

Research Plan

Drawing Matter Archive

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Drawing Matter Archive



Fig. 1. Archive space, David Grandorge, 2014

Sitting at the foot of the agricultural valley in Somerset, the Drawing Matter Archive is the central space for the institution holding thousand architectural drawings dating from the sixteenth century to the present day. Exhibitions, public events and workshops for students and practitioners take place all year around. The archive is set in the Shatwell Farm, a ensemble of agricultural buildings and elements reconverted by architects and designers. These buildings have a delicate balance between the old and the new, maintaining the site's rustic charm while introducing modern architectural elements.

The archive designed by Hugh Strange Architects , is a space that emphasizes both the preservation and exploration of architectural drawings. The structure's minimalist design complements the surrounding environment, with

its wooden interiors offering a welcoming atmosphere for visitors to engage with the archive's vast collection. As described by Alvaro Siza, the drawing matter seems to blend in with its surroundings, 'You have added something that seems (to have been) there since always ... we cannot imagine the whole without this building.'¹

Beyond its physical space, the archive fosters educational initiatives like the annual Architectural Drawing Summer School, offering students a hands-on experience in architectural design. As the archive relocates to Covent Garden in London, its mission to broaden access to its collection continues, blending rural heritage with contemporary architectural practice.

Ref. 1. Drawing Matter, "Hugh Strange: The Archive," 2017

1. Hay Barn
2. Cow Shed
3. Tractor Shed
4. Silo
5. Workshop
6. Wood Store
7. Dairy Cottage
8. Shatwell Farm House

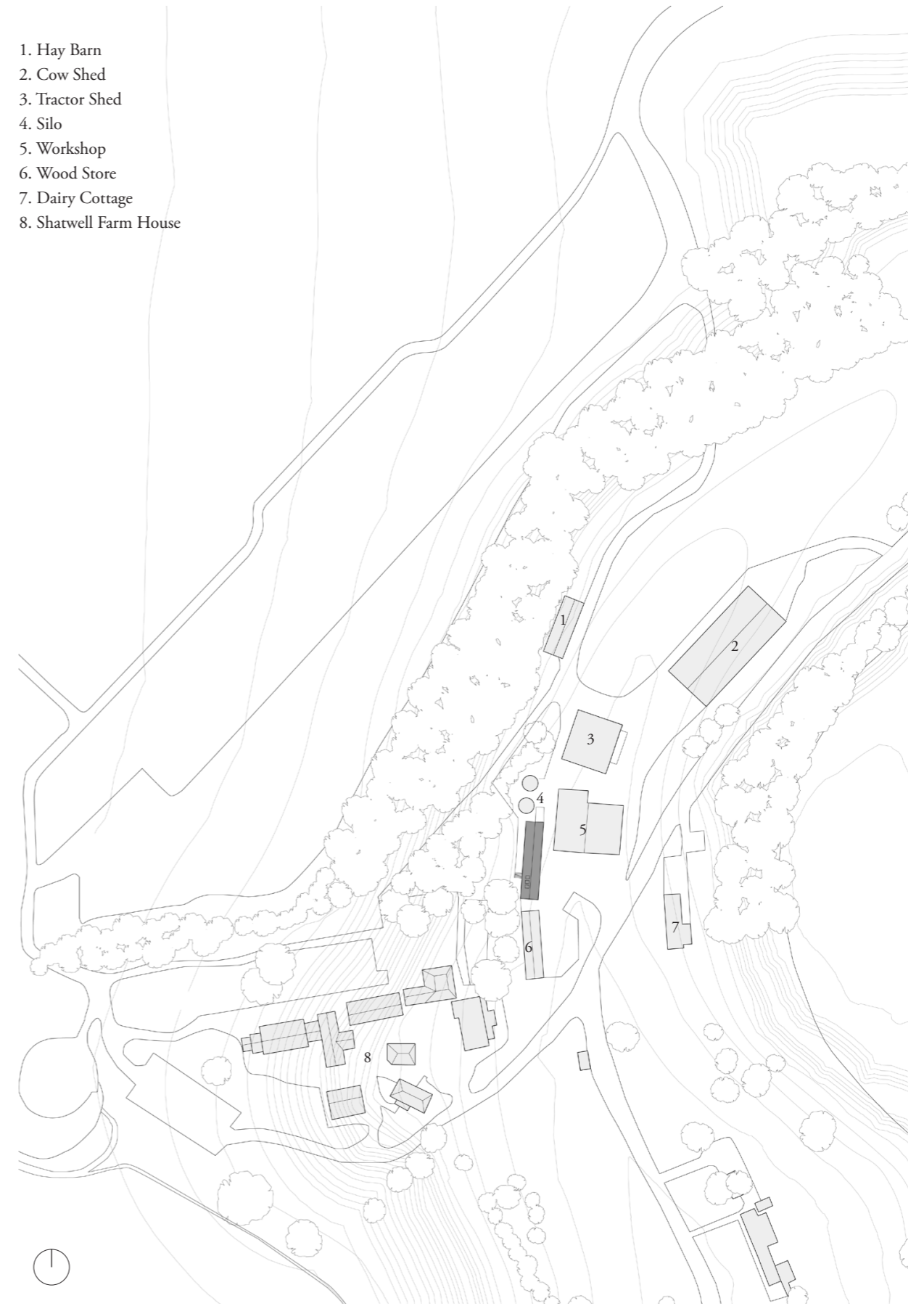


Fig. 2. Urban Context 1:2000

Site Context

Driving down the A371, south of Bristol, one enters a curved country lane on which Shatwell Farm is located. The land surrounding the property is picturesque: old farmhouses on sloping hills with wooden fences and oak trees shaped by the wind. Close to the farm, there is a spa where you can swim beneath its renovated centuries-old wooden beam structure. Another renovated land house functions as a hotel with a huge willow tree in its courtyard and scenic lights guiding the visitors in the evening. A nearby Roman villa replica complete with murals and comfy Roman sofas strengthens the notion of the area: it is a place for the affluent to relax and enjoy the countryside.

