced here), the porches on the wings were in existence by the late 1970s, predating the entranceway extension, which may have been constructed as part of the 1986 catering and dining alterations.

A tank room to the same design and proportions as the rest of the building is above the bathroom of the former NAAFI dormitories, and a similar tank room and lift room are above the first floor service rooms of the upper dining area; these are only accessible via ladders to the roof and so were inaccessible at the time of recording (Plate 488.6).

The fire escapes do not appear on the original architect's plans, but do appear on the 1981 plans as existing features.

The original windows were 14-pane ground floor and 12-pane first floor metal-framed windows, with the uppermost four panes forming a horizontally pivoting casement; the windows to other elevations are variations on this style. The first floor windows of the front elevations of the wings consisted of three circular lights with a central vertical glazing bar. These windows appear on the 1981 elevation, but a reference to general repairs to double glazed units on the 1986 plan indicate that the current plastic-framed units had been installed at some point between.

The round windows on the first floor have the original lead flashing above, intended to deflect rainwater from the glass and frames. The replacement frames are wooden and form an octagon (Plate 488.7).

There is much evidence of the alteration of the apertures in the external walls, mainly to the rear service rooms (Plate 488.8), some of which do not appear on the surviving drawings and so pre-date those alterations indicated in 1981 and 1986. The ground floor windows to the wings which face towards the entrance have been only partially blocked using brickwork, however, the remainder of the windows to the two-storey block were blanked-off at the top of the existing frames with the installation of the suspended ceiling (Plate 488.9). To the upper floor they are black, to maintain the appearance of a window, whilst the ground floor panels have been painted in brown to match the ground floor woodwork. The first floor window to the north end of the east elevation of the former dining area was bricked-up completely with the addition of the Server Room (Plate 488.10).

The majority of the external paintwork is of the mid-brown shade used across the airbase, but the first floor window frames and particularly items which are concealed in the yards are painted in the former dark-green colour scheme of the airbase which is also visible where the brown paintwork has flaked away. The building numbers are painted in white letters on a black background on all elevations with a brown and white plaque to either face of the south-east corner; the former number (AM 95) is painted in white on a light green background.

The open yard to the north-east, at the rear of the building has a later open timber, steel and corrugated asbestos structure forming a covered area along the eastern edge of the yard (Plate 488.11). Art Deco style metal gates secure the central yard; although these are likely to be a later replacement, they are in keeping with the style of the architecture.

A cellar is located below the western wing and is accessed via a door below the staircase to the first floor. The original design included another cellar beneath the east wing, possibly intended as bomb shelters or refuges as with many RAF buildings, particularly barracks, but this does not appear to have been constructed at Upper Heyford.

A shallow recessed dado signifies the primary walls in much of the interior of the building with the exception of the external walls of the wings (Plate 488.12).

All of the office areas have American power sockets in addition to the British sockets (Plate 488.13).

### ***Alterations***

The aforementioned plans dated October 1981 comprise two plans of the western and eastern ends respectively of the first floor of the main building and one set of elevations showing only the first floor windows with selected other apertures. The surviving plans detail the required layout of the electrical services relating to power provision to the new rooms, although they do indicate the intended locations of the new modular office partitions.

The surviving plan dated Sept 1986 and amended in November 1987 covered work to be carried out to mainly catering and dining areas of the building. This scheme may also have involved constructing the entrance extension, although it is unclear from the drawing.

Smaller phases of alteration are apparent, although some may be deviations from the original design and therefore from the primary phase of the building, for instance, the recreation area at the north west of the building differs from the standard plan, but it is not apparent whether it had originally been constructed according to the original design as later decoration has obscured the details.

### ***Current Form***

#### ***The Entrance Building***

The late 1980s octagonal entrance building contains a male and a female WC to either side of the corridor (Fig.488.1). This corridor with an arched plastic roof leads from the modern metal doors to the original door opening, although this is evident only when exiting the corridor into the lobby which has a tiled floor and exposed brick walls (Plate 488.14).

