



We have been studying the history of the former St Michael's Parochial Institute to understand how the building was originally designed and how it has changed since original construction.

Our research stems from a review of several sources, including study of the original building control plans prepared by George Corson in 1883, along with drawings of the alterations by Chorley & Cannon of Leeds, and documents compiled on the history of the building. We are grateful to the West Yorkshire Archive Service for their assistance in our research.

Background

The Parochial Institute was designed in 1883 by George Corson (1829 - 1910). George Corson was a Scottish architect with a prominent Leeds practice responsible for several large houses in Headingley, including the Grade II* listed Spenfield House. He also designed the Grade II* listed Grand Theatre in Leeds (1877-78) with his assistant James Robinson Watson, Grade II* listed Leeds Central Library (1878-1884) and an extension to George Gilbert Scott's Grade I listed Leeds General Infirmary. He won some of the most important recognisable public commissions in Leeds including a competition for the landscaping of Roundhay Park (1873) and the School Board offices (1876) and became the first president of the Leeds Architectural Society which he founded in 1876. Corson lived in Headingley where he died in 1910 aged 81, and is buried in Lawnswood Cemetery which he himself had designed.

The Parochial Institute derived from the efforts of the Vicar of St Michael's Church, the Reverend F J Wood to create such a community building. The corner stone of the Parochial Institute was laid on 28th July 1883 by The Worshipful The Mayor of Leeds (Edwin Woodhouse), and the building was opened on Thursday 12 June 1884, again by Mayor Woodhouse. The 'objects of the proposed institute' were recorded in the ceremony Order of Proceedings as being:

1. To give opportunities in the evening for self improvement and wholesome recreation to the young men of the Parish.
2. To supply Class Rooms, which may be used for various educational and other purposes connected with the work of the Parish, both on Sundays and Week-days.
3. To provide a Reading Room, with daily papers and periodicals, which may be open throughout the day for the use of all classes of Subscribers.
4. To meet a want which has long been felt in Headingley, in the shape of a large and convenient Room for Public Entertainments, and Meetings of all Political and Religious parties, at a moderate charge.

The Order also records that:

The site, and £550 resulting from the sale of the old Glebe School, have, with the consent of the Charity Commissioners, been applied to this purpose, and Subscriptions amounting to £600 have been received. Further Subscriptions are much needed, and in order to raise the total sum required, it is proposed to hold a GRAND BAZAAR in the large room as soon as it is completed.

The Grade II listing description is as follows:

Meeting rooms for St Michael's parish church, now offices. 1877, converted C20. By George Corson. Coursed squared sandstone with freestone dressings and Welsh slate roofs. Gothic Revival style. T-shaped plan with gable end to street and wing at rear. 2-gable front, the smaller on the left projects forward and contains the entrance. This has a short column and 2 half-columns with capitals of naturalistic foliage. Above these are sculpted panels, St Michael and the dragon to the front, the Royal Arms to the side. Paired lancet to the left, quatrefoil in gable. The right hand gable has a buttress flanking the central door with side lights and mullioned window over. Flanking windows are 3-light mullion and transom. Large traceried Gothic window above and small lancet in gable. Diagonal buttress to corner. 2, and 3-light mullion and transom windows to side elevations and rear wing. INTERIOR: meeting hall above rooms and offices. Hall with 4 windows either side. Ribbed wooden ceiling of 18 bays, a central tunnel vault supported on 5 curious decorated semicircular wrought-iron trusses. The roof is close boarded. Stone stair with wrought-iron twist balustrade. Main downstairs room (partitioned) has low relief panelled ceiling.

There are some anomalies in this listing description, in that the date of 1877 is incorrect and inconsistent with the original archive records. The stairs are not stone as described, but concrete, manufactured by the Aire-side Iron Company (recorded in a newspaper article from the corner stone laying, published: Monday 30 July 1883 Newspaper: Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer).

