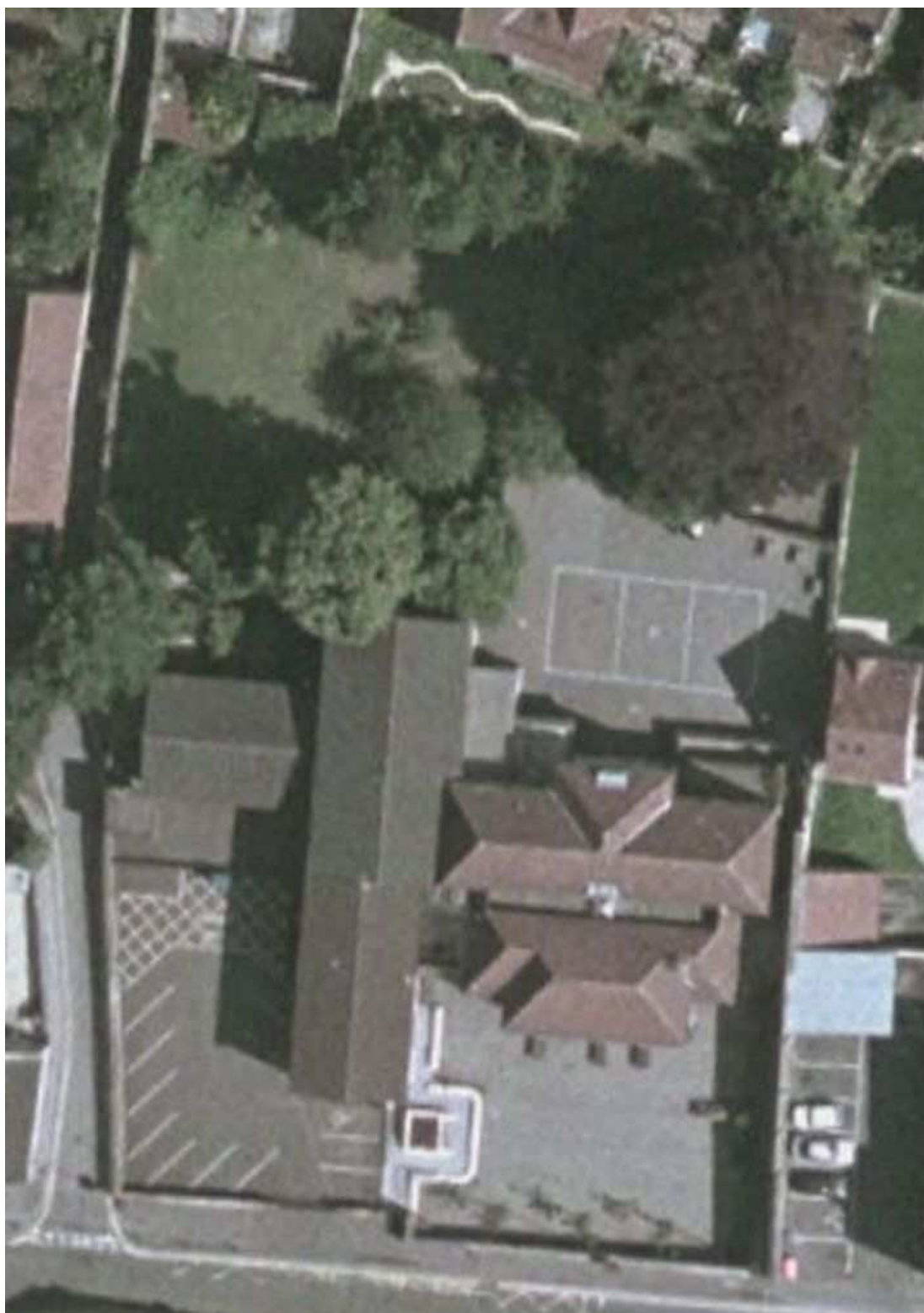


Preliminary Desktop Archaeological Report
on the site of
St Johns CofE VA First School, Frome, Somerset
By Revd Colin Alsbury
May 2019



The site of St Johns Cof E Church School has a long and complex history dating back to the Saxon foundation of the town around the mission church and minster founded by St Aldhelm in 685AD.

Within the school site lay the heart of the ancient Rectory manor with its farm building and tithe barn tenanted from the Abbot of Cirencester who was Rector through the period from the late C12 until the dissolution of the monasteries.

After this the Rectorial lands belonged to Longleat from whom they would again have been tenanted.

The appended maps and images indicate something of the use of the site through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: The 1920's aerial image clearly evidences that all the buildings on the site have changed within the past century.

The boundary walls however retain significant features relating to the older buildings and their foundations have been reused in many places. One location where this is evident is at ground level on the north side of the 1930's school building where stone which may have been part of an old entrance is visible.

Recently a well shaft was found under the south side playground area and this will have related to one of the previous uses of the site, whether as a College in the nineteenth century for choristers, as the Frome and Warminster Steam Laundry, or some other past use. This well shaft was found at a similar distance from the adjacent road as the wellshaft indicated on old maps that was in the grounds of the adjacent Victoria Public House (now a dog grooming salon and flats).

One of the plans clearly shows that there was a boiler room below the present classroom on the western side of the main school hall—whether that remains a void or was filled in during past construction works is unknown.

Some evidence is seen of former toilet facilities within the present car park area from the period when the Dispensary building was in existence: Before that the ancient Tithe Barn sat in the end of Blindhouse Lane and the present car park.

The following pages include:

- an extract from the Extended Urban Survey compiled by Somerset County Council (which makes no reference to the Tithe Barn as the compilers had no evidence of its location),

- Notes about the significance of Frome in Saxon times—in that the Anglo Saxon Chronicle records that King Eadred died at Frome—perhaps on the school site itself.

- Domessday Book references to Frome and the significant manors

- Plans, maps and photographs.

They are presented as evidence rather than as part of any conclusive work at this stage.

Revd Colin Alsbury

7th May 2019

The first documentary record of settlement at Frome relates to the 7th-century foundation of the Monastery of St John by St Aldhelm. This began as a missionary outpost in the heart of the royal estate of Selwood, but the strategic advantages of a situation giving access to abundant natural resources and to the Mendips and Salisbury Plain (where sheep farming was developing by the later Saxon period) may soon have become apparent. Though it was close to one of the old fords, the church site was in fact some way south of the more important fords, which were at Spring Gardens; it also lay on a north-facing hillside. The apparent strangeness of the particular siting of Aldhelm's establishment has given rise to the idea that the minster was located on an already sacred site, perhaps dominated by the spring which later provided its water supply (Mitchell, 1978). However, it is also possible that geology or mere historical accident dictated the site. In this place, rock platforms raised above likely flood levels, suitable for building and supplied with water by fast, clear streams, were available; but Aldhelm is also said to have picked the place where he rested before crossing the Frome on his journey between Sherborne and Malmesbury (Belham, 1973, 1984).

The close association between St Aldhelm and King Ine of Wessex makes it plausible that the Frome estate, which was certainly a royal possession by the later Saxon period (and was never assessed for Danegeld), may have been so from the 7th century. It served the Wessex kings as a hunting centre for Selwood, implying the existence of a royal residence, and there are sporadic records of royal visits there in the 10th century: a witangemot was held there in 934 by Athelstan, and Eadred died there in 955. At the Conquest the minster was associated with Reinbald, one of the most powerful clerics in the country. It is therefore clear that during the late Saxon period the settlement was of both administrative and economic importance. It was the head of the largest hundred in Somerset (and the wealthiest, according to the Geld Inquest of 1084), serving a vast hinterland of settlements in forest and marginal land: the agricultural statistics in the Domesday Survey imply that by the end of the Saxon period, considerable clearance had taken place. The existence of a substantial market (worth 46s 8d) is also recorded in 1086; there are other references from the late Saxon period to receipt of the 'third penny' (a tax on shire court profits) at Frome; and there may also have been a mint (McGarvie, 1980). Though all of these can be indicators of a burgeoning town, there is no indisputable evidence of Borough status in the Saxon period, and no burgesses are recorded at Domesday. Nevertheless, there must have been a settlement of some size around the church and market: the location and extent of this remains largely unknown.

By 1086 a number of secondary manors had been carved out of the Frome estate. Those which are contained in the present study area include St John's (the minster estate), Rodden, Berkley, Marston (in which Spring Gardens was included until 1885), and two small manors at Keyford. Some of these manors lay at times wholly or partly within the Royal Forest of Selwood, which was in existence at least by 1182 - though the limits of the area under Forest Law gradually contracted. The statistics in the Domesday Survey, and in later medieval documents, suggest that only small scale, and perhaps quite dispersed, settlement took place on these outlying manors.