In the middle of this décor sits Shatwell Farm and its art collections. The collection of buildings appears to be simple structures at first sight but have been renovated and altered by firms like Clancy Moore Architects, Stephen Taylor Architects, and Cedric Price. A similar cultural center can be found near Düsseldorf, called Insel Hombroich. It also houses several architectural and artistic collections, but the setting differs. Where at Shatwell Farm the architects have gone out of their way to make minimal changes to the landscape and look of the buildings, at Insel Hombroich each structure seems to be a world of its own, situated in a curated forest full of surprising, almost unbelievable artifacts. It's clear that the sites have different intentions: where one creates an environment for everyone to roam about and be entertained, the other is more subdued, subtle, and of interest only to those who know what they are looking for.

Histories

Niall Hobhouse is a collector of architectural drawings, sketches, and models. He also writes about architecture and has served on the boards of institutions including the London School of Economics, the Sir John Soane's Museum, and the Canadian Centre for Architecture. With his experience working with large public institutions and museums, Naill established the drawing matter archive as a response to frustrations about the types of material that these organizations collect and how they display them physically and digitally². It was set up to propose alternative ways of collecting and engaging with architectural drawings.

The archive sits in an agricultural valley, the Shatwell farm, within a mix of buildings that includes barns, wood stores, and sheds that date from the 19th. The farm has seen a slow decline in its agricultural industry over recent decades, rendering several of its buildings derelict. It is now in the process of accumulating a new series of architectural inventions into a larger assembly. The archive building designed by Hugh Strange Architects is one of the architectural inventions on this farm and it holds a collection of many thousand architectural drawings assembled over the last 25 years, dating from the sixteenth century to the present day.



