Former Bus Depot, Fishponds Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire

Historic Building Recording

Client: Hill Partnership Ltd

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Former Bus Depot, Fishponds Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire

Historic Building Survey

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology East was commissioned by Hill Partnership Ltd to undertake the historic building recording of a former bus depot on Fishponds Road, Hitchin. The work took place in July 2012 and was carried out in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Instone of Hertfordshire’s Historic Environment Unit. The survey was carried out to an equivalent of English Heritage Level 3.

The site comprises a former bus depot with associated single storey office/reception block which went out of use in 2009. Cartographic sources, in addition to the site survey dates the construction of the depot to the mid 20th century and the earliest evidence of the existence of the depot comes from the Hitchin Trade Directory of 1952. Cartographic evidence depicts the building in its current form by 1966.

The survey has revealed three main phases, all thought to have been been completed between 1952 and 1966. The major alterations to the original building comprise the addition of the single storey office/reception and a significant extension to the rear. Internally, there are a number of fixtures and fittings relating the building's history and use as a bus depot. These include testing equipment, sliding internal screens and layers of coloured paint on the walls that reflect the livery of the various bus companies which operated out of the depot throughout its history. Within the offices lockers and a large night safe are thought to be contemporary with the addition of the office/reception area.

There is a great deal of information available about, and interest in, the history of the buses and bus companies which operated from Hitchin and also surrounding the 1939 garage situated on Bridge Street; whilst there is little information about the depot in question, it is hoped that this survey has added to the record of Hitchin’s transport history in the mid 20th century.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and Scope of work

1.1.1 An historic building recording survey was conducted at the former bus depot on Fishponds Lane, Hitchin. The site is located in the centre of Hitchin, close to its historic core, centred at TL 18520 29719 (Figure 1). Planning permission has been granted for residential development of the site following the demolition of the bus depot; the historic building recording survey was undertaken as part of a programme of archaeological works required as a condition of planning permission.

1.1.2 The site is situated on the south side of Fishponds Road, opposite a row of late 19th century terraced houses. To the immediate west are the playing fields of Hitchin Boys Grammar School and to the east and south are modern residential apartments. The site appears to be relatively flat at around 67m OD, however there is a significant reduction of the ground level between the site and the opposite side of Fishponds Road.

1.1.3 The work was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Instone of Hertfordshire's Historic Environment Unit (Planning Application 10/02811/1), supplemented by a Written Scheme for Investigation prepared by OA East (Fletcher 2012).

1.1.4 The Brief required a survey equivalent to an English Heritage Level 3 was carried out. The specific aims were to ensure the following:

- an archaeological building recording of all areas of the above structures that will be demolished, altered or affected by the proposed development, in their current state, and also any additional recording/research necessary to place these findings in their context
- the provision of an adequately detailed project report.
- the dissemination and publication of the project results, as appropriate.

1.1.5 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with Hertfordshire's Archive and Local Studies Collection (HALS) in due course.

1.2 Acknowledgements

1.2.1 The author would like to thank Mike Beckett of Hill Partnership Ltd for commissioning the work and for supplying the architects drawings used in this report. The background research and site survey was carried out by the author, assisted by James Fairbairn who undertook all medium format camera work. Thanks also to Andy Instone from Hertfordshire's Historic Environment Unit wrote the brief for the works and visited the site.
2 Historical Background

2.1 Historical background

2.1.1 Little historical information was found about the bus depot itself during the background research for this report. Most of the analysis of the development of the site comes from physical and cartographic evidence.

2.1.2 The depot stands on Fishpond Road which adjoins land once called Fishpond Close and Great Fishpond Close. In one of these was a pond formed from the Capswell Brook, now a culvert, which rises in Butts Close and joins the River Hiz somewhere behind the Skynners Almshouses. The pond existed as an ornamental lake in the grounds of Woodside, Bancroft, (now the Hitchin Boys School) until 1929 (Douglas and Humphries 1995).

2.1.3 According to a website dedicated to the history of another Hitchin bus garage, the bus depot on Fishpools Road was built for Eastern National between 1937 and 1939 (http://www.ampyx.org.uk/lcountry/garages/garage_hn.html).

2.1.4 The depot stayed in the hands of Eastern National until 1952, which later became United Counties. There was further growth when it took over the collapsed Court Line business in 1973. Luton and District Transport was formed in 1986 from the Aylesbury, Luton and Hitchin depots of United Counties. Arriva’s operations in the south-east of England were grouped together in 2010 when units previously known as Arriva the Shires and Essex, and Arriva Southern Counties, were combined (http://www.arrivabus.co.uk/content.aspx?Id=13207).

2.1.5 The bus depot closed in 2009, since this time the evidence from signage on the site indicates it has been used as a car wash and a computer repair company, that occupied the front offices.