#### ***Dining rooms***

The dining rooms are to either side of the entrance, via a corridor with the serveries to the north (Plate 488.15). They are

decorated in 1980s style, but not in accordance with the 1986 drawing; as the drawn scheme was not fully executed. Rather than the planned 'Olde England' theme to the east and 'The Future' to the west, the Olde England theme was used in both rooms. The wood and leather effect booths (Plate 488.16) are installed around the edges of the room and similar tables would probably have been placed around the dining room (Plate 488.17). Brick arches and planters and exposed brick walls between the dining room and the servery complete the style. A wood dado rail has been fitted the dining rooms and the hallway between.

There is a suspended ceiling contemporary with the 1986 refitting of the room which conceals the beams of the concrete ceilings and areas of the former decorative scheme. This décor was trying to emulate a traditional style building with stonework-effect and brickwork-effect wall papers with wood-effect wallpaper to the concrete beams (Plate 488.18).

A tiled walkway runs between the external doors and the serveries, and carpet tiles are to the remainder of the floors.

The serveries are not as the 1986 drawing, with references on the drawing to temporary works superseding the planned work. The fronts of the stainless steel serving line counters are covered with red leather effect plastic, and the walls are covered with wood effect plastic to dado height to match the style of the dining room booths (Plate 488.19). The block wall separating the serveries from the kitchen area can be seen above the suspended ceiling, indicating that the ceiling is contemporary with the wall and décor. The buff and orange-brown bricks used to construct the east and west walls of the servery are only used to the height of the suspended ceiling; above this, cheaper commons are used (Plate 488.20).

The original plan for the building included a stage and dressing rooms at the western end of the dining room, but no evidence of this is visible.

To either side of the servery, doors lead from the dining room to the kitchen area.

The western dining room has had some fire damage from recent vandalism (Plate 488.21) which has also melted the entrance way plastic roof.

#### *The Linen Exchange and Games Room*

The original design of the building intended the rear buildings along the left hand side to make up a separate Corporal's Supper Room and Games Room with their own external entrance and a WC and Lavy (a room containing wash hand basins) between the two rooms.

The layout which was actually constructed is not known and later décor obscures any features, however, in the room immediately to the north of the western dining room, titled 'Linen Exchange' on the 1986 drawing, an original Art Deco fireplace survives to the south wall of the possible Corporal's Supper Room (Plate 488.22).

This room was not fitted with a suspended ceiling and many layers of decorative schemes, including greens, cream and yellow are visible where the modern cream-painted wallpaper has peeled away. A 1960s orange, yellow and black geometric pattern carpet survives in the room (Plate 488.23).

Beyond the entrance hall, no access remains to the Corporal's Games Room, which now has its own external access and may have continued in use as a games room as wire covers to protect smoke detectors and light fittings are present.

#### *The Kitchens and Food Preparation and Storage Areas*

The 1986 works included a complete refurbishment of the kitchens, food storage and food preparation areas. The walls have been uniformly tiled in pastel blue to the platewash, kitchen and corridors and in pastel pink to the food preparation, food storage and the area behind the servery. A pink and blue tiled strip runs at head-height and a black rubber protective bumper at mid-height protects the walls from trolleys. Corners are finished with white plastic protective strips.

The floors are tiled with cream non-slip tiles which rise to form the skirting. Drainage channels are in the floor of the kitchen area and some of the preparation areas. The concrete slab forms the ceiling in most areas with suspended ceilings in the corridors and kitchen which conceals services, including the ducting serving the large stainless steel extractors in the kitchen ceiling (Plate 488.24).

The salad preparation area is set within the original service rooms to the immediate north of the dining room and was formerly the washing up area. It retains the clerestory windows to the north and the upper portion of the walls, above the tiles, is painted brick. The room is entered via a square room which formerly housed the lifts to the upper dining room, although no features related to this are visible (Plate 488.25).

Some stainless steel sinks and extractors remain, but the majority of the fixtures had been stripped out at the time of recording. A large walk-in refrigerator remained in the Dry Food Store which also retains bars over the windows (Plate 488.26).

The platewash room retains the industrial dishwashing machinery. It has a wooden structure above the southernmost area of the room, providing clerestory windows (Plate 488.27).

The swing doors are painted light blue with metal panels and windows, but most doorways are open, particularly to the food preparation and storage areas along the eastern wall.

