

Building 485: Type 'C' Barrack Block

NGR: SP 51371 25551

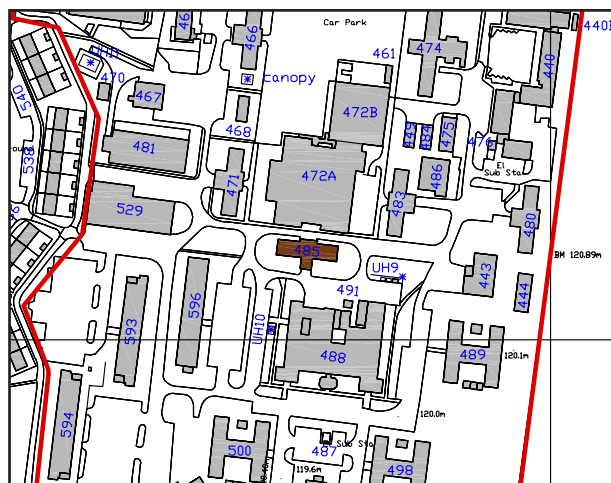
Recording Level: 3

Location

This building is located within Area OA12B, to the south of the former Parade Ground, and between buildings 472A, the Mess Complex, and building 488, the Combined Dining Room and Institute.

History/ Function

Although the design for the Type C Barrack Block dates to the 1920s, the initial drawing number is 104/23, this building is not visible on the aerial photograph of 1937, although it has been constructed by the time of the 1942 AP and displays the same footprint as present.



The 'T'-shaped barrack was used until 1938 when 'H'-shaped barrack blocks were introduced (Francis 1996), and so the block may have been constructed soon after the aerial photograph was taken. It was previously numbered 'AM No. 74'.

Description

The building is a short 'T' shape in plan, with the dormitory wings to the east and west and the rear ablution unit branching off to the south (Figures 485.1 & 2). Two false towers are formed in a central entrance feature of the front elevation to the north, with the entranceway in the centre (Plate 485.1).

The walls are of dark red brindled brick in stretcher bond with a cream-coloured mortar. The window sills are tiled (Plate 485.2).

It has a slate covered hipped roof. Two redundant chimneys are within the slope of the roof between the two 'towers' and one chimney is to the rear of the ablutions block, over the current boiler room. A vent is in the slope of each hip of the main roof. Blocked windows are to the first floor on the north and south elevations and a blocked window is to the east of the boiler room door. The ablutions block shows signs of repair and alteration of plumbing where pointing and patching is visible (Plate 485.3).

The later aluminium window frames are coloured brown externally and white internally. The windows in the 'towers' and the central window in each wing are double lights; the windows at either end of the wings are singles, with a similar arrangement to the east and west elevations (Plate 485.4). The existing windows are all set within a recess in the brickwork which runs from the ground to the eaves, whereas the now-blocked windows were flush with the outer profile of the brickwork.

A concrete porch with pilasters is to the entrance door and a similar detail is around the window above.

The woodwork, rainwater goods and external plumbing are painted in the standard brown colour as seen elsewhere on the estate. The building numbers are painted in white letters on a black background on the north, south and west elevations with a brown and white plaque to the east elevation; the former number is painted in white on a light green background (Plate 485.5).

The central unit contains the entrance hall with an NCO's bedroom to either side, set within the false towers on both floors. The stairwell is opposite the entrance and is flanked on both floors by doorways with arched lights over to the ablution areas (Plate 485.6). A recess is adjacent to each doorway to the ablutions (Plate 485.7), but there is no indication of the function of these on either side of the wall, nor is there any indication in the visible areas of the roof structure of their purpose. The farthest-south rooms consist of externally accessed store and plant rooms to the ground floor and a laundry/sluice room and a store to the first floor

The staircase is concrete with metal balusters and handrail and wooden newel posts. All are painted black with the former brown and white colour schemes visible in where the paint is damaged (Plate 485.8).

Electrical consumer unit/control cupboards are on both floors to the west of the staircase.

The walls of the ablutions areas are faced in glazed brick which has been painted below the height of the suspended ceiling; the original face is visible above the ceiling (Plate 485.9). The sanitary ware mostly predates the 1978 works, which included adding melamine privacy panels between the showers. There are modern white ceramic tile splashbacks behind the sinks and urinals; the showers have been tiled in the same. The floors are of cream non-slip tiles. The woodwork and metalwork is painted in the same shade of brown as the external features (Plate 485.10).

The internal partitions between the bedroom and corridors are made of panels of cellular cardboard between sheets of plaster (Plate 485.11). Where exposed, the joists between the first floor and the roof space show signs of the former lath and plaster ceilings.

Conversion

At some date between construction and the alterations of 1978, the open-plan dormitory wings were converted to individual bed-sitting rooms utilising the afore-described cellular cardboard and plasterboard partitions. There is no indication of the date of this phase of work.

Logically, the smaller windows to the first floor were blocked at this time, as each bed-sit would have required only one window. No signs of a removed partition between the windows is visible on the wall or ceiling above the suspended ceilings, and so there is no suggestion that these windows formerly served separate rooms.