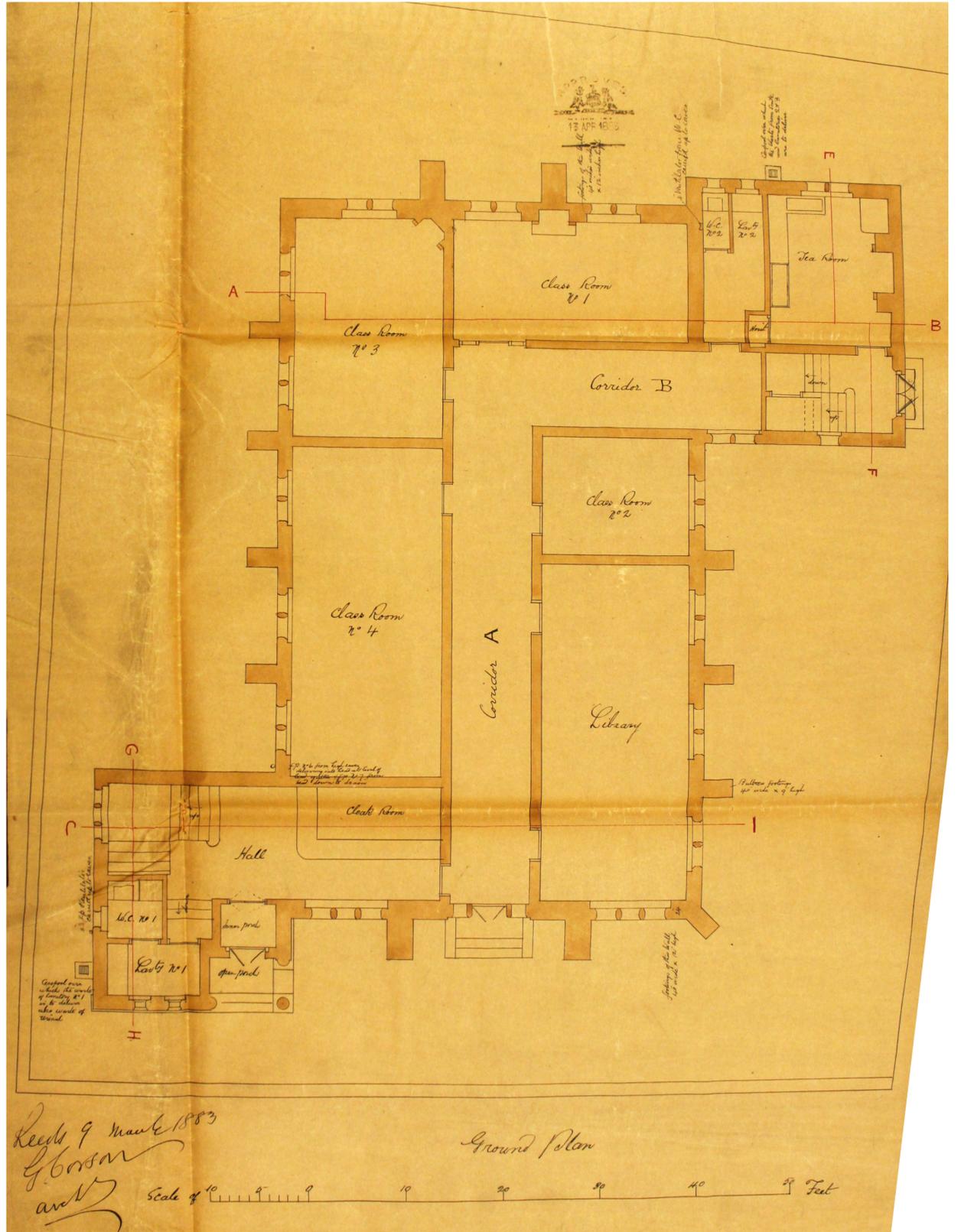
Drawings of the proposed Parochial Institute by George Corson

On the 13 April 1883, building control plans were stamped as 'approved' for the "Parish Institute, Headingley". The drawings are signed "Leeds 9 March 1883 G Corson Arch". The archive contains ground and first floor plans, a block plan, elevations and sections, and show the building as first conceived by the architect. From our measured survey, it is clear that these drawings were followed very closely through to the construction of the building. Several details were developed after these submitted plans, including masonry details in the tympanum, gable masonry details and roofscape (vents etc.), but generally they are very close to the built form. To the west of the plot, Oak Terrace is in existence, whilst the eastern side (The Shires today) is recorded as 'Vacant Land'. Drains and water passed into mains in Bennett Road.

