

RESEARCH INTO "TOORAK HOUSE", ST. GEORGE'S ROAD.

"Toorak House" in St. George's Road is associated with the early political and social history of colonial Victoria. It was the scene of some of the most extravagant parties held in early Melbourne - from those staged by colonial Governors during the 1850s and 1860s, to splendid evenings arranged by George Lansell, the Bendigo mining magnate during the 1870s and later, those of that indefatigable Melbourne hostess, Mrs. Archibald Johnson, during the 1880s and 1890s.⁽¹⁾

This historic mansion was built between 1849 and 1850 by a Melbourne merchant named James Jackson, a partner in Jackson, Rae & Co.⁽²⁾ It is unique for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was the first suburban house of a substantial nature built in Melbourne in the period before the discovery of gold.⁽³⁾ It was also Victoria's first Government House between 1854 and 1874.⁽⁴⁾ The high cost of its conversion from a private to governmental residence between 1853-54 was the cause of widespread criticism in Parliament and press.⁽⁵⁾ It is now in the possession of the Swedish Church.

(1) E. Blumrich and A. Thwaites; Toorak House; History Essay; Architect. School; University of Melb. 1968, p.11.

(2) Ibid:

(3) Ibid:

(4) See Documents U and X:

(5) See below:

There have been only seven owners of "Toorak" since its erection in 1850:

- 1850-53 James Jackson, Merchant.
- 1854-74 Victorian Government.
- 1875-79 George Lansell, Bendigo mining magnate.
- 1880-99 Archibald Johnson.
- 1900-10 Mrs. G. Bage, doctor's wife.
- 1911-56 William, then Allan, Spowers.
- 1957-74 Swedish Church. (6)

The Jackson residence, 1850 to 1853.

Between 1845 and 1848 James Jackson acquired the 148-acre Toorak Estate, comprising portions 16 and 17 granted in the first Prahran land sales of October 1840 to Sylvester John Brown and James D. L. Campbell. (7) The site he chose for his mansion was portion 17, of 78 acres, "some 500 yards from the muddy track of Gardiner's Creek Road." (8)

A stylistic analysis of the original 1850 design and a comparison with later alterations and additions is given in the Blumrich and Thwaites study with detailed indexed references to its bluestone, brickwork, walls, roof, windows, tower, chimneys and so on. These writers express surprise concerning the mystery surrounding its designing architect. For, they argue,

"If he (Jackson) was fostering talent, it seems strange that his architect did not go on to other works and thus become more easy to trace." (9)

(6) See Documents K to R.

(7) Blumrich and Thwaites, p.2. See Documents A and E.

(8) Ibid, p.2. This is now Toorak Road.

(9) Ibid, p.35.

Jackson never lived in "Toorak House", for he died at sea on 2 Feb. 1851 on a voyage to England.⁽¹⁰⁾ On his death, his property passed to his sons, who leased it to Charles Williamson. He, in turn, surrendered his lease in 1853 to the Victorian Government,⁽¹¹⁾ who was looking for a suitable residence for the next Governor after La Trobe's resignation.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE. (12)

The amount of money spent in Government contracts to transform "Toorak House" into a residence splendid enough for future Governors was, as we have seen, the subject of criticism and it was described as, "one of the most monstrous bills that was ever presented and paid in the world."⁽¹³⁾ More than £40,000 was spent, which included many large individual items such as £10,000 for the lease, £29,000 for alterations and additions, £4,000 for furniture, £2,000 for barracks for guards and orderlies, £2,235 for a coach house and stables.⁽¹⁴⁾

The grounds were not neglected. There were contracts for 2,640 yards of carriage way, 1,410 square yards of paving and 6,013 yards of fencing either erected or repaired.⁽¹⁵⁾

(10) Ibid, p.2

(11) See Document A.

(12) See Documents U and X.

(13) Quoted in Blumrich and Thwaites, p.47.

(14) W. H. Newnham, Melbourne - The Biography of a City,
Melb. 1956. p.97.

(15) Blumrich and Thwaites, p.6.

There was also a new dairy and larder, a new verandah, the existing offices were repaired or new ones built, and painting, papering and graining was carried out throughout.⁽¹⁶⁾

During the Government's occupancy bills for repairs and alterations to "Toorak House" continued to soar. Public Works Department contract lists show that in 1863 c£486 was spent on repairs to furniture and ⁽¹⁷⁾ £795 was spent the following year on a temporary ballroom.⁽¹⁸⁾ This was during Sir Charles Darling's term of office. However, in 1867, when Sir John H. Manners-Sutton was Governor, more than £4,700 was spent on his residence, which included £940 for a new billiard room, ⁽¹⁹⁾ £590 for new entrance gates,⁽²⁰⁾ £860 for carpeting, matting, curtains, blinds etc.⁽²¹⁾ and £803 for sundry works.⁽²²⁾

The Governors who made their home at "Toorak House" were:

Sir Charles Hotham	1854-55
Sir Henry Barkly	1856-63
Sir Charles Darling	1863-66
Sir J. H. Manners-Sutton	1866-73
Sir George Bowen	1873-75.

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- (16) Ibid, pp. 6-8. See Documents M, N, O for ground floor, first floor, basement and roof plans. See Documents V, W, Z for work carried out in 1853.
- (17) P.W.D. Summary of Contracts, 1858-1878, p.83. Contract 63/288.
- (18) Ibid, Contract 64/254.
- (19) Ibid, Contract 67/126.
- (20) Ibid, Contract 67/130.
- (21) Ibid, Contract 67/162.
- (22) Ibid, Contract 67/163.

Sir George's successor, the Marquess of Normanby, was the first Governor to occupy the new Government House in the Domain.⁽²³⁾

Very little of these colonial extensions, built during the government's lease, now remain. According to Blumrich and Thwaites, "Today only the new coachhouse, the renovated stables and part of the new range of two-storey offices remain of the extensive outbuildings."⁽²⁴⁾

The Lansell Subdivision.

The lease of "Toorak House" and its 148-acre estate was held by the Government until 1874, although ownership passed from the Jackson estate in 1872 to Edward Klingender for £23,000.⁽²⁵⁾ In August 1874 "Toorak" was bought by George Lansell, Bendigo mining magnate, for £100,000.⁽²⁶⁾

Lansell subdivided the estate in 1875 into allotments varying from $\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 acres, with frontages onto either Lansell or St. George's Road.⁽²⁷⁾

(23) Blumrich and Thwaites, p.90.

(24) Ibid, p.6. See Documents P,Q,R.

(25) See Document B.

(26) Ibid.

(27) See Document F.

The Johnson Subdivision.

The house and its reduced estate of 43 acres, 3 roods and 32 perches was bought in 1880 by Archibald Johnson in the name of his wife.⁽²⁸⁾ Ten years later the rate book records an annual valuation of her 40-acre estate as £5,000.⁽²⁹⁾

For the next twenty years, "Toorak House" was "the hub of Toorak and the centre of extravagant living."⁽³⁰⁾ To make her home more splendid still, Mrs. Johnson added an upper balcony to the north and west decorated with beautiful cast iron work and a balustraded parapet was added to the top of the tower.⁽³¹⁾

With Mrs. Johnson's death, the estate was once again subdivided and sold to 20 new proprietors.⁽³²⁾

The Bage Estate, 1900-1911.