The primary settlement at Frome was dominated in the medieval period by two main manor holdings. The rump of the royal manor was let out after the Conquest, initially to the Courcelles family, though from the mid 13th century onwards several changes of lordship took place. The minster lands came to form part of the endowment of Cirencester Abbey in the early 12th century, and were subsequently either managed by the bailiff or let out piecemeal. Almost inevitably, there was occasional conflict between the Abbey and the Lord of the Manor over domination of the incipient town and its growing profits. The Abbey in effect bought off the secular Lord, and continued to reap the rewards of the cleared fields and the market, and then later the cloth trade, which it deliberately fostered. In 1239 a market charter was granted, and by 1494 this had been confirmed and two annual fairs established. Though much estate land was let out by the Abbey, it did not loosen its hold on the town: there is no evidence that a Borough was ever established.

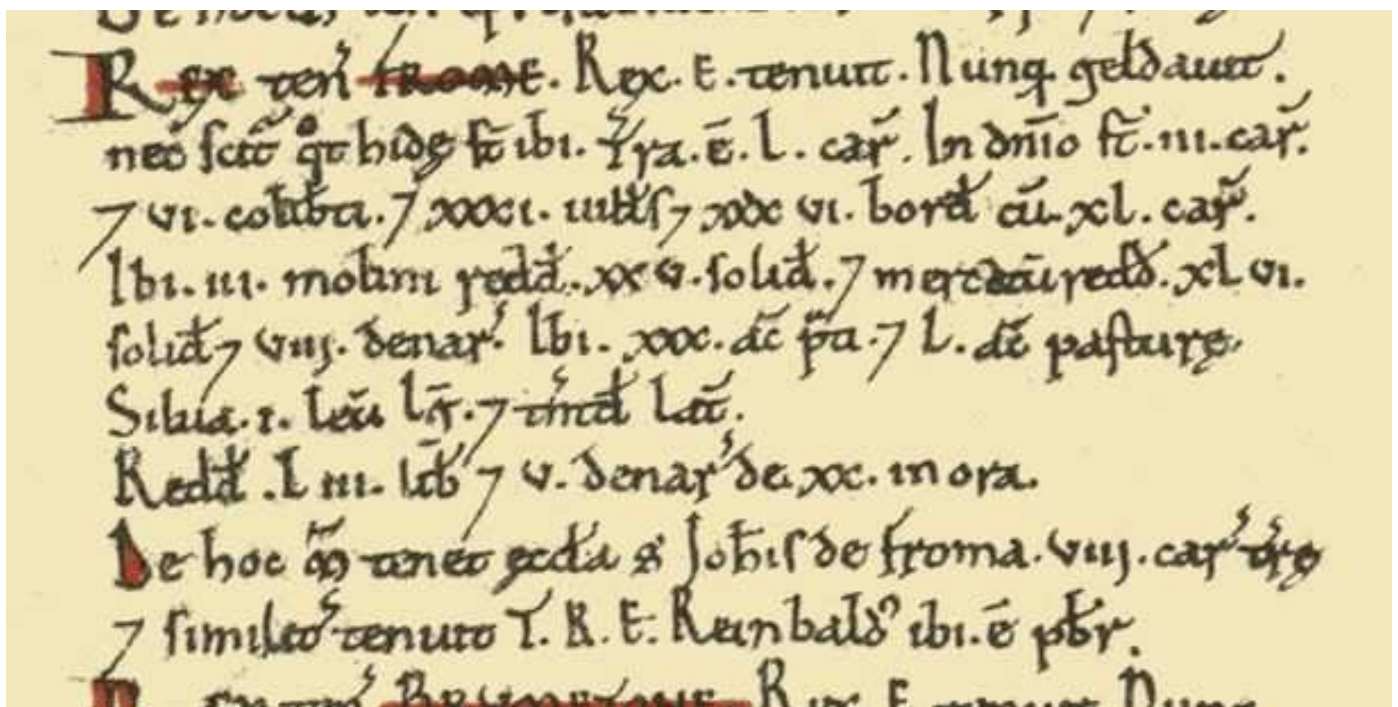
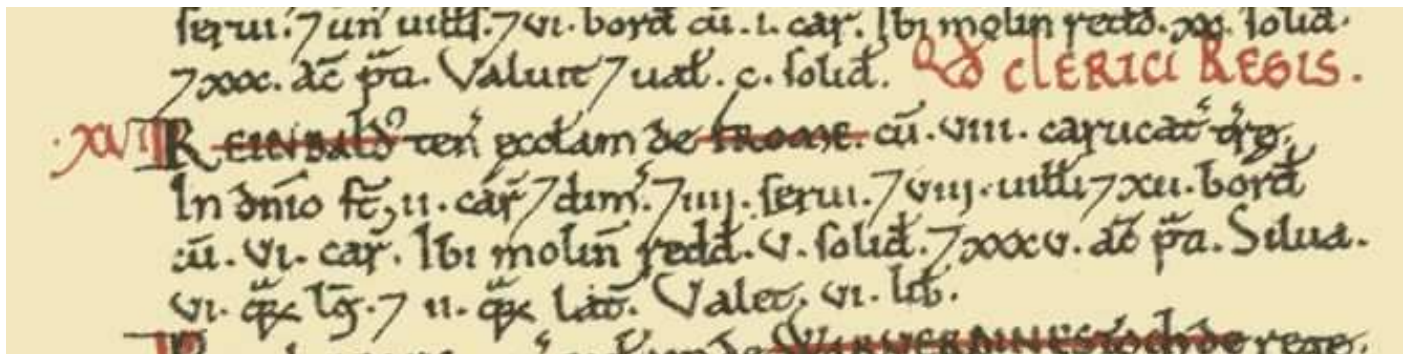
It is clear from 15th and 16th century sources that the cloth industry was already well-established by the Dissolution. Surnames such as Webbe (weaver) or Tayllor appear in the early 14th century (Belham, 1973) and there are explicit references to cloth makers in 1475. Leland (1542) describes a town of "fayre stone howsys" built on the proceeds of the cloth trade and the markets, and Henry VIII's commissioners also describe Frome as a great market town. It does not appear that the Dissolution of the monasteries had greatly disrupted Frome's trade, since so much property had by then been let out by Cirencester Abbey.

Athelstan attended a witan (parliament) in what would have been a palace building in Frome at the Christmas court of 934, after a campaign in Scotland which attempted to unite all Saxon and British kingdoms under his rule. The king of Scotland (Alba as it was called then) was brought back south to Frome to be made to accept his new position as a sub-king, like the Welsh kings.

Charter S427

S 427. A.D. 934 (Frome, Somerset, 16 Dec.). King Athelstan to the familia of Holy Trinity, Winchester; grant of 30 hides (cassatae) at Enford, Wilts.; 10 (mansae) at Chilbolton and 10 (cassati) at Ashmanworth, Hants. Latin version has English bounds of Enford, Hants. Latin and English versions with English bounds, Winchester, Old Minster

Regenbald, chancellor of Edward the Confessor, held the church at Frome and all its estates at Domesday.



Leland states that Regenbald was Dean of the College of Prebendaries that the Abbey at Cirencester replaced and that his epitaph there read 'Hic jacet Rembaldus presbyter quondam hujus ecclesiae decanus et tempore Edwardi Regis Anglie cancellarius.'

In 1133 Henry 1 gave a charter to the Abbot and Convent of Cirencester, granting them all the possessions of Regenbald.

At the dissolution of the monasteries Longleat acquired the lands formerly held by Cirencester.

Friday, 23rd November 955

Imagine... “a smaller church, although still a long church, a royal church... long, high, narrow nave... high windows, stained glass - they had glass then... artificial light of course - torch light, incense, glowing... with wall paintings all the way round... a rood screen - they had those in Anglo Saxon England - with great painted crucifix in wood... gilt crosses... all the paraphernalia of Old English Christianity. And imagine it that night... incense, Latin hymns being sung... whispered Anglo Saxon... and the King of England, brought in here perhaps, to die - that’s what usually happened... The royal hall was somewhere outside - we don’t know where it was but you’d come in here, in this sacred place... to them an old place even in 955: The King brought in, to be in the presence of the saints when he dies... And this is what the Chronicler wrote that year in Winchester:



Her forþferde Eadred cining on

went forth (=died) Eadred King

Sancte Clementes mæssedæg on Frome”

Saint Clement’s mass day at Frome

Eadred, also spelled EDRED

(died after a long illness on 23rd November 955 at Frome)

He was king of the English from 946 to 955, and brought Northumbria permanently under English rule. Eadred was the son of the West Saxon king Edward the Elder (ruled 899-924), the half brother of King Athelstan (ruled 924-939), and the brother of King Edmund I (ruled 939-946).