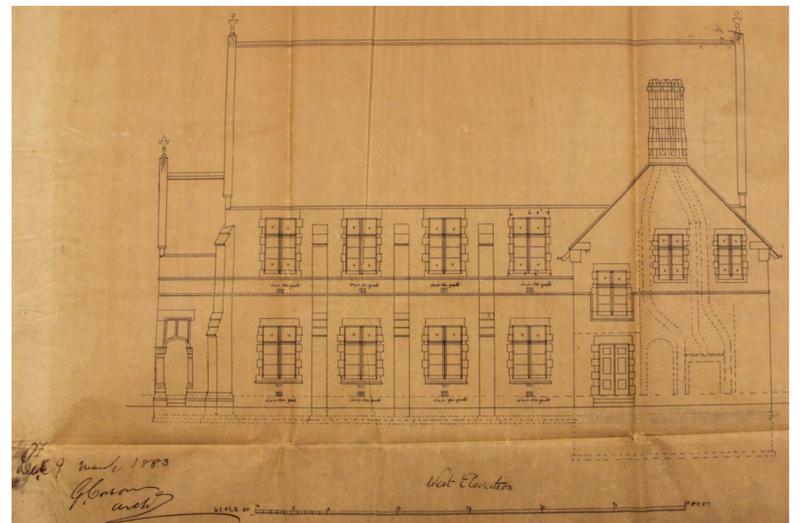
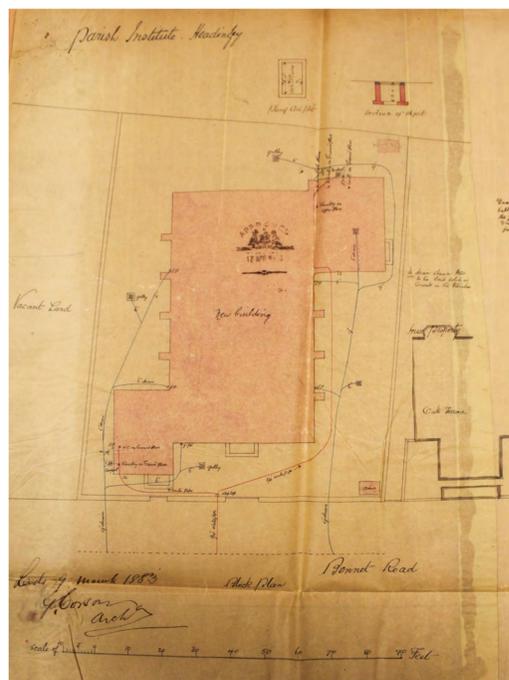
The open porch and inner porch led to the large open stair as it does today, however, this was open to a large hall and cloakroom to the right hand side. This has been partitioned off in the 20th century and this wonderful staircase is no longer connected to the downstairs rooms.

The secondary entrance centred on the main gable led to a long, wide corridor, with a library and classrooms leading off. The corner turned through 90 degrees through what is currently the photography studio. At the southwest end of the corridor were two WCs. The tea room and second stair were not connected to the ground floor corridor, indicating that the only escape from the rear was back through to the northern frontage. A hoist from the tea room up to first floor is present on these plans and still exists today, albeit unused and closed off.

At first floor, the large hall is labelled as the Parish Room, with a platform at the south end. The south west corner has an access from the stair landing into the hall as per the current arrangement, and also into a "Hoist Lobby", further lobby and two retiring rooms, linked with folding doors and with WC and Lavatory off. The plan also has the boiler room cellar, which is little changed to this day, except for some blocking up of openings.



1883 George Corson Ground Floor Plan from the Building Control Plans. Reproduced with kind permission of the West Yorkshire Archive Service. Reference: West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, BCP No.6 13 April 1883.