Mrs. Gertrude Eleanor Bage, wife of a Toorak Doctor, bought "Toorak House" and lots, totalling 10 acres and 9 perches in Nov. 1900.⁽³³⁾ A further subdivision was made in 1904.⁽³⁴⁾ As for the mansion,

(28) See Document C.

(29) Blumrich and Thwaites, p.10.

(30) Ibid.

(31) See Documents P, Q, R, and Y.

(32) See Documents C, D, G.

(33) See Document D.

(34) See Document H.

"Almost all of Governor Hotham's new outbuildings, barracks and lodges had disappeared, leaving only "The Lodge" on Toorak Road and the stable-coachhouse on St. George's Road as a reminder."⁽³⁵⁾

The Spowers Estate, 1911-57

The Toorak Estate was further diminished by its next owners, William Spowers, who purchased "Toorak House" and 2 acres, 2 roods and 28 perches of land,⁽³⁶⁾ and his son, Allan, who sold 2 blocks on St. George's Road⁽³⁷⁾ before "Toorak House" came into the possession of the Swedish Church in June 1957.⁽³⁸⁾

Swedish Church Estate.

A description of some of the changes carried out during the Swedish Church occupancy⁽³⁹⁾ is given by Blumrich and Thwaites.

"The office of John Scarborough transformed the dining and morning rooms into a chapel, and rearranged the remaining ground floor interior for the Seamen's Mission. The Pastor's residence is on the first floor, and the east wing is used as a library and reading room. The stables became the Swedish Consulate, and the coachhouse a sauna below and a residence above."⁽⁴⁰⁾

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- (35) Blumrich and Thwaites, p.12.
(36) See Document D.
(37) Ibid and Document 1.
(38) See Documents D and J.
(39) See Document S.
(40) Blumrich and Thwaites, p.12.

SOURCES:

Blumrich, E and A. Thwaites. Toorak House, History Essay,
Architecture School, Uni. of Melb. 1968.

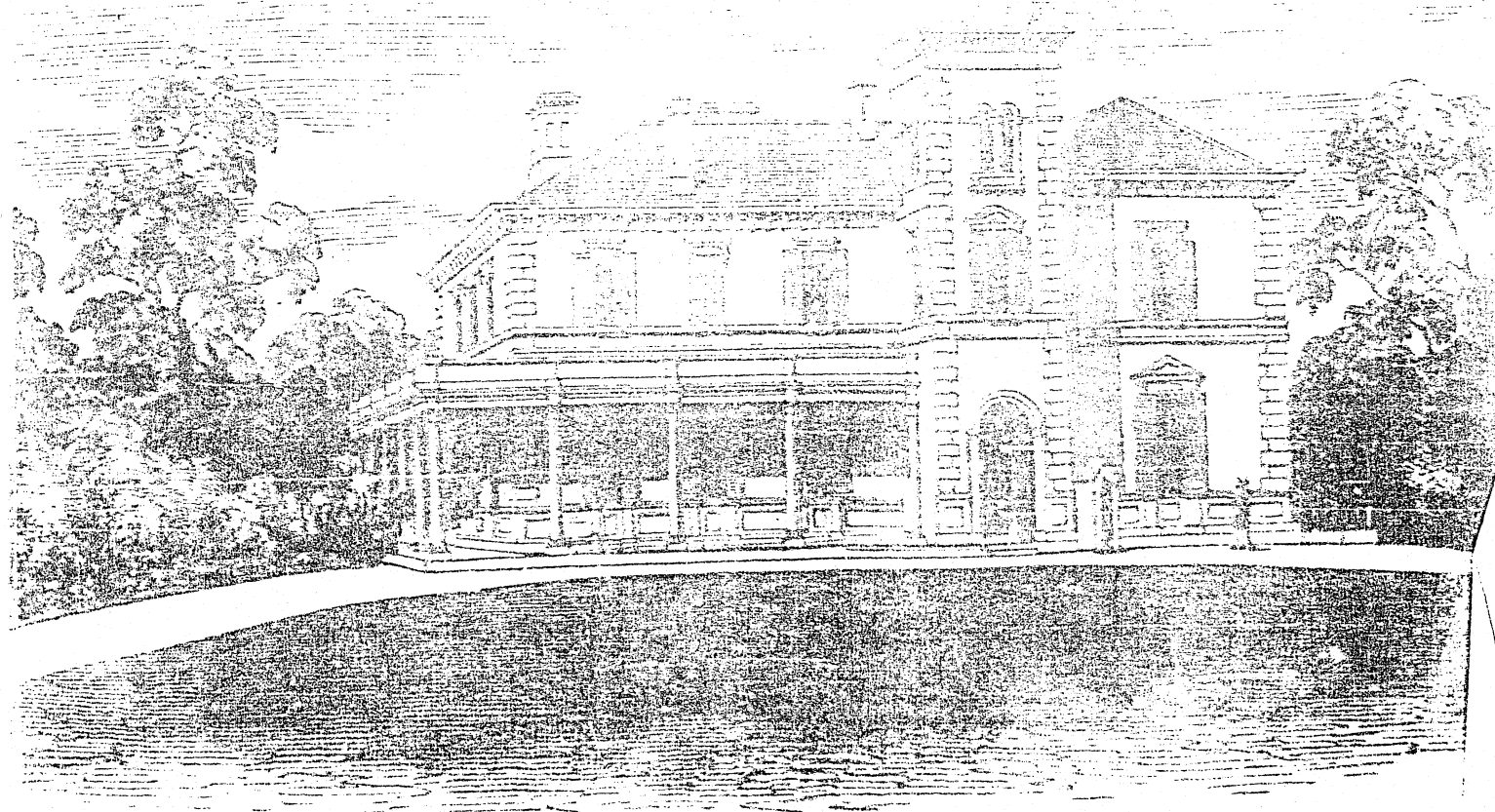
Newnham, W. H. Melbourne - The Biography of a City.
Melbourne 1956.

Public Works Department. Summary of Contracts, 1858-1878,
and other documents.