Where the suspended ceiling has missing tiles, the painted plaster walls are visible, painted in a yellow ocre colour (Plate 488.28).

The corridor between the platewash and the kitchen houses the electrical control panels; to the east of this is a blocked-in area and cupboard concealing an original staircase which formerly lead to the upper dining room. This was photographed via a small hole in the aerated concrete block partition which covers it (Plate 488.29). No evidence of the staircase is visible on either floor.

The plate wash area appears as a kitchen on the original drawings, indicating that two separate kitchens were provided either side of the covered yard. The current plate wash room has been completely tiled and so it is not possible to establish if the kitchen at the west of the building was ever equipped as intended.

A Calorifier Room is now located in the room originally designed as a scullery. The room retains the original cream tiles. A blocked doorway, originally leading to the now-platewash room, is visible which was blocked during the 1986 works (Plate 488.30). The service corridor from which this room is accessed contains an original door which leads out into the smallest, and enclosed, courtyard which is also accessed from the lobby beside the Recreation Room (Plate 488.31).

#### *Service Yard and Buildings*

To the west of the food storage areas is the rear service yard. The covered area at the east may have contained industrial refrigeration and freezer units, according to the 1986 plans, although the area is now empty.

To the south of the service yard is the below-ground Plant/Boiler Room and the adjacent Valve Room. Now containing modern plant, the Boiler Room does retain trenches and brick bays for former equipment (Plates 488.32 & 33).

The eastern ground floor section of the block creating the covered way is accessible both from the west of the yard area and the covered way. Originally designed to form storage for kitchen equipment, it is now empty; it retains the original doors, but the window frames are from the later phase of replacement.

The majority of the alterations to door and window openings is in this courtyard area, although the removal of equipment signifying any reason for the alterations has since been removed.

A small bin store, building 491, is adjacent to the yard and described elsewhere.

#### *Recreation Room*

The original standard design for the Combined Dining Room and Institute buildings included an area for civilian dining with a Reading and Writing Room and a WC. The area was located to the rear of the building, behind the kitchen equipment store and adjacent to the Corporal's Games Room. It is not apparent whether this was instigated in this building as the partitions do not appear to have all been constructed as necessary for that layout. Most recently, the rooms intended as the civilian area served as the Recreation Room for the catering staff.

The former Kitchen Equipment Store was indicated on the 1986 drawings as a shower and WC room for women, with the same for men to the west of the Recreation Room and the Recreation Room was intended for lockers. At the time of recording, the women's shower and WC area was empty and did not show any evidence of having contained those facilities, although the floor was tiled; a door to the platewash area had been blocked, indicating that it had previously been the kitchen equipment store (Plate 488.34).

The men's shower and WC area was not as per the 1986 drawing at the time of recording. There was no evidence of the shower or WCs having been installed and the westernmost partition of the intended Locker Room had been constructed farther east to create a large Recreation Room and a lobby with doors to both the enclosed courtyard and to the rear of the building. A hatch has been knocked through the wall between the lobby and the Corporal's Games Room: replastering around this indicates that it is a later alteration.

The Recreation Room contains the only artworks found in this building; these have been recorded fully as part of the artwork project. Briefly, the artwork consists of a sticker on the entrance door and identical painted logo on the south wall of a snorting bull dressed in a camouflage shirt and a chef's hat, holding pots and pans whilst driving a Jeep. 'Prime Ribs' is in red capital letters beneath this (Plate 488.35). On the east wall is a closed field kitchen trailer next to a tree; adjacent to this, an open similar trailer displays cooking equipment and water containers (Plate 488.36).

#### *Office*

Across the hallway to the east of the Recreation Room is an office; now empty and with no indication of its former use. The

original building design shows the room as a NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes) Common Room with the doorway in the southern wall leading to the hall and stairway to the NAAFI dormitories above, however, there is no evidence in the room to indicate that the door was every anywhere other than in the current location in the western wall.

#### *Learning Centre*

The 1986 drawing labels the room containing the staircase to the former NAAFI Dormitories above as 'Learning Centre'. No equipment or signage confirms this and the rooms appear to have latterly been in use as accommodation.

The ground floor space contains a doorway to the Covered Way which leads to the central courtyard. It also includes a WC.