2.2 Cartographic evidence and development of the site

2.2.1 Due to the approximate known date of the structure, no maps earlier than the first Edition Ordnance Survey were consulted. The Ordnance Survey map collection in addition to other sources held at Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies (HALS) allows for a descriptive development of the site to be compiled.

First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1881, 25” to 1 mile (Figure 2)

2.2.2 The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, dated 1881, was the earliest map consulted for this project.

2.2.3 The layout of the proposed development area (Figure 1) can be easily identified and located based upon the position of a footpath located along the eastern side of the site that, although no longer in use, it is still present today.

2.2.4 At the time of this map, there is no evidence for the presence of the current bus depot building (which is clearly 20th century in date). However, there is an L-shaped building whose east-west range appears to be in the exact same position as the present building. There is also a north-south aligned building positioned along the western boundary which creates an open courtyard area facing southwards. Within the courtyard are what appear to be boundaries, most likely brick walls, which create sub-divided areas.

2.2.5 There are two further buildings to the immediate north which may be a pair of small cottages. Without any annotation it is difficult to establish either a function or date of
construction for these buildings. It is possible that this part of Hitchin was more rural during the late 19th century and that they served an agricultural purpose. This suggestion is supported by the absence of development on the opposite side of the road and by the fact that what is now Fishponds Road is merely a track.

**Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1898, 25” to 1 mile** (Figure 3)

2.2.6 By the time of the Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1898 (Figure 3), the site has altered very little, other than the addition of a small structure towards the front (north) of the site and the reduction in length of the north-south orientated building which flanks the western boundary. A “P” denotes the presence of a pump.

2.2.7 In the immediate vicinity of the site, Fishponds Road is now labelled and the parcel of land bounded to the south by Fishponds Road and to the north by Bunyan Road, has been given over to terraced houses.

**1923 Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 25” to 1 mile** (Figure 4)

2.2.8 By 1923 (Figure 4) the site appears to have altered very little and there is still no evidence of the depot building. The north-south range which sits against the western boundary has been extended southwards and the sub-dividing walls (?) at the rear of the L shaped building have been removed.

2.2.9 Buildings have also been constructed on the south side of Fishponds Road.

**Hitchin Trade Directories 1948-1968/69 (HALS Ref. HALS 914.258)**

2.2.10 The Trade Directories for Hitchin were viewed at Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies (HALS). There were only a few available, covering from 1948 up to 1968/9. The first entry relating to the bus depot building was in 1952 where the “Eastern National Garage” is listed on Fishponds Road. The 1956/7 directory lists the United Counties Garage, indicating a change of company within the previous 4 years.

2.2.11 United Counties Garage is listed again in the directories for 1959/60, 1965/6 and again in 1968/9.

**1956 Hitchin Town Guide (HALS Ref. 942.521.HIT)**

2.2.12 A number of Town Guides for Hitchin were consulted which contained maps and plans of the town. The earliest depiction of the bus depot comes from the 1956 Town Guide (not illustrated) where the site is labelled “Bus Garage”. The plan provided was at such a small scale, the building was only represented by a small rectangle. Although this provides little structural information about the site it demonstrates that it was important enough to show on a guide of the town.

Although there was only a small selection of guides available, those from 1948 and 1962 did not depict the site at all, the guide from 1969 did.

**1960 Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1:10 560** (Figure 5)

2.2.13 The next available map is the 1960 Edition 1:10 560 Ordnance Survey. Unfortunately, due to the scale of this map, there is insufficient detail to comment on the presence or absence of the bus depot building, however the evidence from the Hertfordshire Trade Directories indicates that Eastern Counties had a presence on this site by 1960.

**1966 Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1:2500** (Figure 6)

2.2.14 The 1966 Ordnance Survey Map (Figure 6) shows the bus depot building, labelled “Bus Depot” as it appears today, indicating that the present building was completed by this date. The line beneath the label running across the width is unlikely to denote anything
to do with the building itself as it can be seen continuing through the depot and garage buildings to the west.

2.2.15 At the front of the building “FW” denotes facing wall and BM shows there is an Ordnance Survey Bench Mark with a height value of 212.30 feet. There is an opening from the road, presumably a dropped kerb access for large vehicles.

2.2.16 This is the first map to show house and building numbers and although the depot is not numbered, the building to the immediate west is 13 and as the numbers are decreasing towards the junction with Bancroft, it can be assumed the depot was number 11.

2.2.17 The western boundary of the site has been straightened to form a continuous line and to the immediate west, on the other side of the footpath /access is a building marked “Depot” - this is likely to be the banana warehouse as noted from the trade directories, later to be replaced by flats now called Fyffes Court.