C. Kellaway

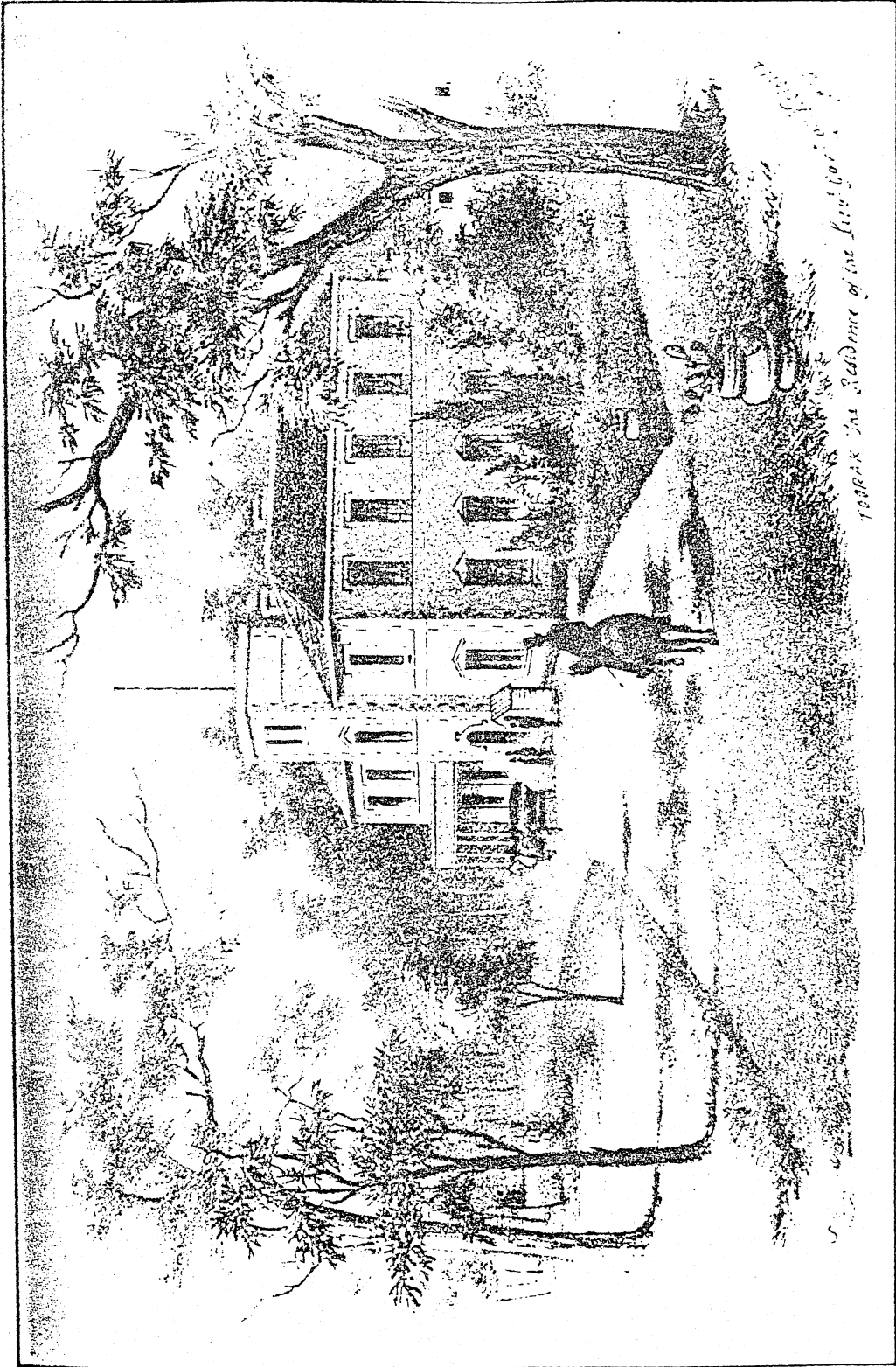
21/1/75.

The first of the
 chambers built
 in 1850 was
 destroyed by fire
 in 1855. The
 present building
 was erected in
 1856, and is
 a fine specimen
 of the architecture
 of the period.
 It is situated
 in the heart of
 the city, and
 is one of the
 most important
 buildings in
 the colony. The
 building is
 a two-story
 structure, and
 is built of
 brick. It has
 a central tower
 with a clock
 face, and a
 portico on the
 front. The
 building is
 surrounded by
 trees, and is
 a very fine
 specimen of
 the architecture
 of the period.
 It is one of
 the most
 important
 buildings in
 the colony.



THORNS, THE RESIDENCE OF HIS EXCELLENCY AIR HENRY PARKER. — SEE PAGE 2

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GOVERNMENT HOUSE (TOORAK HOUSE)
First occupied by Sir Charles Hotham, 1854

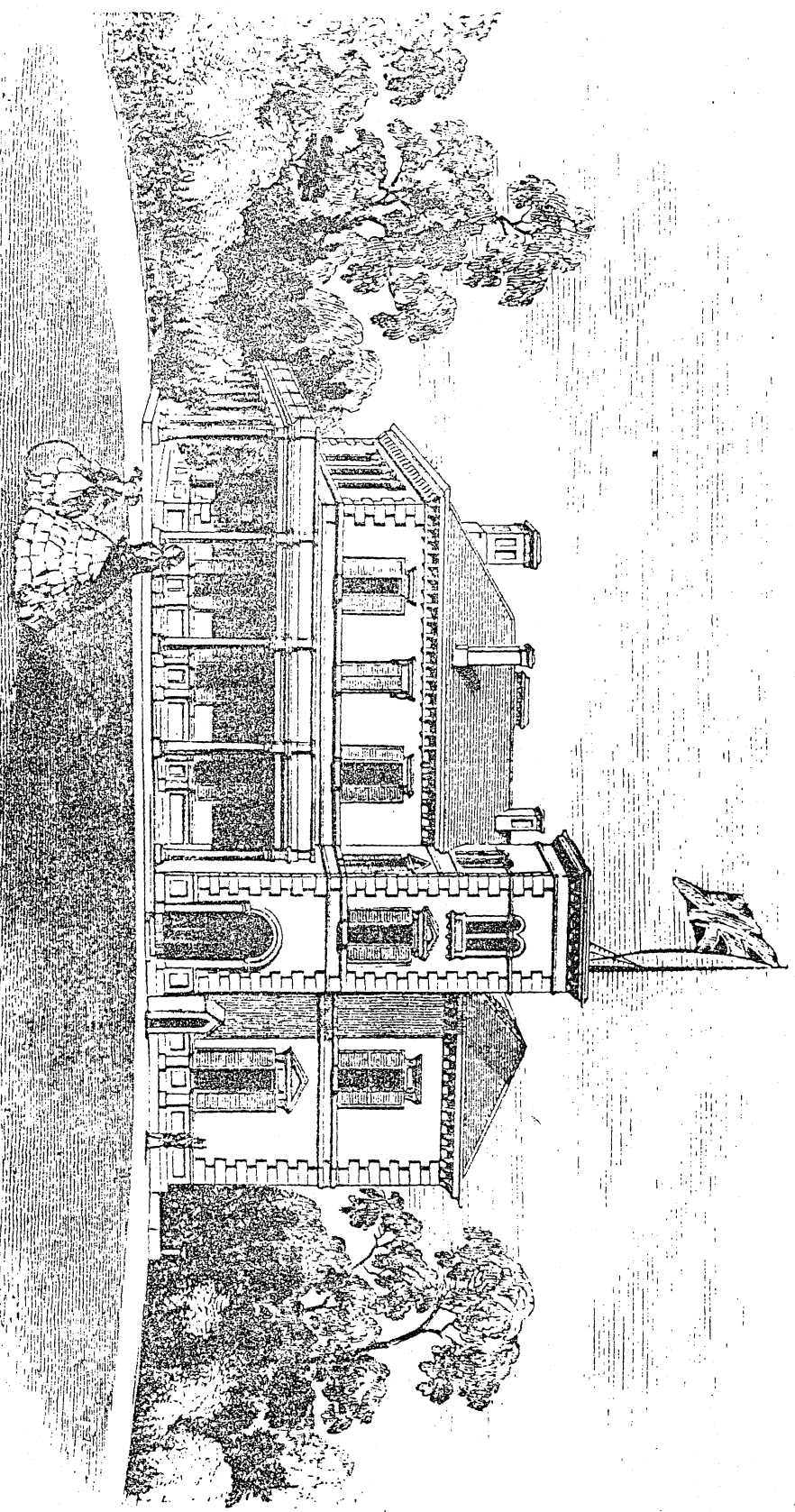
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Fig. 2: Toorak House, 1854.
Watercolour by S. T. Gill.
Original in possession of the National Gallery.