An original Art Deco staircase (Plate 488.37) in an identical style to the others in the building leads up to a corridor with five bedrooms, a bathroom and a WC leading off (Plate 488.38). All of the walls are primary and it appears that there has been little alteration other than the conversion of the cupboard in the former lavy, now the south west bedroom, into an electrical cupboard and the later window replacement work. A small hatch has been cut through the partition between the two easternmost rooms, formerly the two dormitories, although it is not clear if this is original or later, although the current hatch door is modern.

#### *The West Wing*

The ground floor of the western wing appears on the original design as a hallway with WC and lavy to either side of the external door with the staircase to the first floor at the north west corner, and the door to the stairs to the basement beneath. Both staircases are still extant as are the WCs. The WCs are currently tiled in blue tiles up to the level of the suspended ceiling, but these have been added on top of beige tiles (Plate 488.39). The lavy and the majority of the hall have been replaced by an office, requiring an additional door to the Dining Room to be knocked through. The office is plainly fitted-out, but the imprint of the lavy tiles are visible beneath the wallpaper.

The two sets of double doors to the external entrance are both modern metal-framed doors.

One of the original staircases leads to the first floor; typical Art Deco metal balustrades with a wooden handrail are continuous from the stairs to the landing above (Plate 488.40). The bottom of the staircase is squared, rather than rounded, as is seen in the east wing.

#### *The Basement*

The basement is accessed via the doorway beneath the staircase in the west wing. Insufficient light and structural problems prevented recording, but rooms leading off the main room were evident. The poured concrete structure can be clearly seen in the ceiling (Plate 488.41).

#### *The East Wing*

The original design shows an open hall and cloakroom with the entrance door to the front elevation. A second external doorway is located to the rear, north elevation. This does not appear on the original standard drawings, but the style is contemporary to the building, albeit in a plainer form (Plate 488.42). It appears on the drawings of 1981.

During one of the phases of alteration, the cloak room area was partitioned to create an office and, as has happened with the office created in the west wing, the upper portions of the windows were bricked up, rather than blanked-off with a board as has happened with the other windows of the building.

The style of the staircase is identical to the west wing, although the base of the staircase is rounded, rather than square (Plates 488.43 & .44).

#### *First Floor Offices*

The first floor now consists entirely of offices; the partitions are all contemporary with the alterations of 1981, with very few minor alterations to the planned layout (Fig.488.2 and 488.3). The original walls remain between each wing and the main unit and the former service rooms to the rear of the eastern end of the main unit.

Little remains which predates the 1981 conversion to offices. The floor was open plan dining to the east, with the service rooms along the north east edge and a games room to the west of the central dividing wall; this dividing wall has been replaced, albeit in the same location, by the modular office walling (Plate 488.45). There is no evidence of the original construction.

The former scheme of decoration is visible where the suspended ceiling is missing, and includes yellows, pinks, pale green and bright orange.

The current decoration is neutral, with cream walls, grey carpet tiles and white wood and metal work. The inside of the window frames is white. The modular partitions are cream with aluminium edges and black skirting. Doors are brown wood veneer. The suspended ceilings have considerably reduced the height of the rooms and cut across the windows; black panels are visible on the external elevations blocking the upper portion of the window.

The open plan area in the centre of the western end of the first floor was the former games room, now with offices to the north, east and south. No evidence of the former use is visible, although the function may not have called for fixtures, however, the original cupboards are at the western end of the room (Plate 488.46), the northernmost cupboard now within room F8.

A server room towards the north east corner in F31 has caused a computer floor to be installed, and a ramp has been installed to allow access from F30. The window in the east wall has been blocked at an unknown date, although it was still open in 1981 when the floor was divided up into offices; presumably the window was blocked specifically to allow for the change of use. The walls of this room are clad in plastic tiles to help prevent dust. The suspended ceiling has recently been removed, showing the extractor fans required to cool the room (Plate 488.47).

The few remaining primary walls are distinguished by the recessed dado. These are the walls of the Reading Room and Writing Room at the western end of the floor and the structural wall between the former Dining Room and service rooms. There is no remaining evidence of the service room lifts or staircase or other fixtures (Plate 488.48).