Upon Eadred's accession to power, the Northumbrians acknowledged his overlordship, but they soon proclaimed as their king Erik Bloodax, son of the Norwegian ruler Harald I Fairhair. In revenge Eadred ravaged all of Northumbria (948). The Northumbrians submitted to Eadred, but in 949 they accepted another Norse king, Olaf Sihtricson, as their ruler. They overthrew Olaf in 952 in favour of Erik Bloodax, who in turn was expelled and killed in 954. The Northumbrians then resumed their allegiance to Eadred. Eadred was a close friend of Dunstan, abbot of Glastonbury (later archbishop of Canterbury), and a supporter of the monastic revival inspired by Dunstan.

[Text in italics from a talk by Michael Wood at Frome St John the Baptist parish church]

ST JOHN'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND V A FIRST SCHOOL, CHRISTCHURCH STREET EAST FROME BA11 1QG

Plan and Legend

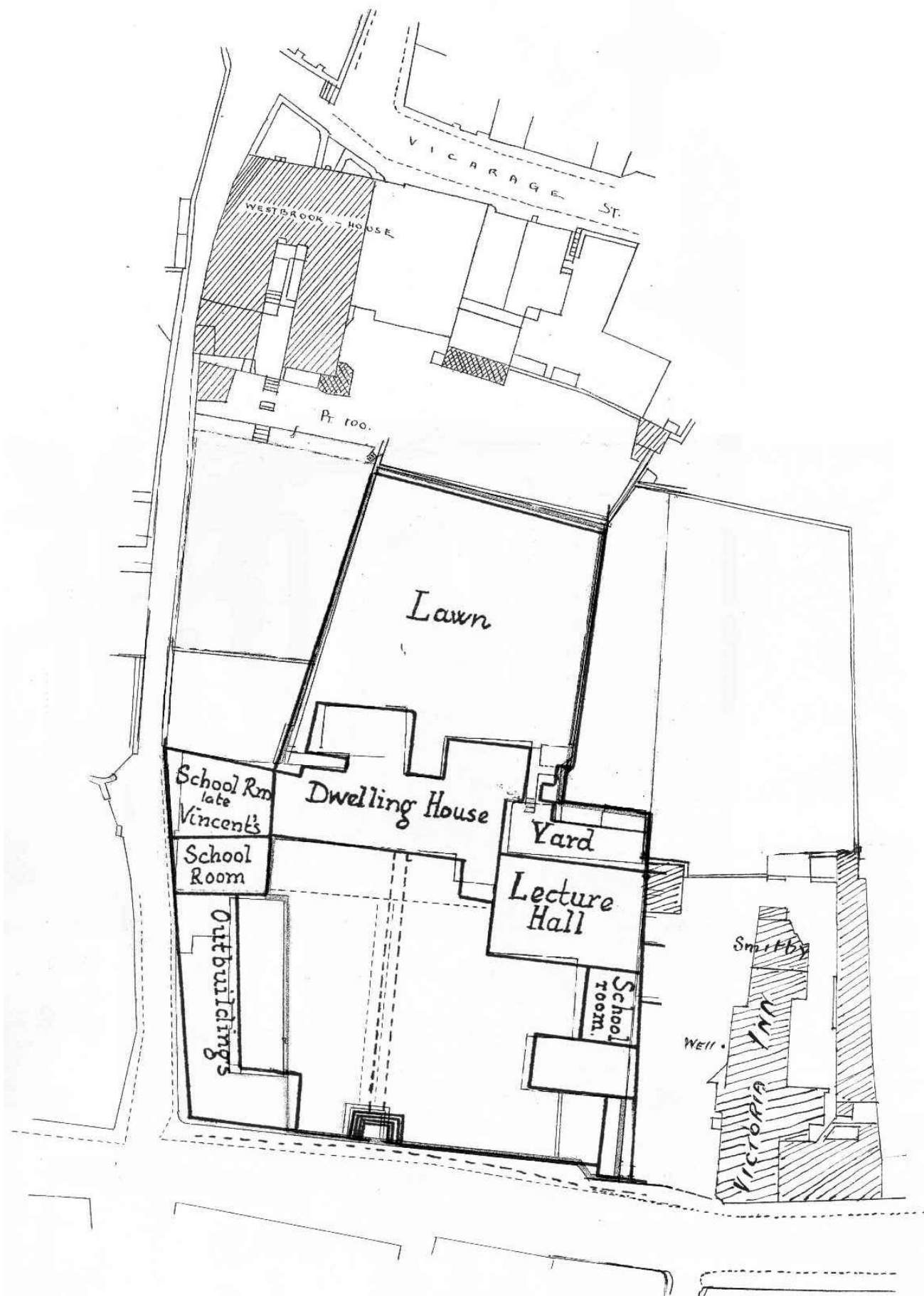


Note: The above plan is not to scale and is for guidance only

Plan No	Colour	Conveyance Date	Trust Deed Date	Managing Trustees	Custodian Trustees
1a	Blue	22 Feb 1911	3 Jan 1912	Vicar of Frome	Bath & Wells DBF
1b	Red	3 Jun 1918	3 Jun 1918	Vicar of Frome	Bath & Wells DBF
2	Green	9 Dec 1910	3 Jan 1912	Vicar of Frome	Bath & Wells DBF
3	Orange	29 Sep 1911	3 Jan 1912	Vicar of Frome	Bath & Wells DBF
4	Pink	31 Jul 1939	21 Jul 1939	Vicar & Wardens	Bath & Wells DBF
5	Yellow	28 Jun 1932	28 Jun 1932	Vicar & Wardens	Vicar & Wardens

1a and 1b were conveyed from Longleat estate to R H H Eden on 31 Dec 1894 and then by him on 21 Jan 1895 to the Frome and Warminster Steam Laundry Limited. 1a was conveyed by the Frome and Warminster Steam Laundry Limited as above on 22 Feb 1911 and 1b likewise on 3 Jun 1918.

5 was conveyed from the Lamb Brewery Ltd under the School Sites Act



Site plan showing use of rooms on the school site in the nineteenth century.



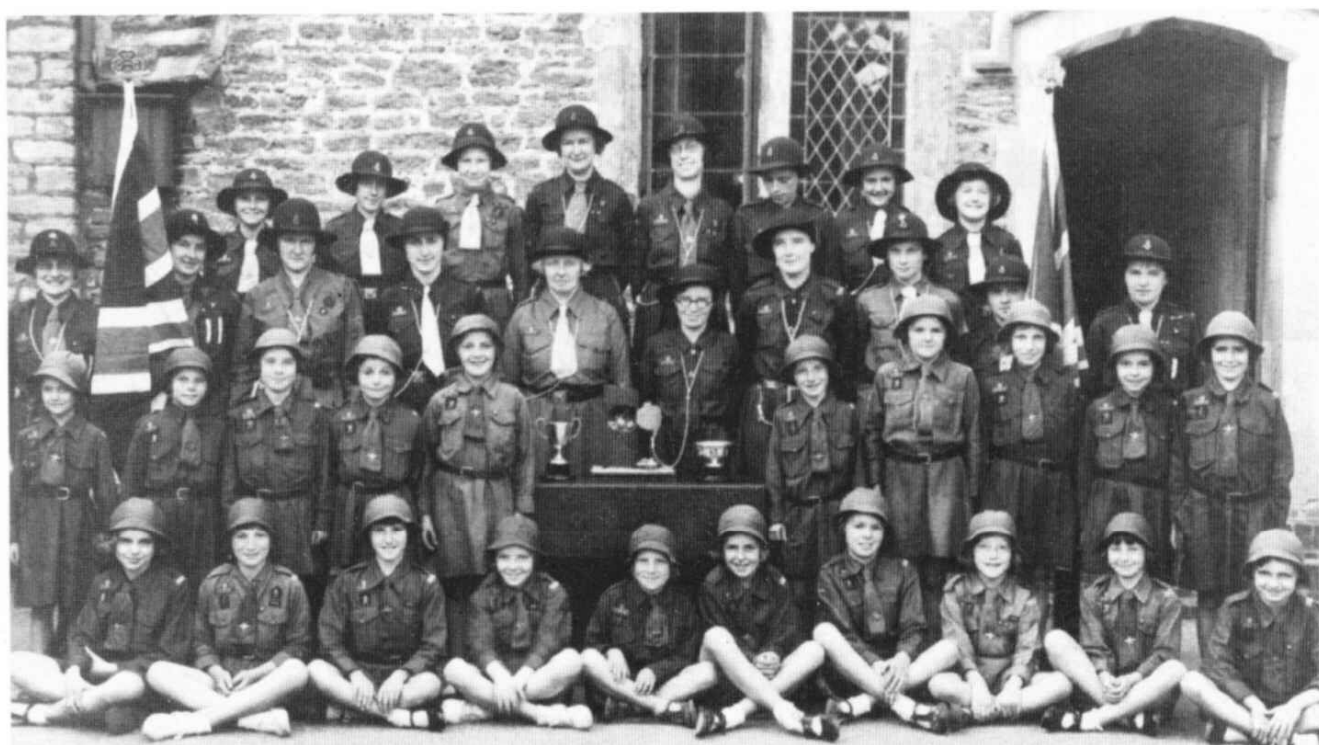
Photograph of boys studying at the College in April 1892