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TOORAK (THE GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE).



(X)

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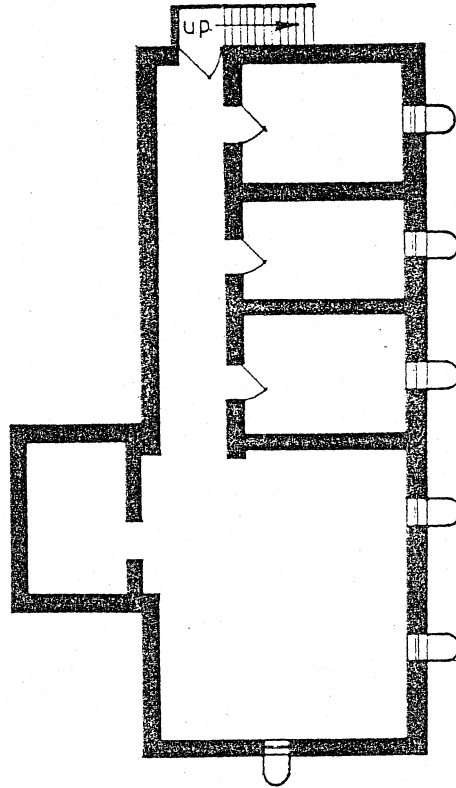
Fig. 7: View from west, 1858. From "The Illustrated Journal of Australasia", 1858.

Town of Home

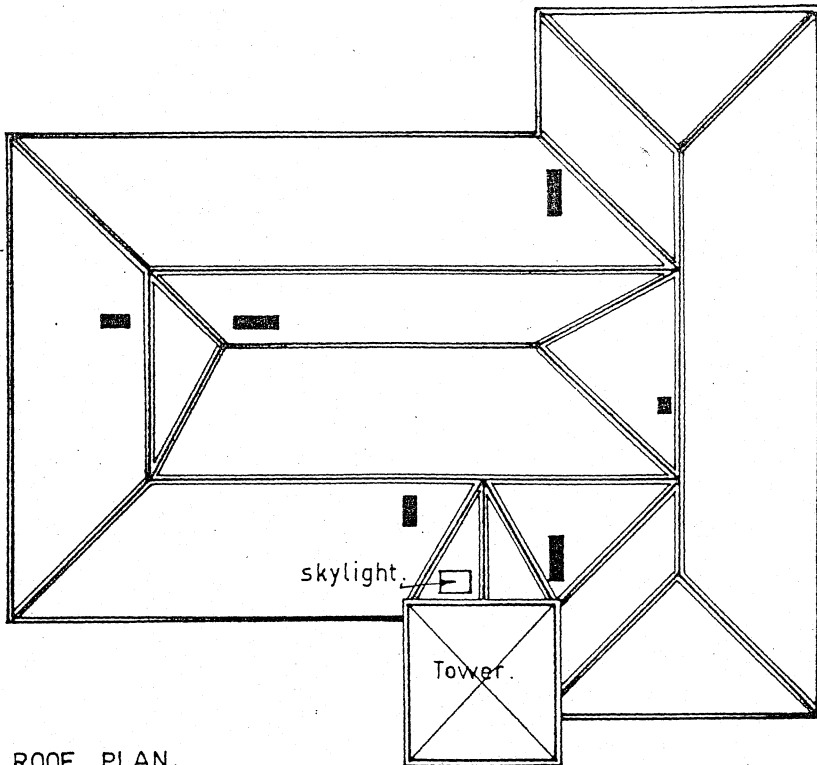
Estelle Blewrich & Lem Thwaites

History Essay 1968

Architectural School Library (K)



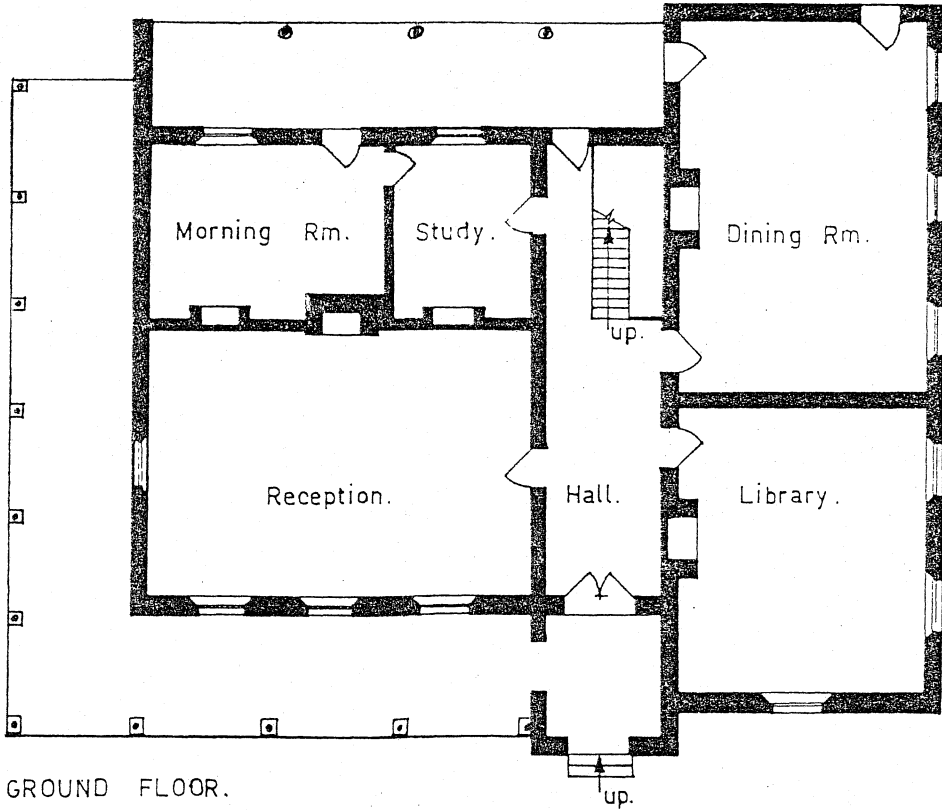
BASEMENT.