The blocked windows to the front elevation use dark red-brown bricks, whereas the windows at the rear of the building use orange-red; logically, the windows were blocked at the same time, despite the difference in the colours of the materials. The mortars appear identical.

There is no mention of these windows on the plans of the 1978 works and so it can be concluded that they had been blocked by that time.

1978 Alterations

The only surviving plans of the building relate to relatively minor works carried out in 1978. These works consist mainly of the replacement of most of the internal doors with half-hour fire doors, minor alteration of access between the landing and corridors and the installation of a suspended ceiling.

During these works, the lights between the first floor ablutions and the landing, presumably previously intended to provide light for the stairwell, were blocked, just visible in the painted brickwork inside the toilet area (Plate 485.12) and visible in pattern staining on the landing walls (see Plate 485.8).

A handwritten note on the plan states '*mineral fibre acoustic suspended ceiling*' which matches the current materials, as does the position of the ceiling frame.

A note refers to the windows being repaired or replaced as necessary, however, the current windows are all of an identical type and so would have been replaced in their entirety, either at a later date or as an amendment to the works. There is also a note regarding the two central windows in the first floor recess above the entrance in the north elevation. It states '*Remove glazing and bars from centre windows and replace with side hung casements to match adjacent windows*'. The current windows are all contemporary and top-hung, but this does indicate that the originals may have been sash windows as seen in the same building on other airfields and more fitting to the classical architectural style (Francis 1996).

A note refers to the whole building being redecorated. The current decorative scheme to the communal areas consists of pale blue walls and mid-blue woodwork. The bedrooms are individually decorated with the majority having cream, blue or white walls and grey, blue, black, brown or burgundy woodwork. Previous colour schemes can be seen above any missing ceiling tiles; the rooms are painted with different colours, confirming that the partitions were in place and individual rooms were in use well before the suspended ceiling was installed during the 1978 works (Plate 485.13).

The suspended ceiling cuts across the top of the window openings of the ground floor, leaving just the ends of the wooden pelmet exposed (Plate 485.14); the first floor pelmets are abutted by the suspended ceiling (Plate 485.15).

The rooms contain glass or metal light fittings, although where the ceiling tiles are missing it can be seen that prior to the suspended ceiling the rooms were lit by fluorescent tubes (Plate 485.16). Both British and American power sockets are provided in each room, the power cable runs in surface mounted metal tube conduit. New door handles were fitted to any doors which were not renewed. Room numbers, which differ to those on the 1978 plan, are painted on the corridor wall outside each room (Plate 485.17). There are radiators to each bedroom and the public areas, which may date to after the 1978 works as they do not appear on the plans.

Artwork

The individual artworks are recorded and detailed within the specific artwork recording project, but, in brief, the artwork dates to the 1980s and refers mainly to the squadron and to contemporary comic book or film characters (OA forthcoming).

In the day room at the eastern end of the ground floor, the emblem of the 20th Component Repair Squadron, consisting of a shuttle surrounded by orbiting engineering components and the slogan 'many tasks one mission' (sic) is painted on the eastern wall (Plate 485.18).

The bed-sit to the west of the ground floor toilets contains simply the word 'underground' stencilled in black capital letters

adjacent to the door (Plate 485.19).

On the first floor, the corridor contains a full height Judge Dredd (Plate 485.20) and a large bird of prey carrying a snake in its beak (Plate 485.21). Several artworks had already been removed by the time of recording (Plate 485.22), including a full height Invisible Man painting, stored on the ground floor, which may be inspired by a c1949 American edition of the book by HG Wells (Plate 485.23).

An un-numbered first floor bedroom, the central southern room in the west wing, contains a crow with the text: 'Always on frequency, never a random jam' (Plate 485.24). This room is painted in the colours used in the public areas and so may have not been a bed-sit when the artwork was created.

Summary

1937-1942: The footprint of the building is as-built as are, ostensibly, the elevations, albeit with replacement window frames and the loss of the small first floor windows.

Mid-20th century: The internal partitions converted the open-plan dormitories to bed-sits of a similar size to those of the NCOs which were located in the false towers of the north elevation. The rooms were individually decorated. The redundant small windows to the first floor north and south elevations were blocked. A doorway to the east wall of the ground floor ablutions block was added or altered.

1978: Fire doors replaced most of the internal doors and the doorways between the landing and corridors were altered to provide better fire protection.

Additional privacy was provided in the shower areas.

A suspended ceiling was installed and the building redecorated.

Post 1978-closure: The bed-sits were decorated individually and artworks were created in the communal areas, and to a lesser extent in the private areas. The window frames were replaced. Central heating was installed and the boiler room altered accordingly, including the blocking-up of a small window adjacent to the boiler room door. The redundant chimneys to the front of the building were retained.

Archive

Three plans were identified within the Upper Heyford archives.