2.2.18 To the rear of the site is a north-south range of buildings which appear to be associated with the Dairy fronting onto Bancroft Road. It is possible that if this dairy was present in the late 19th century, the buildings which previously stood on the site of the bus depot were also associated with it.

Arriva Safety Poster with images of bus depot in use prior to closure (Figure 7)

2.2.19 A safety poster found in the staff room shows images of the depot when still in use (Figure 7). Thought to date from the final years of the depot, it comprises digital images of the interior and exterior of the building and shows some fixtures which were no longer present by the time of the survey; these include a diesel pump (?) on the forecourt and security railings inside and outside of the building.
3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE SURVEY

3.1 Aims
3.1.1 The aim of this investigation was to carry out a historic building survey to English Heritage Level 3 (English Heritage 2006).
3.1.2 This survey focuses on the former bus depot and adjoining office building. There are no other associated buildings on or close to the site (Figure 1).

3.2 Site Conditions
3.2.1 Conditions within the buildings were generally good, allowing measured and photographic survey to take place. All of the rooms and principal areas were empty and unrestricted access was possible. Roof structures were visible and accessible, however due to the height of the building, close inspection was not possible.
3.2.2 External photographs of full elevations were compromised by access restrictions. These are fully explained in Section 4.
3.2.3 Weather conditions were good with only occasional light drizzle.

3.3 Methodology
3.3.1 The measured survey was carried out using basic equipment including: a Leica distometer, tower tape, 30m tapes, hand tapes and scale ruler.
3.3.2 Photographic survey was carried out using a 35mm camera (monochrome and colour slide) with additional digital photographs using a high resolution Canon EOS 450D digital camera. As requested in the Brief, a Medium Format camera was also used to take external and internal photographs. Extra lighting was not necessary.
3.3.3 All building recording work carried out complied with standards and guidance set out in by the IFA (2001) and was undertaken by an experienced archaeologist. The client supplied scaled architect's drawings, these were used for field notes and were annotated and amended on site as necessary. A measured floor plan was drawn at a scale of 1:50.
4 DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

The surveyed buildings are part of the former bus depot fronting onto Fishponds Road. They comprise two principal elements; a large rectangular shaped building with vehicular access from the front and a two storey internal staff workshop/welfare accommodation block at the rear and, attached on the north-east side, a single storey office/reception block, which is triangular in plan (Figure 1). The buildings are entirely of brick construction, the main depot has an asbestos covered, steel framed roof and the single storey office block has a number of raised skylights.

To aid the description of the building, the main depot area is referred to as such and the ground floor and first floor rooms have been labelled G1, G2 etc. Elevation drawings provided by the client's architect and amended during the survey are presented in Figure 8 and a floor plan is presented in Figure 10 which shows the room locations as well as the position of plates referenced included at the back of this report.

4.1 External Description

North-facing elevation (Figure 8)

4.1.1 The north-facing elevation fronts onto Fishponds Road and comprises the principal vehicular entrance and access to the reception area and offices (Plate 1). There is a large tarmac and concrete forecourt area to the front. At the time of the survey a number of cars from a nearby car sales garage were parked in this area; most however were kindly moved to allow for elevation photographs.

4.1.2 The office/reception area is on the far left and presumably formed the most recent formal entrance to the bus depot for visitors and staff (Plate 2). This part of the building is constructed using a “zig zag” patterned, textured brick with an average dimension of 22cm by 10cm by 7cm laid in a Flemish bond with a gritty mortar containing crushed flint inclusions (Plate 3). It has a flat roof, the covering of which was not inspected due to health and safety restrictions.

4.1.3 The office element has four, white painted, metal-framed casement windows with the upper top light hinged and outward opening, all with blue painted sills and lintel above. To the right of these is a larger window constructed from the same material. Immediately to the right of this larger window is the main entrance which has a large single pane window and door affording access to the front office/reception area. The brickwork surrounding the office window and door is a lighter pink colour with a grittier mortar. Although the brick type and dimensions are the same, this is clearly a later addition to the building.

4.1.4 Set back from the office/reception is the principal elevation of the bus depot building. This is constructed from the same brick, with the same bond and dimensions, as those used for the office/reception to the left. Close inspection of the brickwork between the single storey office and the main building indicates the offices were a later addition, although continuity of materials has been maintained by using the same brick type (Plate 4).

4.1.5 The north-facing elevation is dominated by large folding doors which comprise the vehicular access to the building (Plate 5). The opening is given additional structural support by a central post, either side of which are two sets of folding doors that can be fully opened to allow buses to drive directly in. Although it was not possible to open up the doors for the purpose of the survey, the image at the top of Figure 7 does show them fully opened. The doors are painted in the blue livery of Arriva, the most recent
bus company operating from the depot. Constructed from wood, each folding panel has
three glass panels in the upper third to allow light into the building. The panels are
paired by pivoting hinges which allow the doors to be folded back. The maker's name
on the hinges is Esavian (Plate 6).