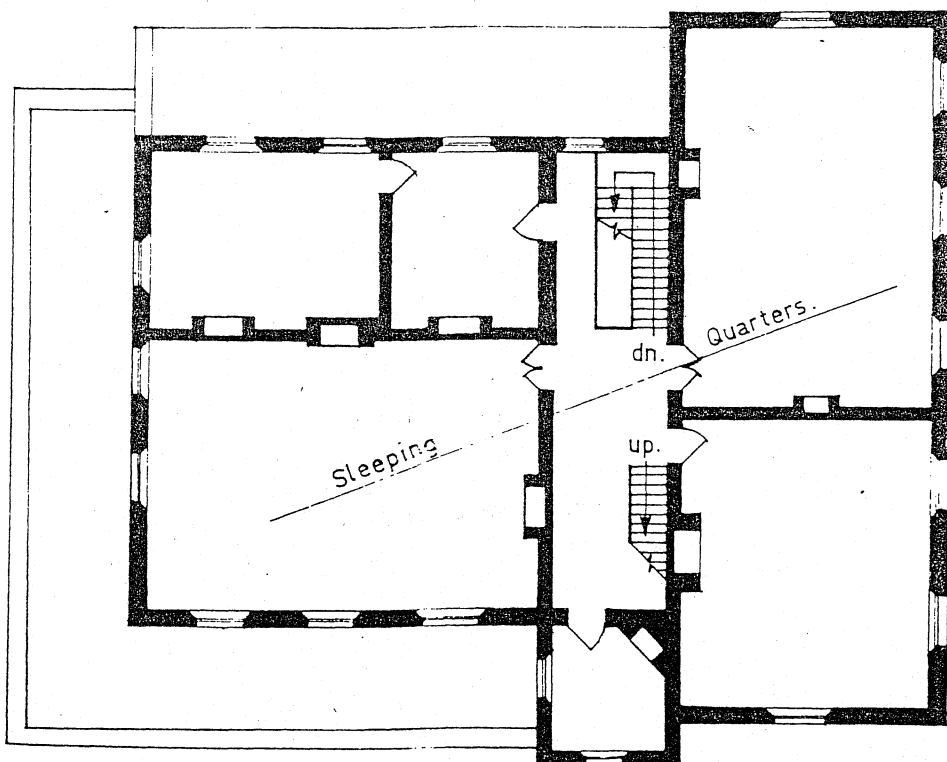
ROOF PLAN.

JACKSON RESIDENCE

2



GROUND FLOOR.

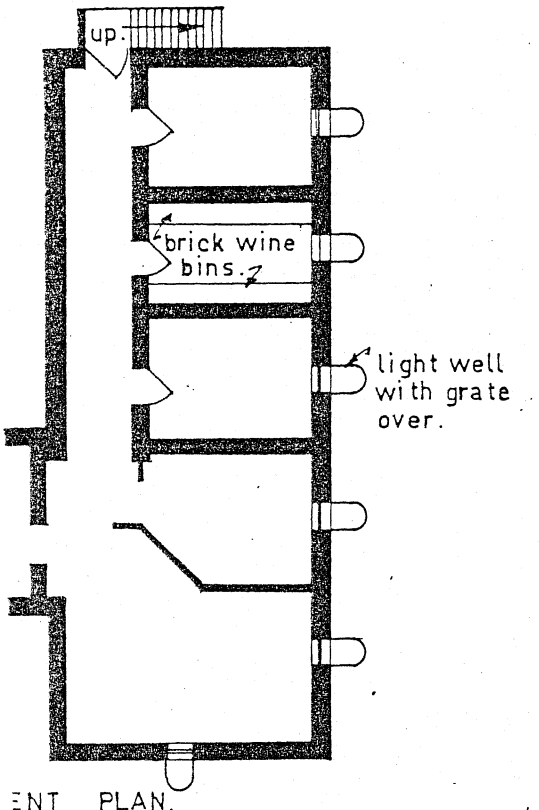
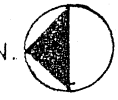


FIRST FLOOR.