#### *West Wing first floor*

The layout of the area is much as it was before the office conversion, with the exception of a narrow office being partitioned along the northern edge of the landing and the store being converted to a WC (Fig.488.2).

According to the original design, the current office was a barber's shop; although there are no remaining fixtures to confirm this. The recessed dado which is present along the other primary walls is not visible, but it does appear as if the lower portion of the wall has been replastered and so this may indicate that tiling and plumbing has been removed.

The tall windows in the stairwell have decorative pelmets over the top of the windows; they may be original, or possibly a later replacement in an Art Deco Style. The upper portions of these windows are also fitted with panels to obscure the upper panes, although there is no suspended ceiling to necessitate this as is the case in the offices.

#### *East Wing first floor*

The original design plans show this area as an open plan landing and cloak room, much the same as the ground floor below (Fig.488.3). The most recent phase sectioned-off the cloak room and installed male and female WCs. The external walls of the landing and stairwell do not have the recessed dado, although a dark blue painted line runs around the landing and down the stairs, including across the later partition.

The tall windows in the stairwell have the wooden pelmets and blanking-off panels as described in the West Wing (Plate 488.49).

The ladies WC has been redecorated in stippled orange with the former blue décor visible above the suspended ceiling, the men's is the same blue, which extends above the suspended ceiling, suggesting that the WC additions probably occurred before the 1981 works (Plate 488.50).

### **Summary**

An Art Deco protected permanent brick building built to the layout of the standard drawing 8055/38 in most areas, with some probable alterations to the design to suit the needs of the Base.

Minor alterations occurred during the lifetime of the building when necessary to ensure it met the requirements of the period. In 1981, the first floor dining and recreation facilities were converted into offices. It was at this time that the original metal windows were replaced with modern plastic-framed double glazed windows.

In 1986 the catering and dining facilities, now confined to the ground floor, were overhauled, however, not all of the planned alterations were carried out and some temporary measures were taken in the construction of the serveries. A new entrance block was added to the front of the building which provided extra WC facilities.

Few primary features were extant in the building by the time the Base closed. The notable survivals were the staircases in each wing, with a smaller staircase in the NAAFI block, or Learning Centre, and a disused staircase, since blocked-in, which formerly linked the floors in the Service Rooms to the rear of the dining areas.

### **Archive**

Three plans were identified within the Upper Heyford archives.