4.1.6 Esavian primarily produce doors for aircraft hangars and have been in production for
more than a century (www.jewersdoors.co.uk). With a factory in Stevenage, the
company also supplies doors, folding screens, partitions and windows to showrooms,
factories and warehouses. An undated advert for Esavian shows how London Transport
utilised similar doors to those at Hitchin at their New Cross bus garage (Figure 9)

4.1.7 A small, black painted metal door is set into the folding door on the extreme left of the
elevation, which allows access to the garage when the main doors are closed (Plate 7).

*East-facing elevation* (Figure 8)

4.1.8 It was not possible to fully photograph the east-facing elevation as it is too long to
capture and the full view is obscured by buildings to the immediate east. It is accessed
via the alleyway on this side of the building which was gated at the time of the survey,
but access from the rear can also be gained from Bancroft. The elevation of the
building supplied by the client (Figure 8) provides a scaled representation of this side of
the building and also depicts the roof structure, which could not be seen from ground
level. There are four main phases represented on this elevation. These are described
from the front towards the rear in the following sections.

4.1.9 Towards the Fishpond Road end of the building is the east-facing wall of the single
storey office/reception (Plate 8). The bricks are a continuation of those recorded on the
north-facing elevation and there are two slate damp courses, one approximately 0.60m
from ground level, the other below the upper seven courses of brick. There is also a
relatively tall brick chimney which appears from the brickwork around it to be either a
later addition or to have undergone a level of repair/rebuild. This part of the building
continues southwards where it meets the main bus depot building. There is a small,
elongated, wooden framed casement window.

4.1.10 Set back from the single storey office is the east-facing element of the earlier main
depot entrance, constructed in the same brick and bond as the north-facing elevation,
there are no additional details on this side (Plate 8).

4.1.11 An extension measuring 25.60m in length has been added towards the rear of the site.
This is marked by a change in brickwork (Plates 8 and 9). Here, construction is in an
English bond with pink and orange coloured bricks that have an average dimension of
22cm by 10cm by 7cm. There are two slate damp courses at the top and bottom and
the upper six courses appear to have been raised or re-pointed. It is likely that this is
contemporary with the front of the building but constructed in a less expensive brick.

4.1.12 The last element of this elevation is another extension of the main depot which extends
for a further 21.38m (Plate 10). This is constructed in the same brick and bond as the
previous section, the only difference is that the brick is a slightly lighter colour. The
damp course continues from the previous section and there is a dark red painted steel
door with concrete lintel and step. This element of the building also has a tall brick built
chimney/outlet and the upper courses indicate the level has been raised or a parapet
added.
**South-facing elevation** (Figure 8)

4.1.13 The south-facing elevation is accessed via a fire escape at the rear of the building which opens into a small area no wider than 1m, making photography of this elevation impossible. The positions of the windows were added using the client's architect's drawings (Figure 8).

4.1.14 This elevation comprises a single phase which appears to be a contemporary continuation of the last phase of the east-facing side, with the same bricks and bond. On the left side of this elevation are two large, elongated windows which would have allowed light to enter the depot's main garage area prior to the construction of the modern flats at the rear; close inspection was restricted and these are best described from the inside. There are a number of casement windows at first floor level which correspond to the staff rooms recorded in Section 4.2.10. At ground floor level is a heavy, metal fire escape door which provides the only access from the building to this side.

**West-facing elevation**

4.1.15 The northern-most part of the west-facing elevation is recessed and comprises the single storey office / reception building (Plate 11, not surveyed / presented in the clients architects drawing Figure 8). This part of the building has three contemporary steel framed casement windows with blue painted sills. At the end closest to the depot main entrance is a plain door, also painted in the blue Arriva livery with a plain fanlight above. The brickwork on this elevation indicates later additions including the lighter coloured brickwork extension on the left, which corresponds to the office / reception entrance on the north-facing elevation. The same brick has been used to in-fill two earlier doors on this elevation, evidence of which can be seen below the two southern-most windows.

4.1.16 It was not possible to access the rest of the west-facing elevation as it was within the grounds of the adjoining school playing field. The client's architect's drawings indicate that this mirrors the east-facing elevation, including a tall, brick-built chimney. Internally there are no doors or windows, which is entirely consistent with the architect's drawings.

4.2 **Internal Description**

The building was empty at the time of the survey, however it had recently been occupied by staff working at the car wash which previously operated from the site. As a result, there was a lot of "occupation rubbish" as well as other rubbish which had been left when the bus company departed. It was not practical to move all of this material for the purposes of the photographs.