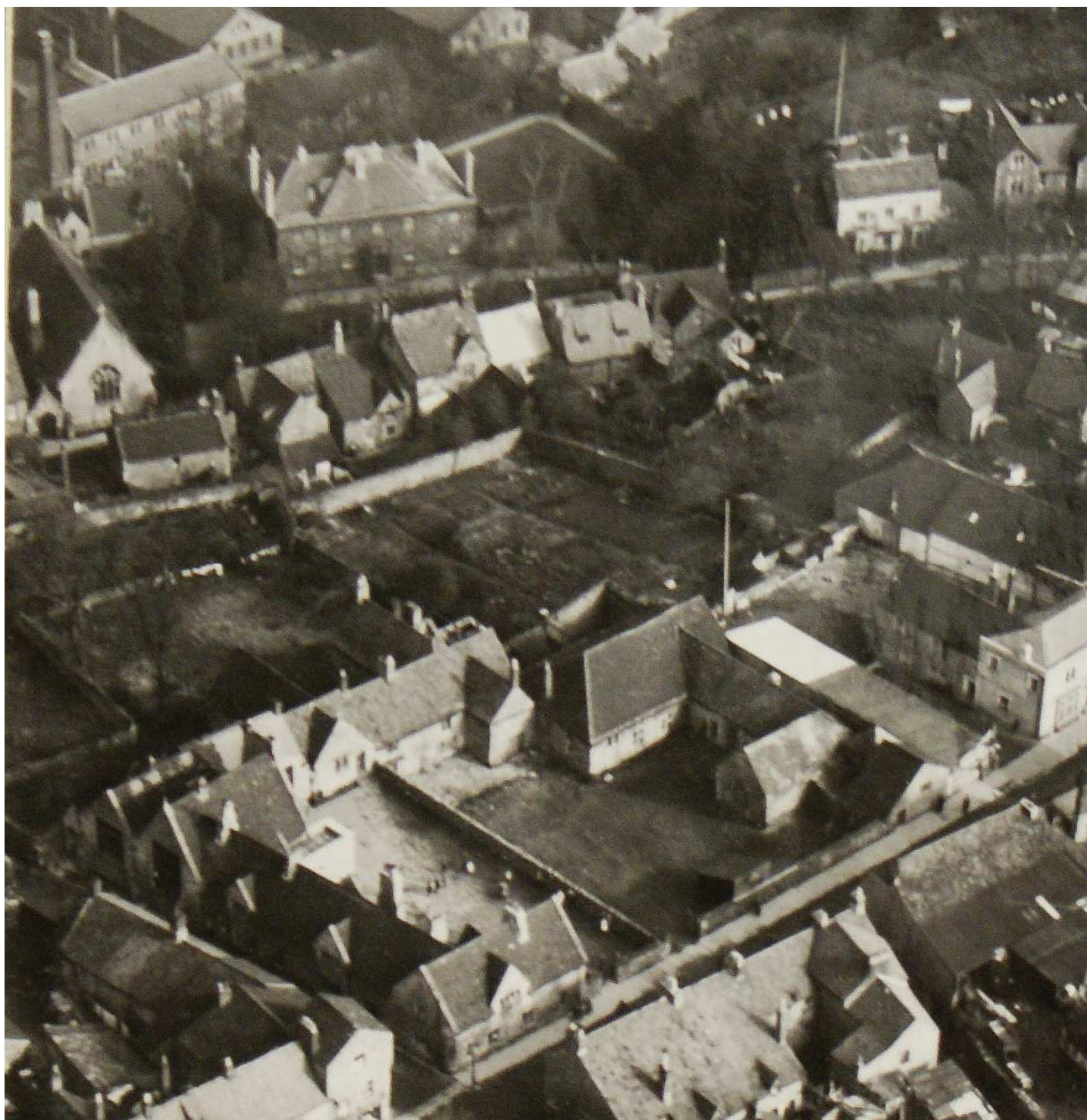
View down Blindhouse Lane in 1892



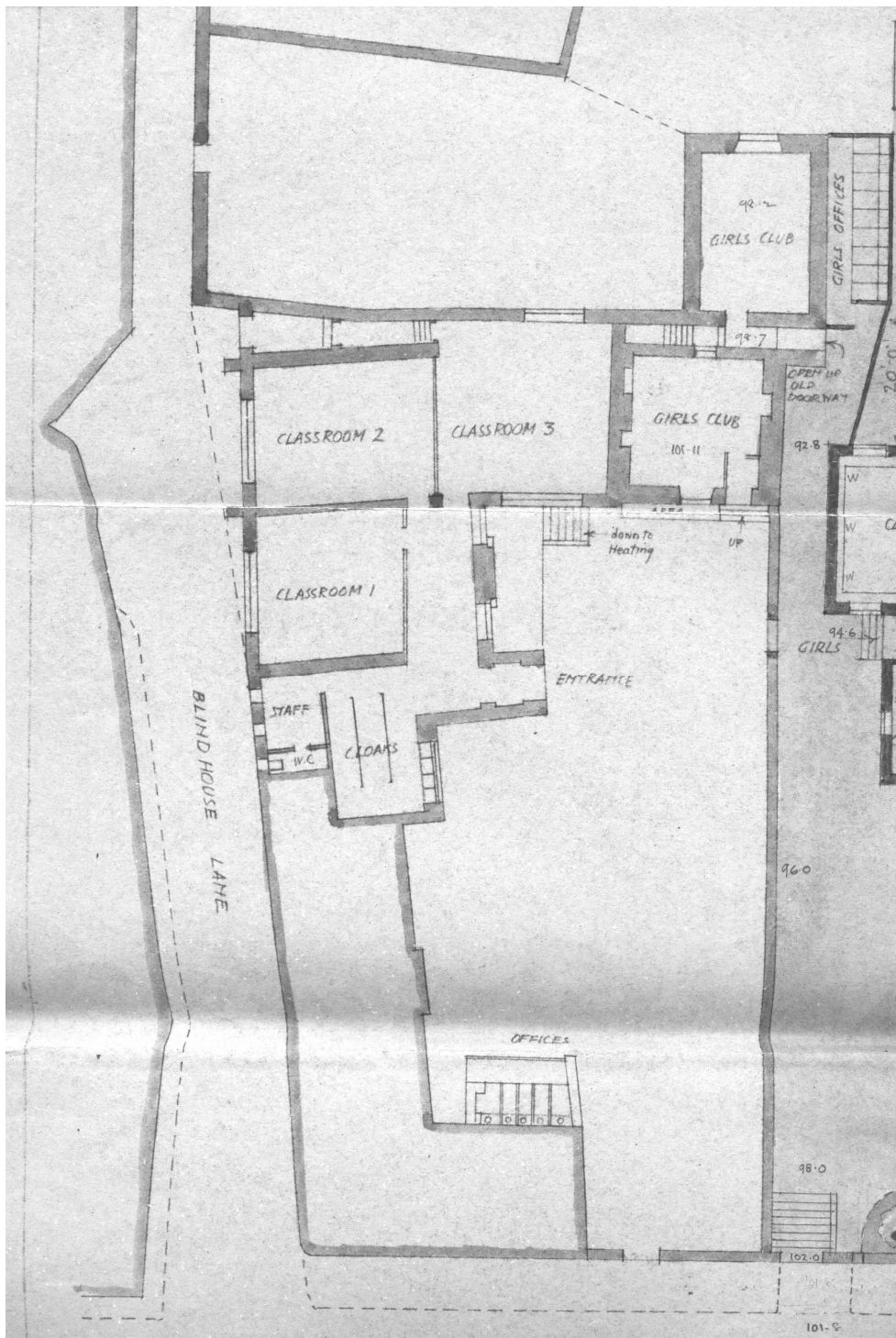
Pupils on the school site in 1906



St John's 4th Frome Guides, c. 1932. They are seen outside their room in a building on the site of the present St John's School hall, facing Christchurch Street East. Miss Ruth Polehampton, captain and District Commissioner, stands behind the left-hand cup. In the same row (from the left) are Kate Burns (flag bearer), Eunice Overend and Winnie Young, and, on the other side of Miss Polehampton, are Kathy King (wearing glasses) and Daphne Lapham. In the front row are Iris Walwin (second from left), Dorothy James, Katherine Wingrove and ? Sutton (second from right). In front of the unleaded window is ? Morgan.