Figure 488.1: Ground floor plan





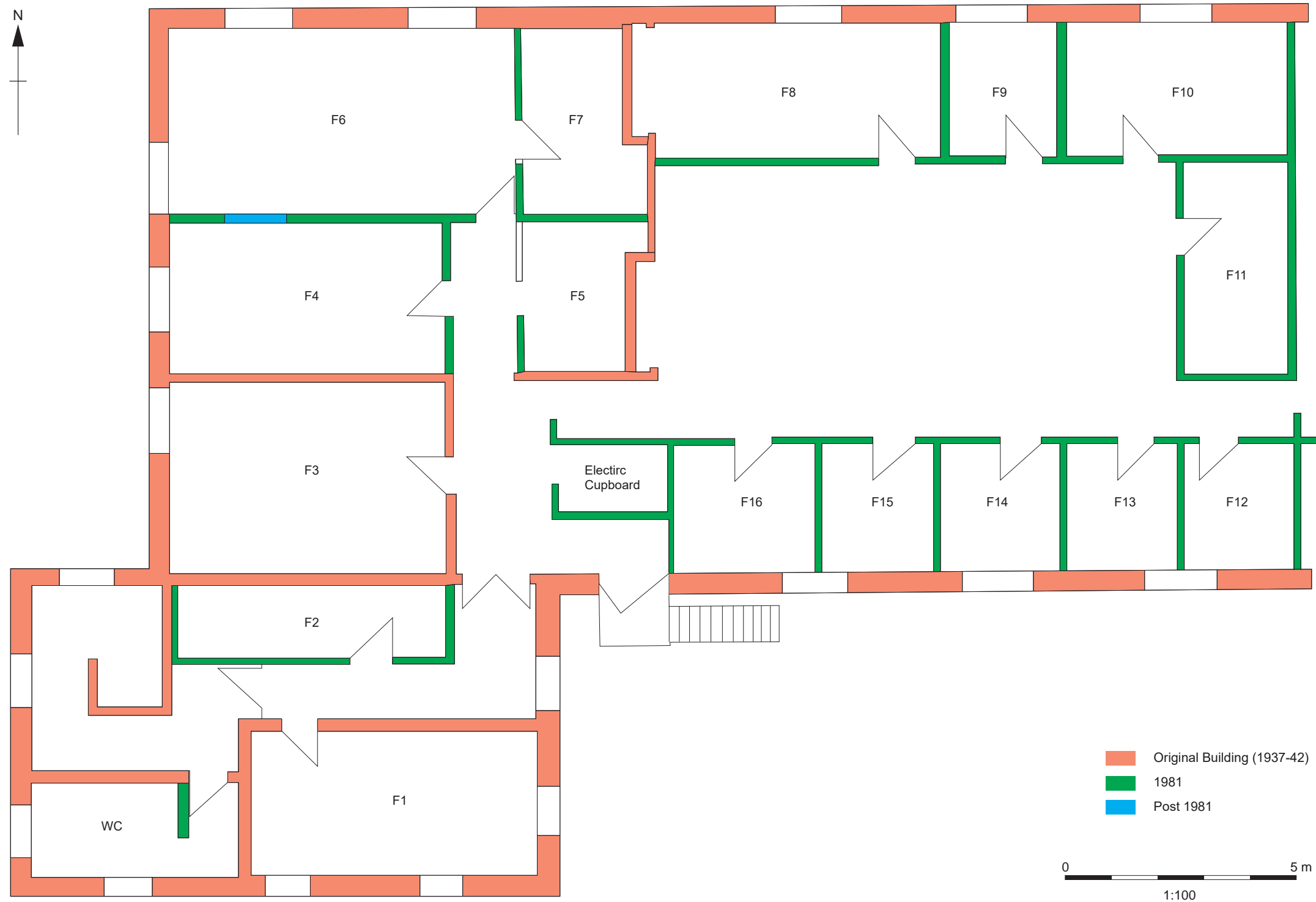


Figure 488.2: First floor plan, west wing





Figure 488.3: First floor plan, east wing



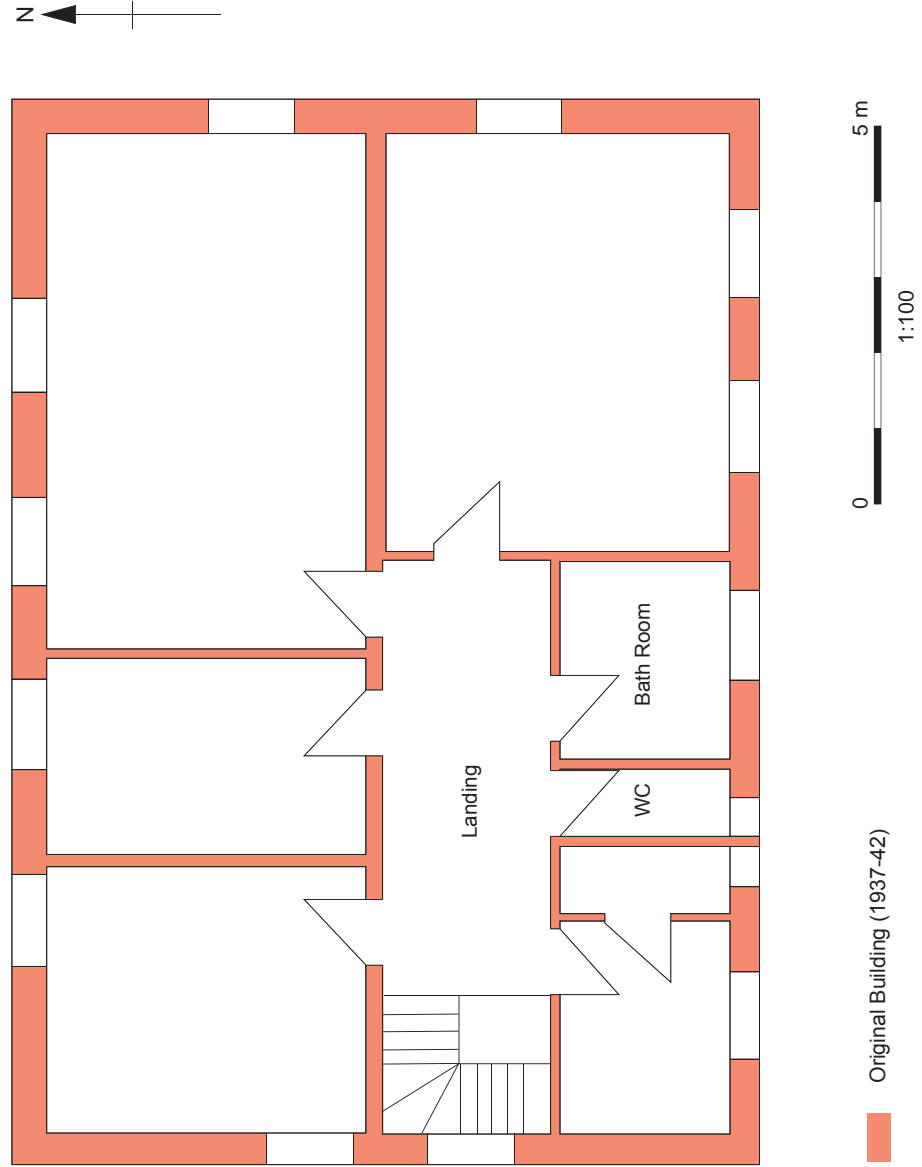


Figure 488.4 Second floor plan



*Plate 488.1 South (front) and east elevations*



*Plate 488.2 North (rear) elevation*



*Plate 488.3 Example of a vent*



*Plate 488.4 Example of an Art Deco wing entrance doorway and porch*



*Plate 488.5 The entrance block extension*



*Plate 488.6 The two second storey tank rooms visible in the roofline*





*Plate 488.7 The west wing south elevation*



*Plate 488.8 An example of alterations to the apertures in the rear range*



*Plate 488.9 The east elevation of the west wing*



*Plate 488.10 East elevation*



*Plate 488.11 The covered area of the service yard*



*Plate 488.12 An example of the recessed dado*



*Plate 488.13 An example of the American and British power sockets*



*Plate 488.14 The entrance extension looking from the servery*



*Plate 488.15 The corridor alongside the servery, looking towards the dining room*



*Plate 488.16 An example of a dining room booth*



*Plate 488.17 The east dining room*



*Plate 488.18 The former décor scheme in the dining room*



*Plate 488.19 The servery décor*



*Plate 488.20 The types of brick used in the servery wall*



*Plate 488.21 The west dining room*



*Plate 488.22 The Art Deco fireplace in the linen exchange*