**Main Bus Depot**

4.2.1 The principal depot building is accessed via the north-facing folding back screen doors or the small metal hatch door positioned within it as noted on the north-facing elevation (Section 4.1.3). The area inside measured approximately 48m in length by 27m wide and comprised an open plan area with sub-dividing screen and internal offices/staff facilities at the rear (Figure 10).

4.2.2 The floor is concrete with a number of iron drain covers inset and narrow grooves, which presumably aid drainage (Plate 12). There are yellow lines painted on the left side which are likely to denote the position of pedestrian walkways and a recent photograph on Figure 7 show these lines were in addition to yellow handrails. The
concrete has been removed in several areas to facilitate the excavation of boreholes for soil testing investigations.

4.2.3 The roof comprises five steel framed bays covered with asbestos sheets and elongated skylights. The three northernmost bays differ from the two at the rear, indicating a separate phase of construction. The three bays at the front appear to have longer skylights, some of which open manually. This part of the roof structure is supported by centrally positioned steel-framed pillars, three on each side, located within brick columns and comprised of two long steel joists secured with cross-braces and iron rivets (Plates 13 and 14). The southernmost two bays are supported by plain rolled steel joists and have mechanically opening skylights (Plate 15). Figure 14 provides cross sections of the building which represents the five roof bays discussed.

4.2.4 There is an internal sliding door whose position corresponds with the change in roof structures (Plate 12). Although the screen was not fully opened at the time of the survey, the second image in Figure 7 shows the screen pulled across. It is manoeuvred along steel-framed grooves in the floor (Plate 16).

4.2.5 Behind the screens in the rear part of the depot are a number of original fixtures and fittings relating to the use of the building a servicing/mechanical repair area for buses. Immediately to the rear of the screen is a sunken feature with rolling steel bars set within an iron frame with central supporting rods (Plate 17). This is a chassis Dynamometer, also known as a “rolling road” which measures the torque and power of a vehicle when the wheels are placed over the rolling bars and “driven” in this stationary position.

4.2.6 Positioned against the wall, next to the rolling road, is a metal cupboard. It too had metal slides set in the concrete floor, leading from the cupboard towards the rolling road (Plate 17). Although the cupboard was empty, it was likely to contain equipment which was heavy enough to require assisted manoeuvrings and safe and secure storage.

4.2.7 Within the concrete floor are two parallel inspection pits (Plate 18). Although filled with rubbish and water at the time of the survey, these are necessary to allow mechanics safe access to inspect the underside of the vehicles.

4.2.8 On the eastern wall at the rear of the building is a breeze-block built, internal structure (Plate 19). The top of it is accessed via a flight of external steel steps leading to a walkway with handrails. It is possible to walk through the block structure via doors at either end however, there are no internal spaces for storage or windows and it is assumed that this structure was built to provide a raised inspection/viewing area for buses and vehicles during testing, cleaning or servicing.

4.2.9 At the far end of the building are two internal floors of rooms (Plate 20). At ground floor level there are three rooms; at the time of the survey they were filled mostly with rubbish bags and furniture. These rooms would have provided storage and also an office area for record keeping etc. relating to the garage works.

4.2.10 The first floor level is accessed via a set a stairs immediately behind the ground floor rooms (Plate 21). The stairway is partly tiled and partly painted, however the walls and stairs appear to have been damaged by a water leak. The first floor corridor area (Plate 22), is also partially tiled and has painted walls in poor condition. It has a wooden framed internal window which provides a view into the depot. The corridor also provides access to three rooms (F1-F3). On the immediate left is a room which appears to have provided a staff rest / refreshment area (Plate 23). This room has a carpeted floor and is mostly tiled, particularly at one end where fixtures indicate it had a sink and oven. Accessed via a door at the end of the corridor, on the left is a male toilet and shower.
facility. This room contained the remnants of a small shower, two cubicles and a urinal and was fully tiled. The final room at the end of the corridor is a ladies toilet, fully tiled with sink and partitioned off toilet cubicle. The only fixture/fitting of any interest is a wall mounted “Hygienette” waste dressings incinerator which was manufactured in the UK between 1960-1970 (Plate 24). There is also a raised skylight.

**Ground Floor Offices / Reception** (Figure 10)

Accessed via an internal door from the main depot (Plate 25), as well as exterior doors on the north and west-facing elevations, this part of the site comprises the office/reception areas of the building.

**G1**

4.2.11 This room is roughly triangular in plan and is accessed from the main depot building (Figure 10). The floor is covered with carpet and the walls are all plastered and painted cream and white. In the northern corner of the room is a small cupboard, inside of which there is exposed white painted brick and shelves (Plate 26). A small step up leads into G2.