1883 George Corson West Elevation and Site Plan from the Building Control Plans. Reproduced with kind permission of the West Yorkshire Archive Service. Reference: West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, BCP No.6 13 April 1883.



The building has undergone quite a few changes since it was originally completed in 1884. The biggest alteration to the layout came only 10 years later...

Drawings of east extension by Chorley & Cannon of Leeds

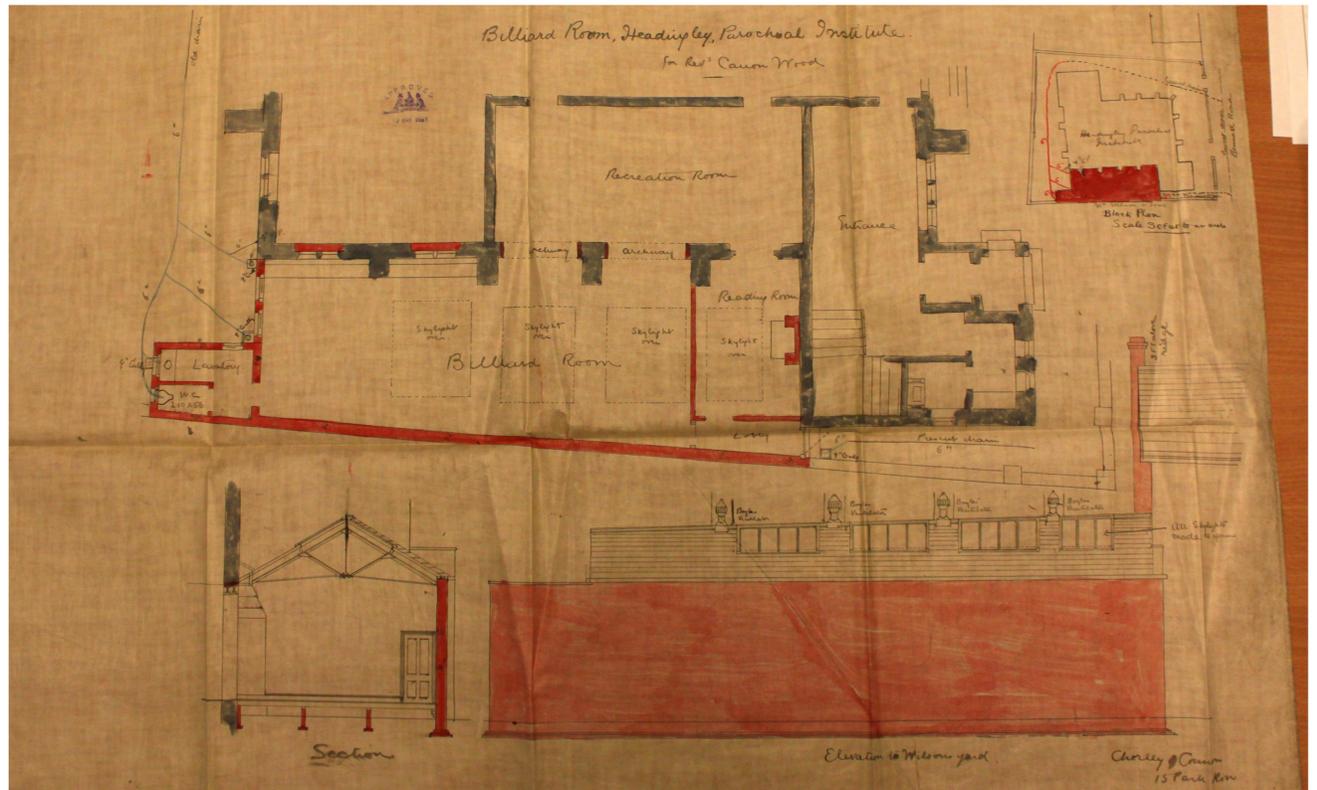
Charles Roberts Chorley and John Wreghitt Cannon formed their practice in 1881, working on churches, commercial buildings and residential projects. Their notable works include the Grade II listed 1891 Leeds and County Liberal club (now Quebecs Hotel) and Hotel Metropole in King Street, Leeds opened in 1899 and noted as one of the best examples of terracotta work in Leeds on the Blue Plaque.