*Plate 488.23 The linen exchange*



*Plate 488.24 The kitchen*



*Plate 488.25 The salad preparation area*



*Plate 488.26 A walk-in refrigerator in the food storage area*



*Plate 488.27 The platewash area*



*Plate 488.28 The former décor in the corridor and blocked-in staircase*



*Plate 488.29 The blocked in staircase*



*Plate 488.30 The calorifier room*



*Plate 488.31 The corridor to the enclosed courtyard*



*Plate 488.32 The boiler room*



*Plate 488.33 The steps from the boiler room to the yard*



*Plate 488.34 The former kitchen equipment store*



*Plate 488.35 The logo for the catering staff's sports team*



*Plate 488.36 The east wall of the recreation room with field kitchen artwork*



*Plate 488.37 The staircase to the NAAFI dormitories*



*Plate 488.38 The landing of the NAAFI dormitories*





*Plate 488.39 The WC in the west wing*



*Plate 488.40 The staircase in the west wing*



*Plate 488.41 The basement*



*Plate 488.42 The doorway to the north of the east wing*



*Plate 488.43 The staircase in the east wing*



*Plate 488.44 The staircase in the east wing*



*Plate 488.45 The open plan area of the first floor offices*



*Plate 488.46 The original cupboards at the west end of the open plan area*



*Plate 488.47 The server room*



*Plate 488.48 The former service rooms on the first floor*



*Plate 488.49 The landing in the east wing*



*Plate 488.50 The ladies WC in the east wing*