**G2**

4.2.12 This room is accessed via internal doors from G1 and G3 and an external door as noted on the west-facing elevation. It is trapezoidal in plan and measures 6.22m by 3.76m (at its widest points). There is a hard terrazzo granite effect floor with a black and white chequered design (Plate 27). The walls are painted plaster using the Arriva livery of turquoise blue and white and the western and northern walls are tiled. On the western wall is a partially boarded up casement window as described on the west-facing elevation (Section 4.1.15).

4.2.13 A number of fixtures were recorded in this room that are considered to be contemporary with its use as a bus depot. These include a unit of staff lockers positioned within a recess in the wall (Plate 28). The range comprises 24 individually numbered staff locker units, also painted in the Arriva livery. However, closer inspection revealed they had been previously painted red.

4.2.14 Although perhaps not original, there is a free standing De La Rue ticket/banknote/cash sorting machine (?) which possibly dates from the 1970s or 1980s (Plate 28).

4.2.15 To the right of the De La Rue machine is a small hatch which links through into G3. It secures with metal inter-locking doors and is also painted in turquoise blue with a pale blue tiled panel below (Plate 28). To the right of the communication hatch is a small window, also linking through to G3 with a steel painted drawer beneath, presumably a night safe (Plate 28).

4.2.16 The range of equipment within this room would suggest it was used by the drivers who, when returning from their shift or journeys, could deposit the takings/float from their day or pass them through the hatch to the office staff in the room on the other side and collect their belongings from the lockers.

4.2.17 Within the ceiling is a raised skylight with aluminium / steel frame with hinged opening panels on opposite sides (Plate 29).

**G3**

4.2.18 This room is accessed via internal doors from G2, G4, G6 and G9. The room is trapezoidal in plan measuring 8.21m by 3.58m at its widest points. The floor is carpeted and the walls plastered with painted wood-chip wallpaper. On entering from G2, there is
a plasterboard screen on the right (Plate 30) and two casement windows as recorded on the west-facing elevation (Section 4.1.15). In the ceiling is a raised skylight as recorded in G2.

4.2.19 On the partitioning wall between G2 and G3 is the rear of the night safe, the windowed hatch and the De La Rue machine (Plate 31). The night safe hatch recorded in G2 appears to deposit directly into the safe within this room. The safe is painted turquoise blue with silver coloured handle and fittings and a makers name plate of John Tann (Plate 32). Two keyholes suggest two key-holders need to be present to access this safe. As it appears to be built into a brick surround it is most likely to be contemporary with the construction of this part of the depot building.

4.2.20 The area providing access to G9 is constructed of a part panelled, part wooden screen which may also be an original feature of the building (Plate 33).

G4

4.2.21 This room is accessed via an internal door from G3 and was most recently in use as a kitchen (Plate 34). It measures 3.75m by 1.72m and has a small number of kitchen cupboard units – none of which are considered to be more than 20 years old. The floor has the same terrazzo covering as recorded in G2 and the walls are all covered with a cream coloured tiles. The ceiling has a raised skylight and there is a door which provides access into G5.

G5

4.2.22 This area comprises a toilet and sink area. It is entered via an internal door from G4 and measures approximately 2.0m by 1.61m with a plasterboard partition screen concealing a separate toilet cubicle (Plate 35). All walls are covered with cream coloured tiles and the floor with terrazzo. There are two identical casement windows as recorded on the left of the north-facing elevation (Section 4.1.3, Figure 8).

4.2.23 There is a cream coloured “Sadia” electric wall mounted water boiler which may date to the 1960s/70s and a ceramic sink below.

G6

4.2.24 This room is accessed via an internal door from G3 and G9 and had been recently occupied as a living area (Plate 36). It measures 3.53m by 3.03m and has carpeted walls and papered walls.

4.2.25 There is a boarded up window which corresponds to the wide double casement window as recorded on the north facing elevation and access to G7/G8 via an internal doorway.

G7

4.2.26 This area is accessed via an internal door from G6 and measures 1.17m by 1.62m. The walls are covered with cream coloured tiles and there is a “Sadia” electric wall mounted water boiler as noted in G5 with a ceramic sink below (Plate 37). The floor has the same terrazzo covering as G2 and G5 and a casement window as noted in G5 and the north-facing elevation. A modern, grey painted door provides access to G8.

G8

4.2.27 This room is accessed via an internal door from G7 and measures 1.62m by 0.90m. At the time of the survey, it had most recently been used as a shower facility. The walls are covered with cream coloured tiles and the floor has the terrazzo covering with a later inserted drainage hole presumably added when converted into a shower. There is
a casement window on the external wall as noted in G5, G7 and the north-facing elevation.

G9

4.2.28 This room is accessed via an internal door from G3 and an external door from the north-facing side of the building. It measures 3.56m by 3.88m and was most recently used as a reception area for a computer repair company based in this part of the building (Plate 38).