In May 1893, plans were approved to the designs of Chorley and Cannon of 15 Park Row, Leeds, for "Billiard Room etc., Headingley Parochial Institute, for the Rev. d Canon Wood". This new addition on the east side of Corson's Institute building consisted of:

"Brick buildings, walls at front & back faced with stone, slated roof supported on iron bindings and wood purlins. Floor boarded" (Block plan annotation, April 1893).

The proposals formed openings between the new addition and the Corson institute, widening windows openings with steels lintels shown on the section drawing. Skylights were formed over the Billiard Room and a Reading Room with new fireplace and chimney against the north east rear gable. To the south, a lavatory and WC project beyond the line of the Corson building in a stone lean-to arrangement. Drainage was extended along the southern yard to meet these new toilets. The land to the east is now recorded as Wm Wilson's Yard.

The extension is a simple utilitarian infill between the boundary and the original building, a far cry from the more notable works by Chorley and Cannon. The pitched roof form creates an awkward valley along the east wall of the Corson building, flowing around the buttresses and clearly having been refinished numerous times, whilst the east brick wall is simple solid brick construction, with gutter on top so as not to project into neighbouring ownership. The floor is suspended timber, but has no sub-floor ventilation and has now badly decayed as a result.



1893 Chorley and Cannon Drawing from the Building Control Plans, with alterations coloured red.

Reproduced with kind permission of the West Yorkshire Archive Service. Reference: West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, BCP No.40 12 May 1893.

Drawings of south extension by Chorley & Cannon of Leeds

In November 1895, further extension plans were approved to the designs of Chorley and Cannon (Archive reference: BCP No. 79 29 November 1895). These showed a small, single storey extension of the southwest kitchen (Tea Room on the Corson Plan).