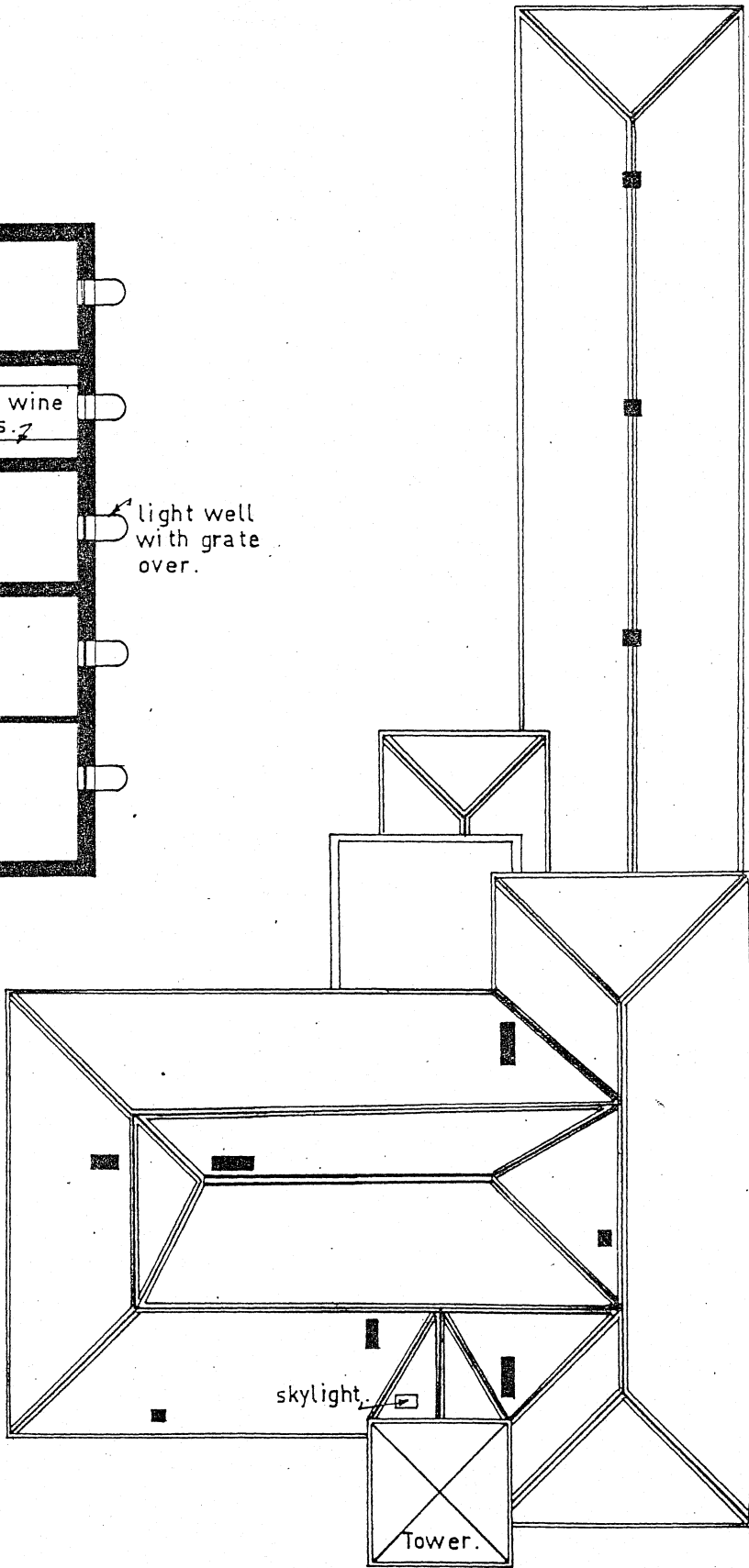
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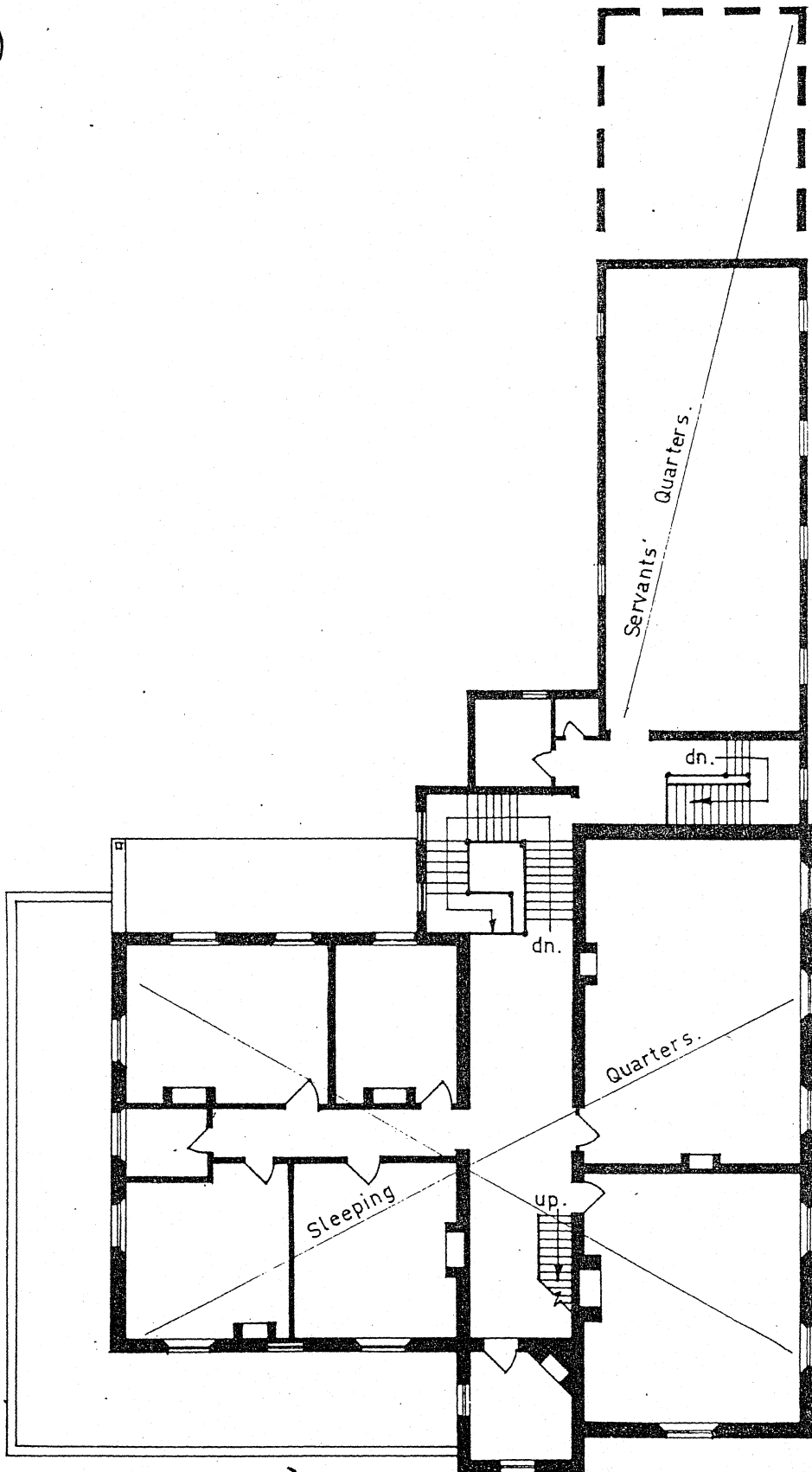
100M.



FRONT PLAN.



ROOF PLAN.



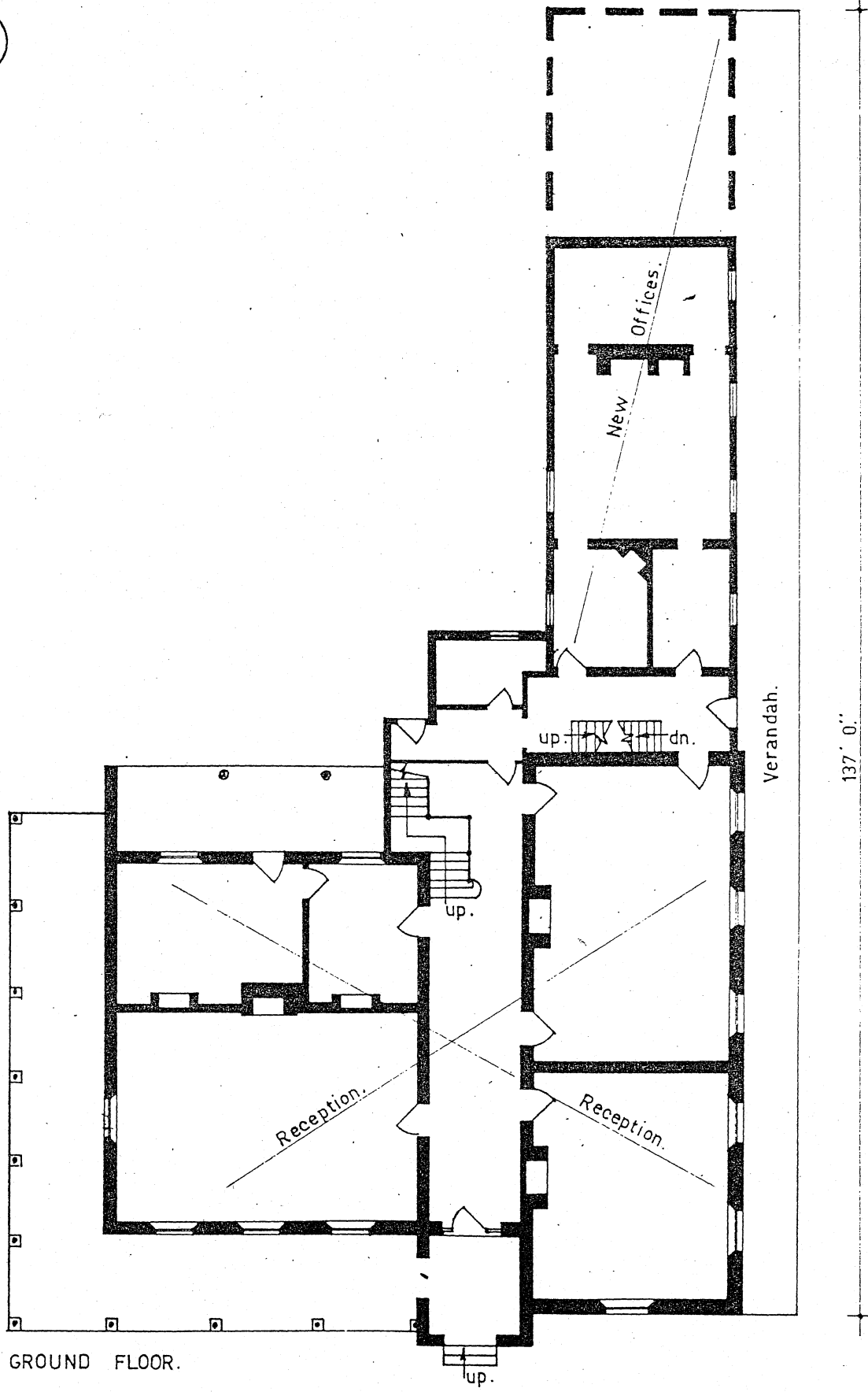
FIRST FLOOR.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE

1854-1874

2.

scale. 1" : 16' 0"

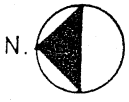


GOVERNMENT HOUSE

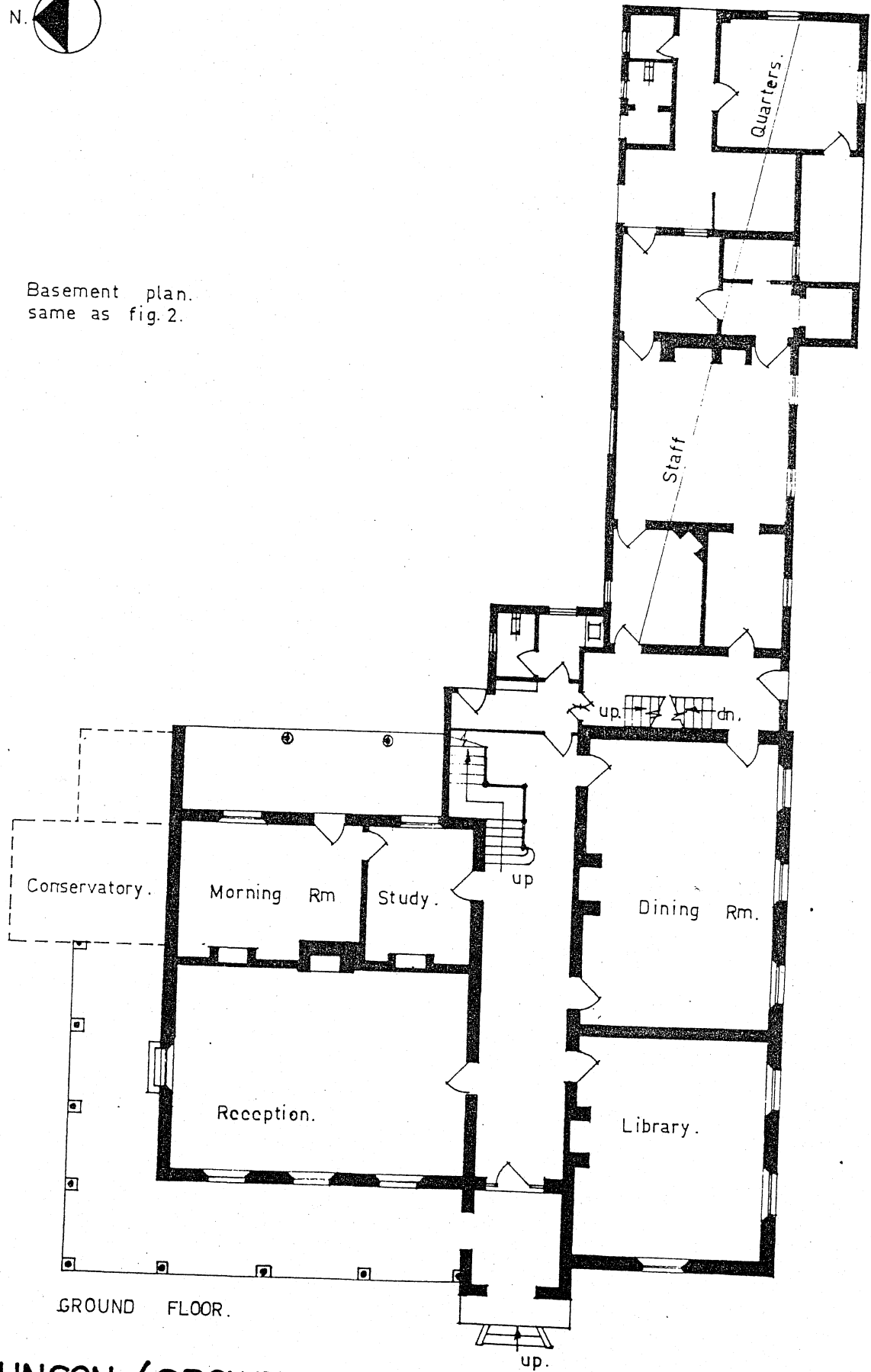
1854 - 1874.

2.

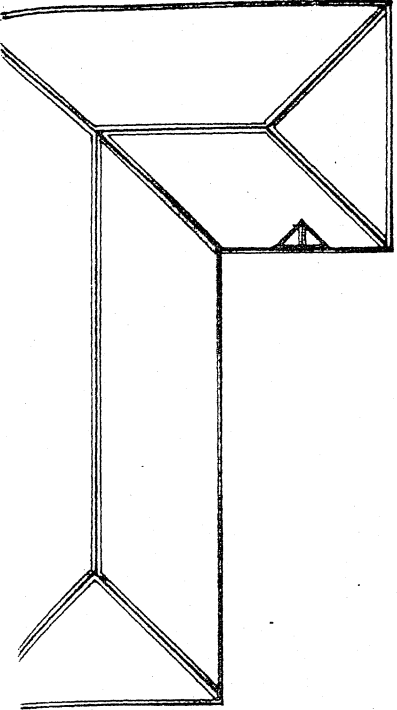
scale. 1" = 16' 0"