Aerial view of the site dated 25 Feb 1925



Detail of use of rooms adjoining Blindhouse Lane.

NB: the steps marked 'down to Heating' indicate the presence of some form of boiler room below ground level in the area now occupied by a classroom to the West of the Main Hall.



Above: Image of inscription 'Soup Kitchen—Dispensary' that was on Blindhouse Lane side entrance to the outbuildings used as a Dispensary.

Below Left: End Gable facing Christchurch Street East of the Dispensary building

Below Right: Statue in gable end facing Blindhouse Lane of school building pre 1962: This statue survives in storage at St John's parish church





Aerial view of the school site from about 1930

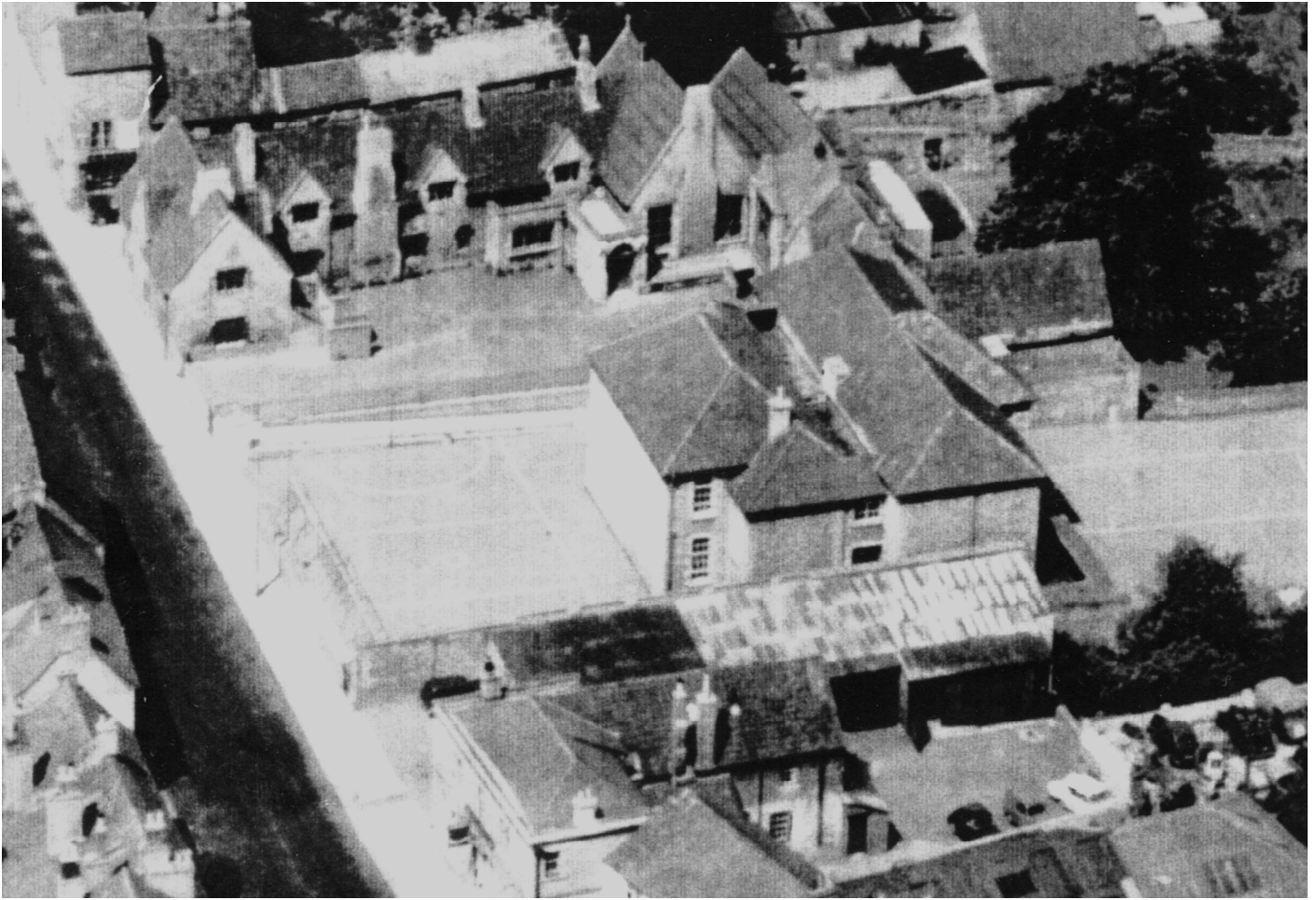


Photograph of the front of the school site buildings about 1890's.

By the 1920's the window of the left of centre gable had been changed



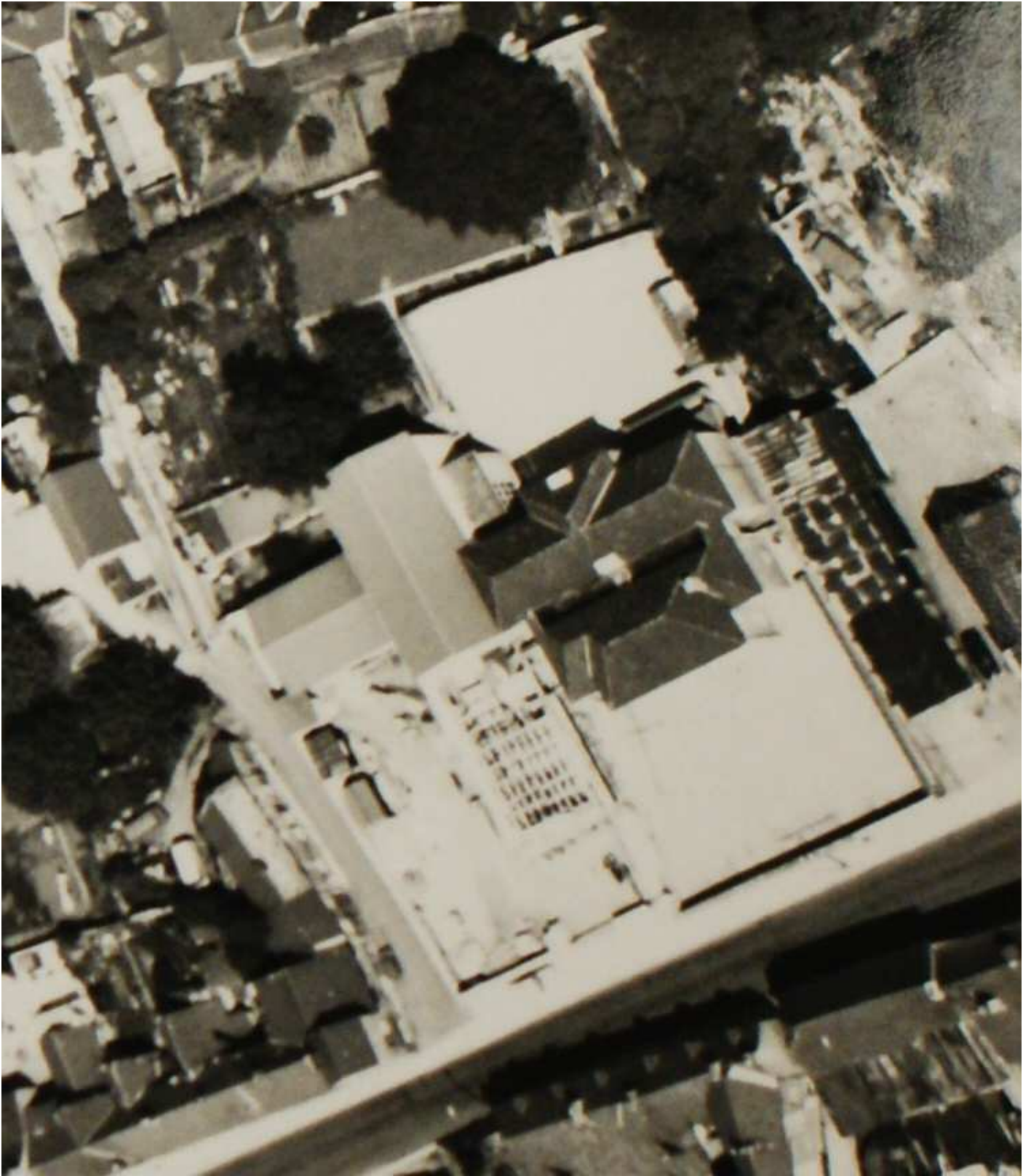
School site as on the District Record Map IR90-30-200 from the 1930's