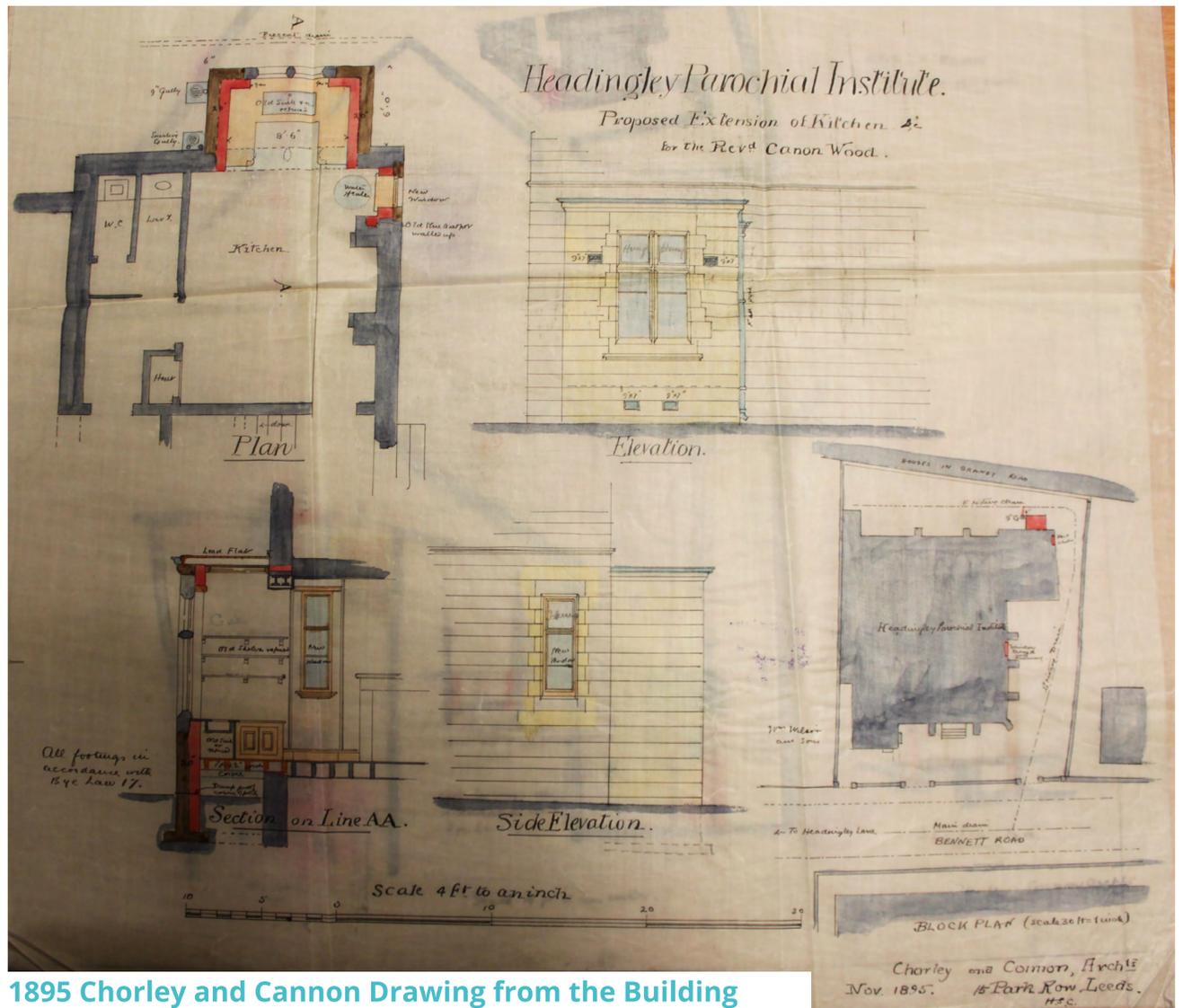
The south wall was pushed out and the existing, original mullioned window was re-inserted in the new south wall. The present drain was noted to run approx. 3ft further to the south of this new extension. The roof was to be flat and covered with lead, with steel beams carrying the load of the original wall above the opening into the new extension. The floor is shown as suspended timber joists.

To the west, a new window was inserted into the Corson building, shown as window GWG5 on the Calls Architecture ground floor plan. This window was drawn with dressed lintel and cill, but the built window is clearly of lower quality than the original masonry, having no complete stone lintel, and the cill has cracked.

By the time of the 1895 plan, an opening is shown to be existing between the tea room and the corridor, perhaps amended during original construction as a sensible departure from the Corson building control plans, to allow better escape.

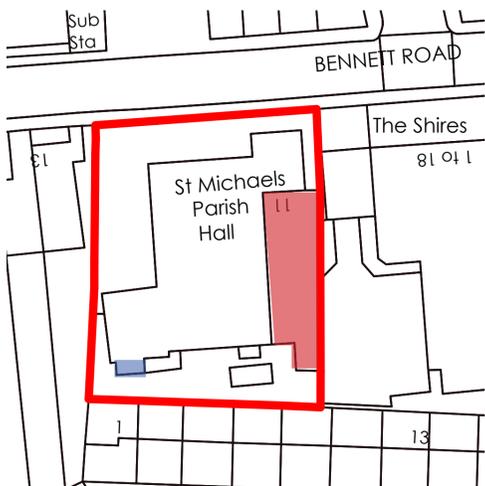
The approved plan also includes an alteration that changed window GWG3 (Calls Architecture Plan Reference) into a doorway, seemingly never carried out. The houses in Granby Road are clearly shown on the site plan at this time, built around 1888.

Sometime after the single storey extension, this addition was extended up and to the side at first floor, forming a canopy above the WC windows on exposed steel beams and single stone column. This canopy arrangement is first noted on the 1951-54 OS map.



1895 Chorley and Cannon Drawing from the Building Control Plans

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1895 extension marked in blue, 1893 extension in red



1895 extension, interior January 2019.



Southern extension photo from yard, dashed area indicated extent contained in the 1895 drawing. Additions above circa 1940s / 50s.



1895 window highlighted.