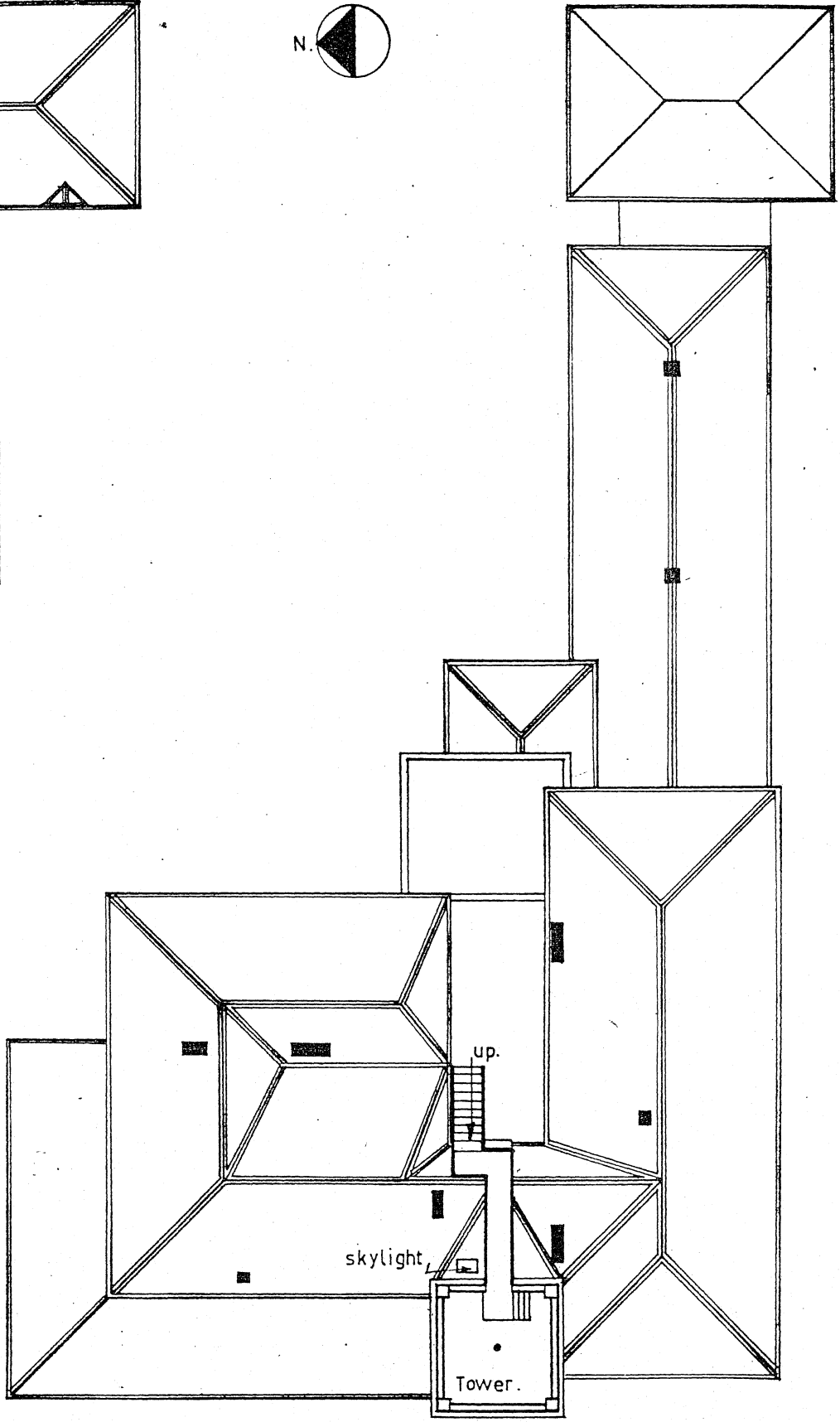
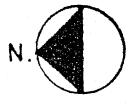
Basement plan.
same as fig. 2.



GROUND FLOOR.



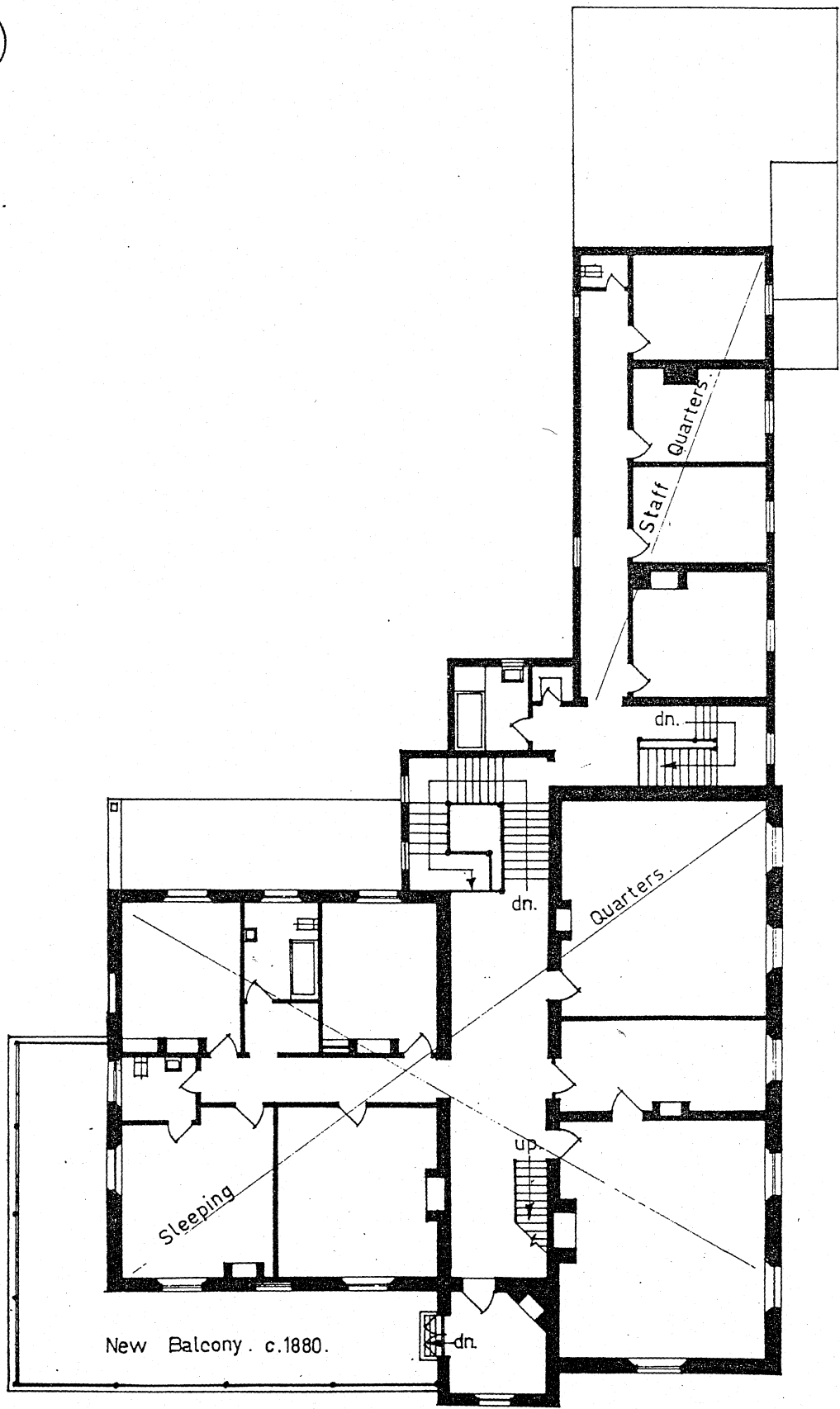
BLE ROOF.



ROOF PLAN.

JOHNSON/SPOWERS RESIDENCE

(R)



OM.

FIRST FLOOR PLAN.

JOHNSON / SPOWERS RESIDENCE

3.

scale. 1" = 16'0"