4.2.29 On entering the room, the walls are to the left and right are covered with vertically laid wooden panels and painted white. The rest of the exposed walls are plastered and painted white. The floor has the same terrazzo floor covering used in the other rooms in this part of the building and the ceiling has perforated chipboard tiles. There is a blue painted door providing access from the front elevation and a wooden MDF reception counter which is considered to be a very recent installation.

4.2.30 The wall opposite the front entrance contains the door which accessed from G3. The wooden door has two mirrored panels which match the glass screen to the left (Plate 39).

5 Phasing

It has not been possible to ascribe absolute dates to any of the four principal phases of the building as it is believed, with the aid of cartographic sources and directories, that they were all completed between the years 1948-1960.

It is possible however to identify the development of the building in three distinct phases: these are described below. Figure 10 shows the suggested phases.

5.1 Phase 1

5.1.1 The earliest phase of building comprises the construction of the main entrance, the surviving element of which extends back 26m. The brick used for the façade, street-frontage is a dark coloured, textured, patterned brick, however at the rear of the building, designed not to be seen, a less expensive lighter pink coloured brick has been used. Internally, the office fixtures and the depot walls were painted in the Eastern National red and cream livery.

5.1.2 The bus depot, or garage as it is referred to, is known to be present from the Hitchin Trade Directories by 1952 where it is listed as “Eastern National Bus Garage”

5.1.3 Interestingly, during the background research, a website suggests that “Eastern National built their own garage in Fishponds Road between 1937 and 1939” (http://www.ampyx.org.uk/country/garages/garage_hn.htm). However this is the only reference to a pre-1952 date. With no reliable cartographic sources between 1926 and 1966 no further speculation can be made regarding an earlier construction date.

5.2 Phase 2

5.2.1 The single storey office block was added and this is accessed from the depot as well as via external doors (now blocked). Providing administration offices for Eastern National staff with toilet and kitchen facilities as well as a secure locker and cash deposit area for drivers. Constructed using the same brick as the rest of the façade, this addition blends in entirely. It follows the boundary of the footpath located on the eastern side.
5.2.2 It is unclear if the depot was used as a pick up/set down point for passengers at this time or if tickets could be purchased from here directly. If not the new facilities were entirely for staff use.

5.3 **Phase 3**

5.3.1 The next phase of construction sees the addition of the depot building to the rear in its present position. Using a similar light pink brick at the rear where it would not be seen, this extension allows for more servicing and repairs with the inclusion of a rolling road, and inspection pits. The change in brickwork on the east-facing elevation denotes the position of the extension, which corresponds with the change in roof covering, adding two bays to the existing three, and also the location of the internal sliding screen.

5.3.2 Although a precise date is difficult to ascribe to this addition, it may have been carried out when the depot changed into the hands of a new bus company.

5.3.3 Ground and first floor rooms were included during this development at the rear of the building allowing for better facilities for the depot staff. With an office and storage area and the first floor canteen, shower and toilets, drivers and mechanics would have benefited and perhaps segregated from the office staff and customers at the front of the building.

5.3.4 Perhaps during this phase the front reception area was added, blocking up the entrance doors on the west-facing elevation and providing a formal entrance fronting onto, and more visible from, Fishponds Road. The client's architect's drawings show above this door “Information and Reception”. This suggestion is further supported by the additional rooms for staff at the back of the depot.

6 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

6.1.1 The survey has revealed three main phases, all thought to have been been completed between 1952 and 1966. The major alterations to the original building comprise the addition of the single storey office/reception and a significant extension to the rear. Internally, there are a number of fixtures and fittings relating to the building's history and use as a bus depot, including testing equipment and sliding internal screens and layers of coloured paint on the walls that reflect the livery of the various bus companies which operated out of the depot throughout its history. Within the offices, lockers and a large night safe are thought to be contemporary with the addition of the office/reception area.

6.1.2 There is a great deal of information available about, and interest in, the history of the buses and bus companies which operated from Hitchin and also surrounding the c.1930 garage situated on Bridge Street (HER 15225). However, there is little information about the depot on Fishponds Road. It is likely that buildings such as this are being lost from the modern townscape through demolition as the demand on land for residential development is high. Although lacking in significant architectural features, it is important to make a record of such buildings which represent a period of development and growth in the town and its infrastructure and communication links. Hopefully this survey has added to the record of Hitchin’s transport history in the mid 20th century.
APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Journals

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Fletcher, T. 2012 Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation for Historic Building Recording: Former Bus Depot, Fishponds Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire

Gillingham, J.C. 1963 London County Bus Garages in Buses Illustrated

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IFA 2001 Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings

Instone, A. 2012 Design Brief for Archaeological Building Recording : Former Bus Depot, Fishponds Road, Hitchin

Websites Consulted

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Maps and other Sources Consulted

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APPENDIX B. OASIS REPORT FORM
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**Type of Project/Techniques Used**

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- [x] Annotated Sketch
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- [ ] Dendrochronological Survey
- [x] Photographic Survey
- [ ] Laser Scanning
- [ ] Rectified Photography
- [ ] Measured Survey
- [x] Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure

**Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods**

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state “none”.