Above: Aerial view of the site after the 1930's building was erected

Below: view from Christchurch Street East after 1932

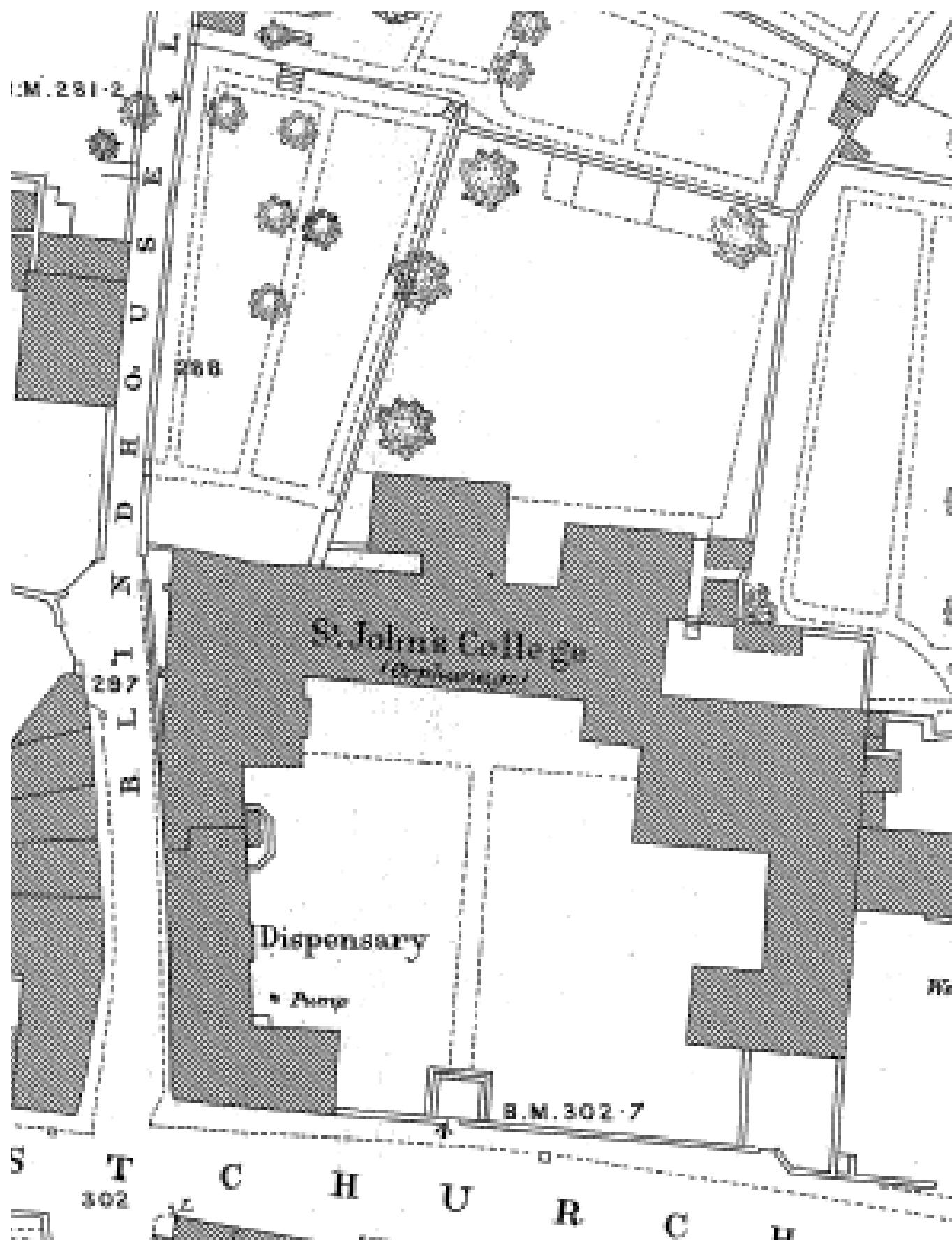




Aerial image of the site during the 1969 construction work on the school hall.



Aerial view of the present site showing outline location of buildings in the 1925 aerial view (outlined in black) and the former Tithe Barn (outlined in red).



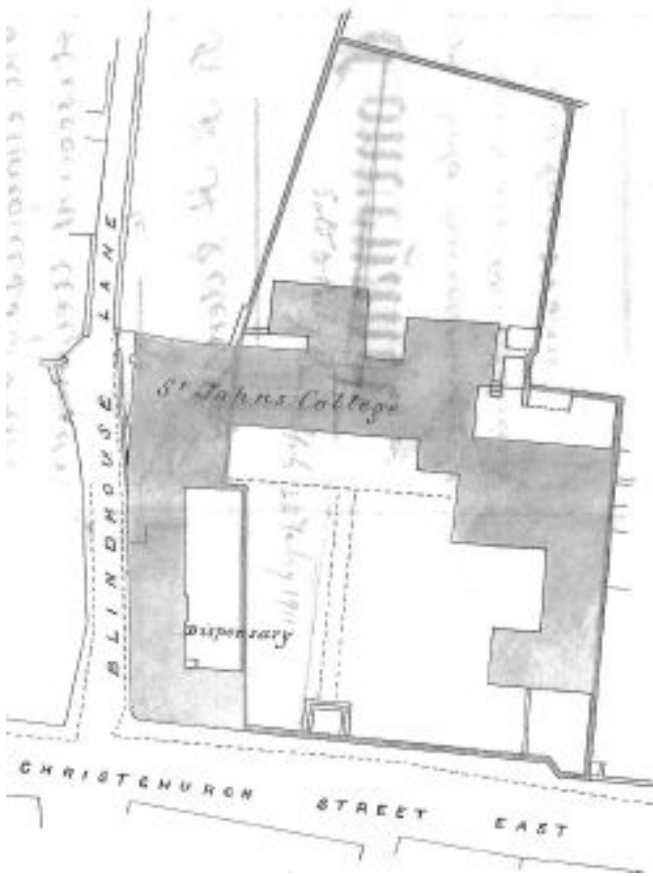
School site as delineated on the 1886 OS map of Frome—showing the Dispensary building erected in the area where the Tithe Barn had been and the use of the old Rectory farm buildings as St John's College.

The 1881 Census shows the use of the old Rectory Farm buildings as a College:

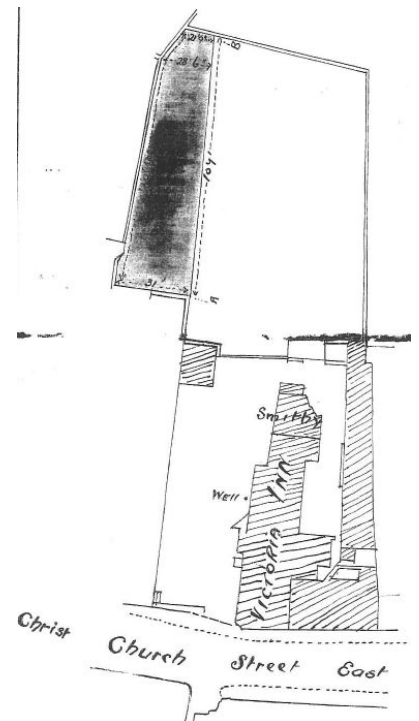
Institution: "The College" Christ Ch Street		Census Place: Frome, Somerset, England			
Source: FHL Film 1341578		PRO Ref RG11	Piece 2401	Folio 160	Page 28
		Marr	Age	Sex	Birthplace
Tom WILLIS	M	25	M	Gloucester, Gloucester, England	
Emma J. WILLIS	M	32	F	Frome, Somerset, England	
Keeper (Domestic)				Rel: Other	Occ: Tailor
Amy HOBBS	U	16	F	Gt Olin, Somerset, England	
maid (Domestic)				Rel: Serv	Occ: House-
Mary A. MARCHANT	U	15	F	Frome, Somerset, England	
Laundry Maid				Rel: Serv	Occ: Under
Alfred J. GIDDINGS	U	19	M	Ipswich, Suffolk, England	
Apprentice				Rel: Boarder	Occ: Printers
John C. ALDERTON		14	M	Brenford, Middlesex, England	
Clarence HORWOOD		13	M	Frome, Somerset, England	
Robert MORRISON		13	M	N K	
Occ: Scholar				Rel: Boarder	
Gilbert C. HORWOOD		13	M	Frome, Somerset, England	
George ALDERTON		12	M	London, Middlesex, England	
Scholar				Rel: Boarder	Occ:
Francis I. FROST		11	M	Brighton, Sussex, England	
Harry D. GERRISH		10	M	Trowbridge, Wiltshire, England	
Ernest A. EADISTON		10	M	Gt Malvern, Worcester, England	
James E.B. VERRALL		9	M	Frome, Somerset, England	
Edgar HORWOOD		12	M	Caerleon, Monmouth, England	
Alfred DAVIS		7	M	Ludlow, Hereford, England	
Henry W. NOBLE		7	M	Frome, Somerset, England	
Frank NOBLE		5	M	Frome, Somerset, England	
Alfred C.H. PALMER		6	M	Tally, Carmarthen, Wales	
Ernest F. PALMER		3	M	Darmstadt (Brit Subject)	
Scholar				Rel: Boarder	Occ:
Walter BRADFORD		5	M	Saltburn, York, England	
Scholar				Rel: Boarder	Occ:
Alice M. NOBLE		9	F	Frome, Somerset, England	
Mary A. TYRRELL	U	21	F	Oxford, Oxford, England	
Mistress				Rel: Boarder	Occ: School
Charles OPEN	M	36	M	South Brewham, Somerset, England	
ter				Rel: Servant	Occ: Carpen-
Dinah OPEN	M	40	F	North Brewham, Somerset, England	
Servant				Rel: Servant	Occ: General
Eva OPEN		3	F	Wyke Champflores, Somerset, England	
				Rel: Boarder	Occ: Scholar