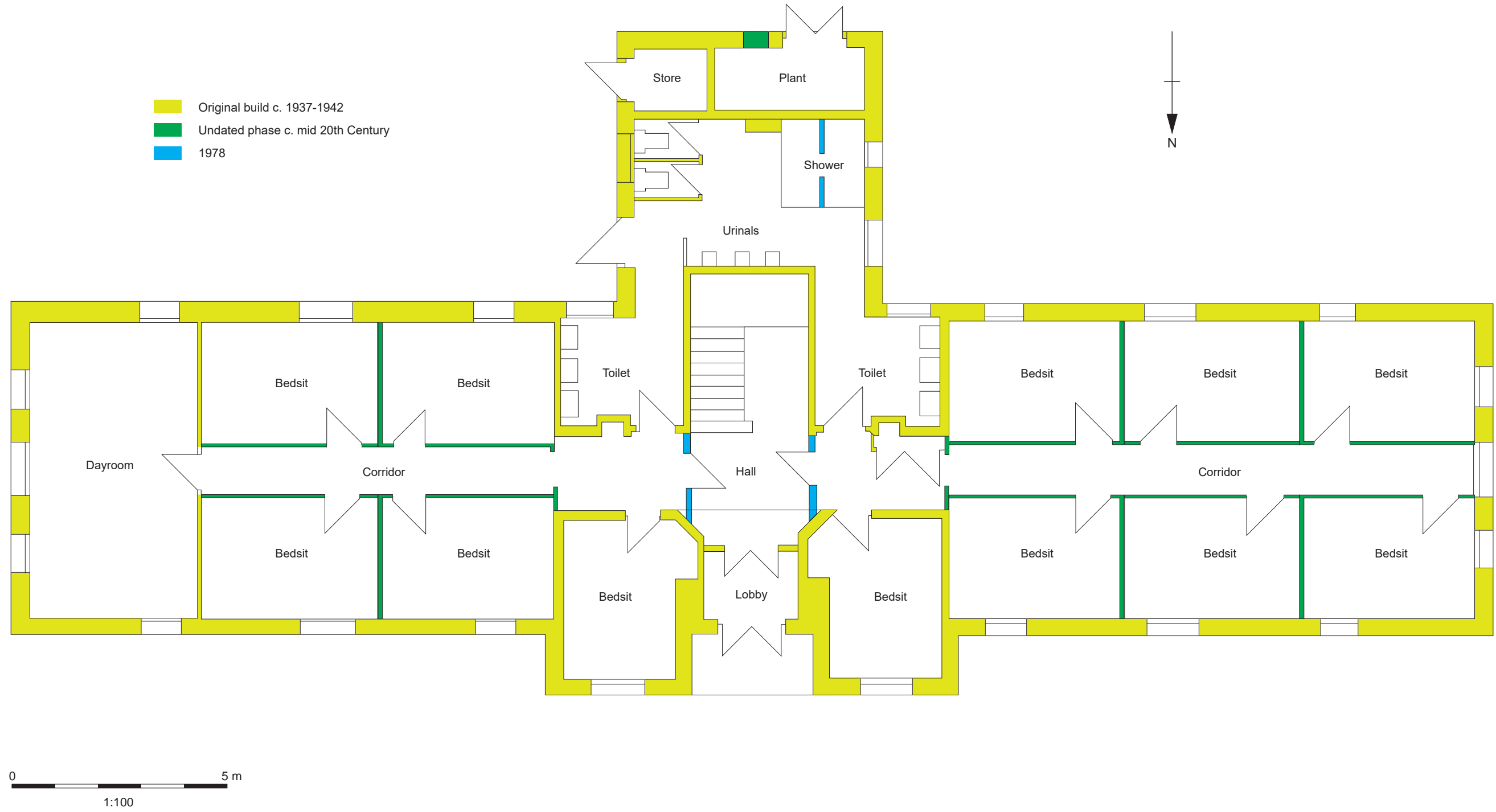


Figure 485.1: Ground floor plan



Figure 485.2: First floor plan



Plate 485.1 North, front, elevation



Plate 485.2 Single window in a side elevation



Plate 485.3 Rear, south, elevation: east end and ablutions block



Plate 485.4 East elevation



Plate 485.5 New and old building numbers



Plate 485.6 Example of a doorway between the ablutions and the corridor



Plate 485.7 Example of a recess beside the ablutions doorway



Plate 485.8 The stairwell, also showing the location of blocked lights to ablutions



Plate 485.9 The glazed brickwork in the ablutions, visible above suspended ceiling



Plate 485.10 The range of finishes in the ablutions block



Plate 485.11 The partition panel construction



Plate 485.12 The blocked lights visible in the ablutions brickwork



Plate 485.13 An example of a former decorative scheme



Plate 485.14 The suspended ceiling obscuring a ground floor window pelmet



Plate 485.15 The suspended ceiling abutting a first floor window pelmet



Plate 485.16 Ceiling staining showing the previous light fitting



Plate 485.17 Current numbering system, stencilled outside the rooms



Plate 485.18 The eastern wall of the day room and squadron emblem



Plate 485.19 'Underground' stencil in a ground floor room



Plate 485. 20 'Judge Dredd' artwork, first floor corridor



Plate 485.21 Bird and snake artwork, first floor corridor



Plate 485.22 Western end of first floor landing following artwork removal



Plate 485.23 The 'Invisible Man' artwork, removed and stored in the day room



Plate 485.24 Crow artwork in a first floor room