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### Digital Media

- Database
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- Aerial Photos
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- Correspondence
- Diary
- Drawing
- Manuscript
- Map
- Matrices
- Microfilm
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### APPENDIX C. HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET

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Oxford Archaeology East was commissioned by Hill Partnership Ltd to undertake the historic building recording of a former bus depot on Fishponds Road, Hitchin. The work took place in July 2012 and was carried out in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Instone of Hertfordshire's Historic Environment Unit. The survey was carried out to an equivalent of English Heritage Level 3. The site comprises a former bus depot with associated single storey office/reception block which went out of use in 2009. Cartographic sources, in addition to the site survey dates the construction of the depot to the mid 20th century and the earliest evidence of the existence of the depot comes from the Hitchin Trade Directory of 1952. Cartographic evidence depicts the building in its current form by 1966. The survey has revealed three main phases, all thought to have been been completed between 1952 and 1966. The major alterations to the original building comprise the addition of the single storey office/reception and a significant extension to the rear. Internally, there are a number of fixtures and fittings relating the building's history and use as a bus depot. These include testing equipment, sliding internal screens and layers of coloured paint on the walls that reflect the livery of the various bus companies which operated out of the depot throughout its history. Within the offices lockers and a large night safe are thought to be contemporary with the addition of the office/reception area. There is a great deal of information available about, and interest in, the history of the buses and bus companies which operated from Hitchin and also surrounding the 1939 garage situated on Bridge Street; whilst there is little information about the depot in question, it is hoped that this survey has added to the record of Hitchin's transport history in the mid 20th century.

**Author of summary:** Taleyna Fletcher  
**Date of summary:** 24th July 2012
Figure 1: Site location
Figure 2: First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1881, 25" to 1 mile, showing location of current bus depot building (red)
Figure 3: Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1898, 25' to 1 mile, showing location of current bus depot building (red)
Figure 4: 1923 Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 25" to 1 mile, showing location of current bus depot building (red)
Figure 5: 1960 Ordnance Survey Map, 1:10560, showing location of current bus depot building (red)
Figure 6: 1966 Ordnance Survey Map, 1:2500, showing location of current bus depot building (red)
Figure 7: Arriva Safety Poster with images of bus depot in use prior to closure
Figure 8: Building elevations (from data supplied by client)

North Elevation

East Elevation

South Elevation

West Elevation
Figure 9: Advertisement for “Esavian Doors” (from Huddersfield Passenger Transport Group)
Figure 10: Ground floor plan of bus depot with phasing, showing position of plates used in report (from data supplied by client)
Cross section through length of bus depot

Cross-section through width of bus depot

Figure 11: Cross-sections through bus depot (from data supplied by the client)
Plate 1: Former bus depot, viewed from Fishponds Road

Plate 2: Office / Reception
Plate 3: Detail of textured brick

Plate 4: Join of brickwork on depot and office / reception
Plate 5: Vehicular entrance of former bus depot, viewed from Fishponds Road

Plate 6: Detail of “Esavian” hinges
Plate 7: Small access door

Plate 8: Part of the east-facing elevation showing changes in brickwork
Plate 9: Part of the east-facing elevation showing changes in brickwork

Plate 10: Part of the east-facing elevation showing changes in brickwork
Plate 11: Northernmost part of west-facing elevation

Plate 12: Interior of depot, looking southwards
Plate 13: Northern part of depot showing steel roof supports

Plate 14: Detail of roof support structure
Plate 15: Southern part of depot showing steel roof supports

Plate 16: Sliding internal partition
Plate 17: “Rolling Road” and secure cupboard

Plate 18: Inspection pits
Plate 19: Internal breeze-block structure

Plate 20: Internal workshops, stores and staff welfare rooms
Plate 21: Stairs leading to first floor

Plate 22: First floor corridor
Plate 23: Staff rest-room / canteen

Plate 24: “Hygienette” incinerator
Plate 27: Terrazzo floor, G2

Plate 28: Lockers, hatch, cash-counter / ticket machine and night-safe, G2
Plate 29: Raised skylight, G2

Plate 30: Internal sub-division. G3
Plate 31: General room view, G3

Plate 32: John Tann safe
Plate 33: Wooden screen and door leading from G3 into G9

Plate 34: General room view, G4
Plate 35: General room view, G5

Plate 36: General room view, G6
Plate 37: General room view, G7 / G8

Plate 38: General room view, G9
Plate 39: General room view, G9