By 1894 St Johns College was not functioning on the site and the larger part of the site was conveyed to the Frome and Warminster Steam Laundry.

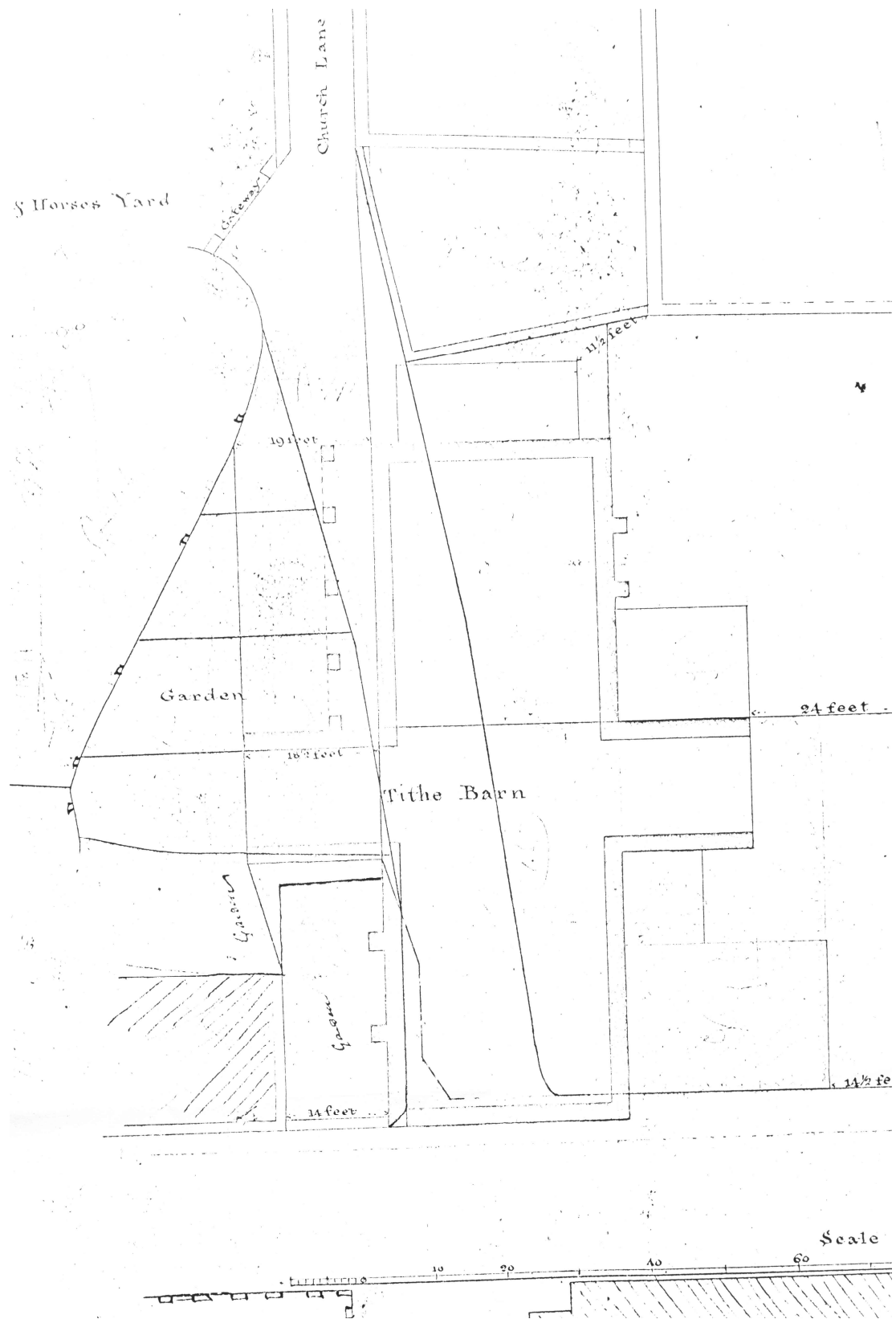
Only the buildings along Blindhouse Lane remained in parish use—being the subject of a 21 year lease in 1895 for use as a school and Dispensary.



well shown on adjacent property when it was owned by the Lamb Brewery



Behind Town was later known as Christ Church Street East

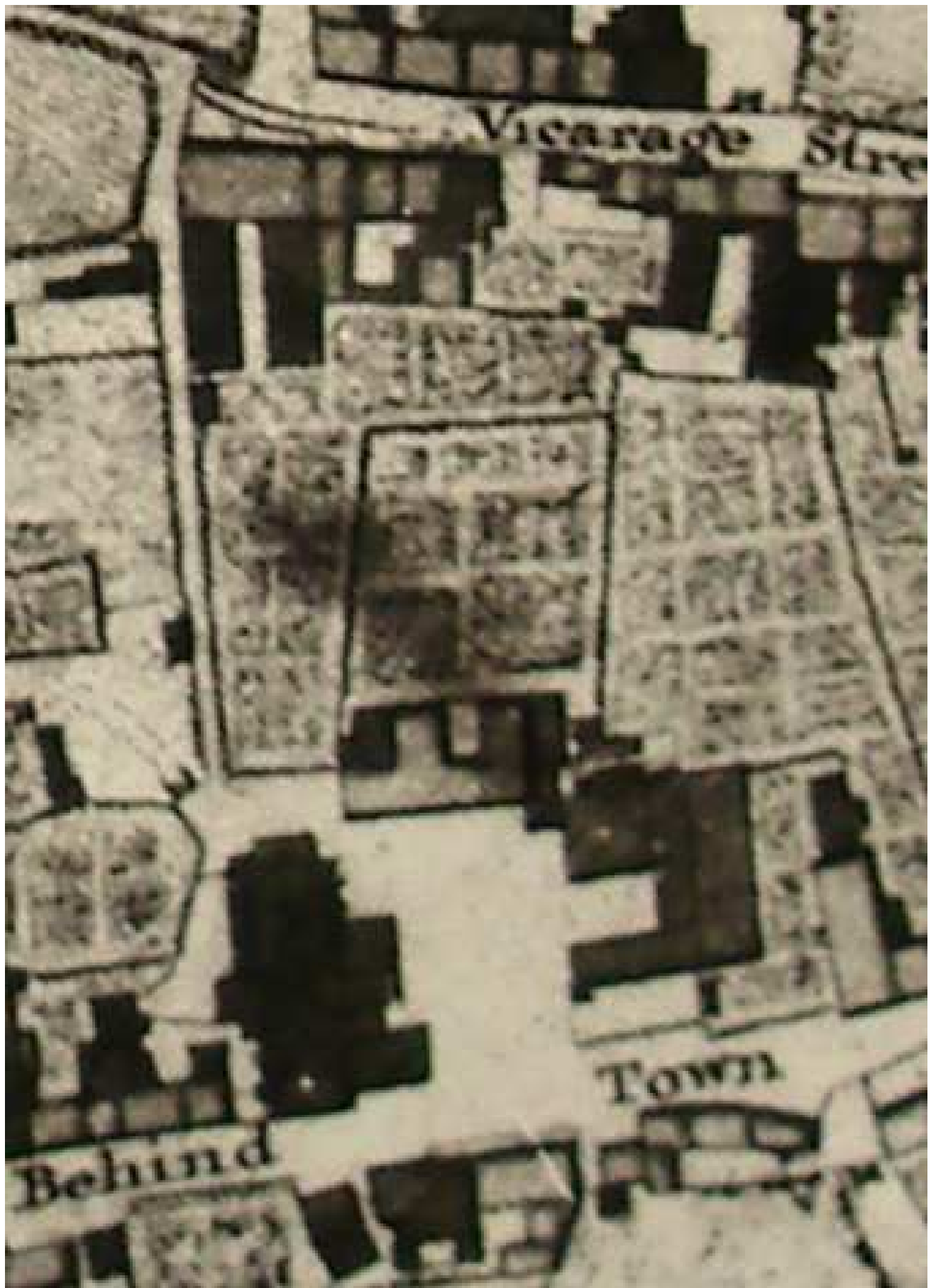


Detail from a conveyance plan showing the location of the old Tithe Barn.



School site as shown on the 1838 map of Frome by Dixon and Maitland

The 1846 to 1851 Parish Rates used the same numbering system as on this map and the owners and occupiers of the various plots were as below.



Map detail from ca 1800 showing the school site with the Tithe Barn in place. Coaches leaving the rear yard of the Waggon and Horses public house on Gentle street would have passed between the Tithe Barn and the old Rectory Farm building on the way to Warminster and then London.



The 1840's Tithe map of Frome shows no detail in this area as the lands were all part of the Rectorial lands owned by Long-leat.

The shape of the space between the Tithe barn and the old Rectory Farm buildings through which coaches from the Waggon and Horses would have left for Warminster and London is however clearly visible on this map.

This space was however not there by 1840 as the 1838 Dixon and Maitland map shows the Tithe Barn already removed.



The 1831 Dawson map of Frome area similarly shows the Tithe Barn in place— it was probably demolished soon after this map was drawn.



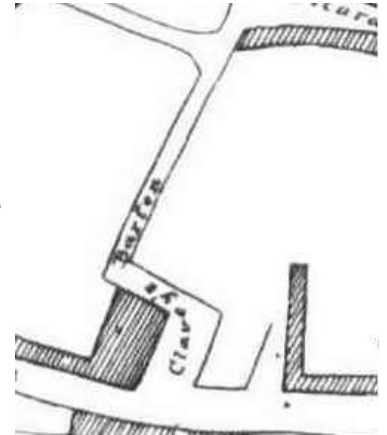
Detail from the 1813 Cruse map showing the Tithe Barn and Rectory farm buildings in place

Before the Blindhouse, or lockup, was relocated to the South West corner of the churchyard in the 1790's the land up the side of the school site was known as Church Lane and the area between the Tithe Barn and the old Rectory farm buildings as Clavey's Barton. Only after the removal of the Tithe barn and the building of the Dispensary building was the top section straightened in line with the lane coming up from by the church.



The 1815 map of Turnpike roads In the Frome area still clearly shows the Tithe Barn in place and the ancient Rectory Farm buildings.

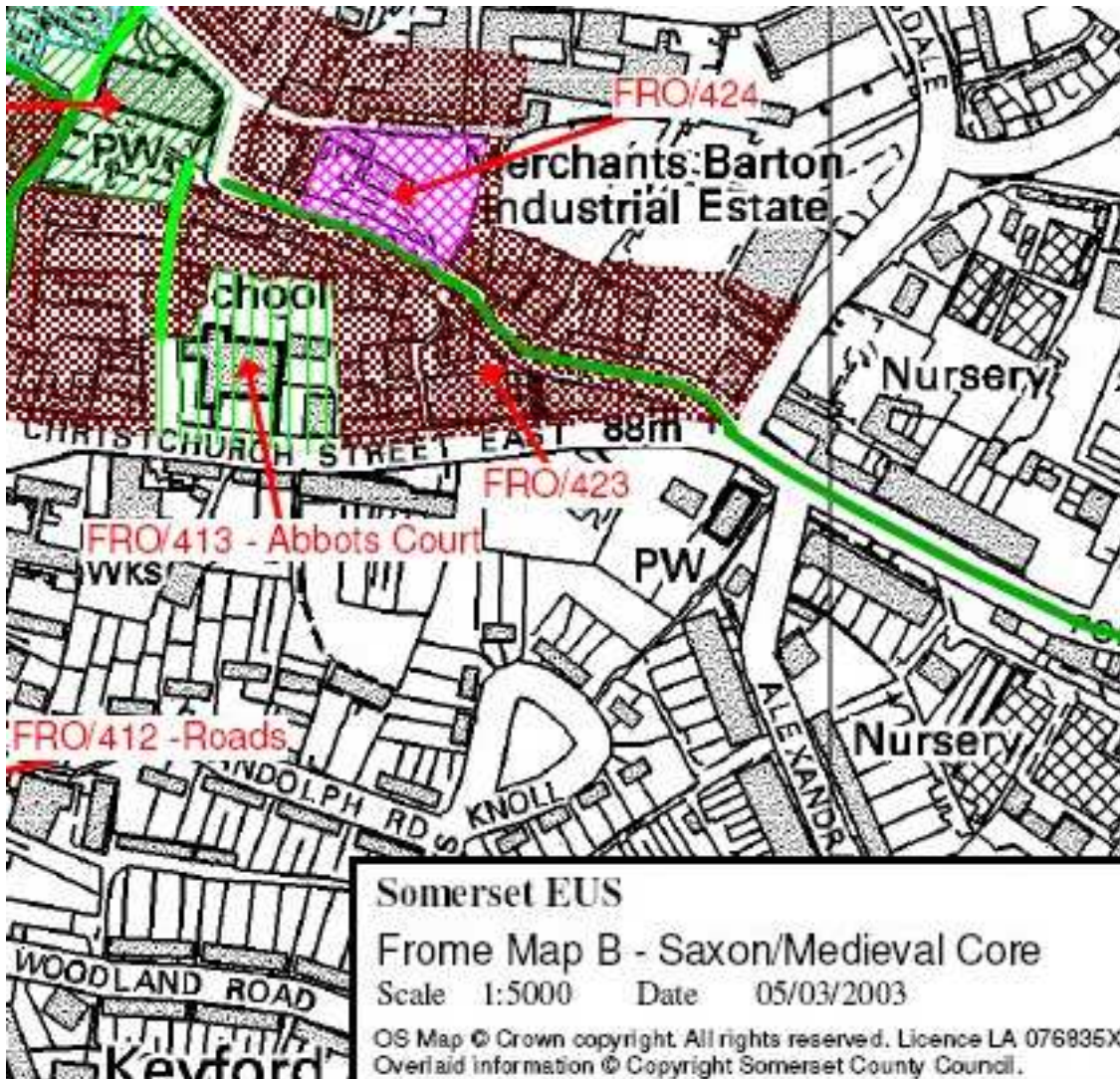
Undated old plan showing the route between the Tithe Barn and the old Rectory farm house as 'Clavey's Barton'



Map of Frome from between 1811 and 1817



Map of Frome from 1774



Somerset HER record showing 'Abbots Court' ref FRO/413 occupying most of the school site and dating from the Saxon/Medieval era.

It is important to note that the Somerset EUS makes no mention of the former Tithe Barn or its location.

FRO/413 Abbots' Court

In the medieval period, the Abbey had a barton up above the church. By the 13th century it was known as the Abbots' Court, perhaps because the manorial court was held there. However, documentary evidence shows that already by this time, parts of the complex had been let out to smallholders: the house itself may have been let, and another tenant had converted a hay-barn into a tenement. The house, known as the Rectory, was certainly let in the early 16th century, when it was described as the "scyte of the Manor or parsonage, one house, a barne, a stable, a dovehouse all covered with tyle, a garden, an orchard and a backside containing by estimation 2 acres, a close of pasture over against the ferme gate" (McGarvie, 1980).

According to the medieval documents, access from the barton to the town centre was up what is now Blindhouse Lane or, perhaps, via a passage through the garden of a property further along Vicarage Street. Number 27 Vicarage Street (SMR LB 26621) may be of late medieval origin (though not according to the List description), its archway possibly giving access to the barton (though since this property lay in the Vicarage manor, not the main Rectorial manor, this may not have been the case). The 1392 rental mentions a way to fetch water in the west corner of the court, which may refer to Blindhouse Lane; it also mentions the 'great gate' to the court, presumably the Behind Town (Christchurch Street East) access.