Fig. 4. View when entering the archive. Google Earth 2024

Ref. 2. Abrahams, "Shatwell Farm: Reshaping the Rural - the Architectural Review," 2022

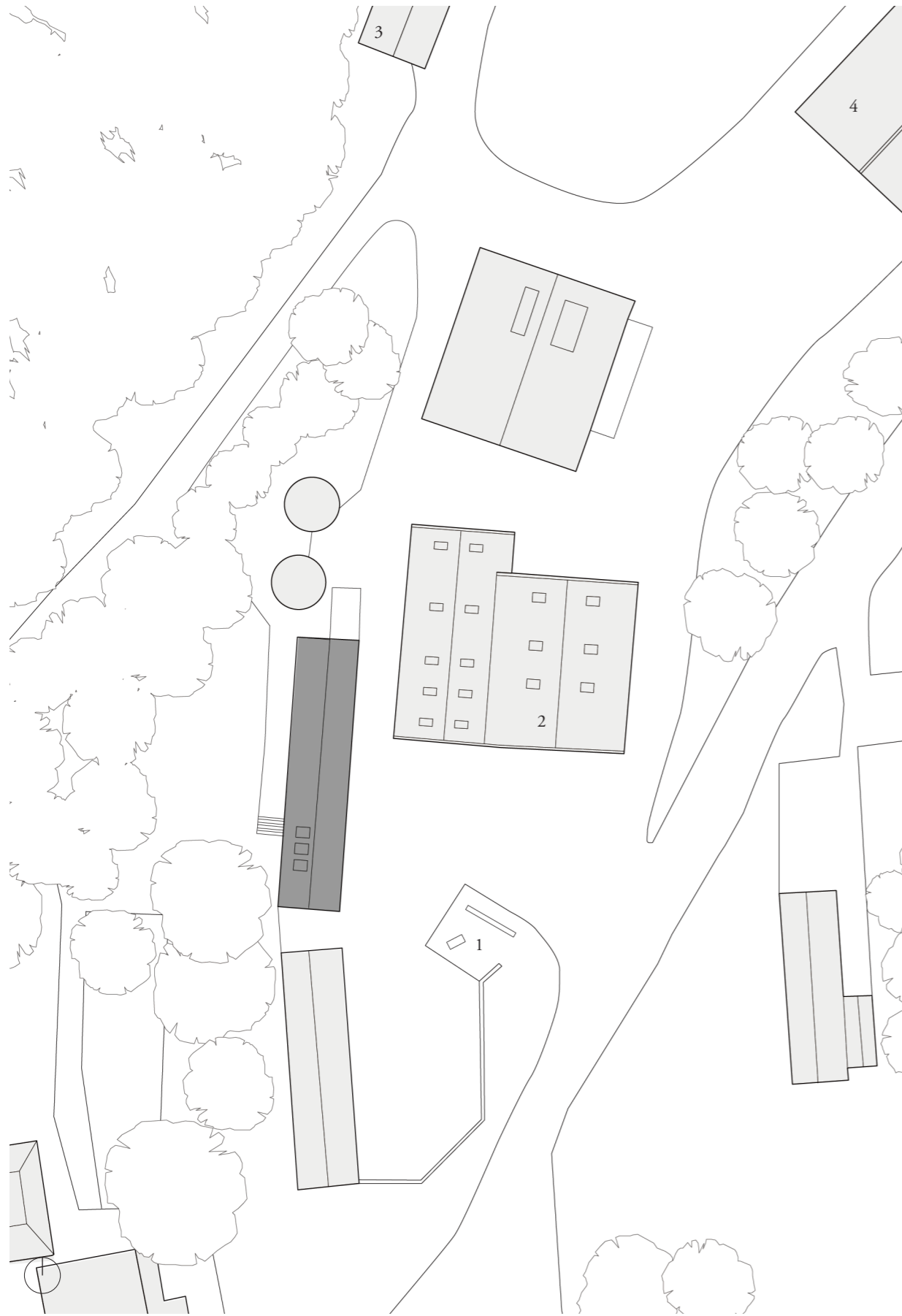


Fig. 5. Site Plan 1:500



Fig. 6. An overview of the farm, James Morris, 2016



Fig. 7. Sculpture by Álvaro Siza, Guus Kaandorp, 2019



Fig. 8. Tea house by Clancy Moore, Sue Barr, 2022



Fig. 9. Hay barn by Stephen Taylor Architects, David Grandorge, 2015



Fig. 10. Cow shed by Stephen Taylor Architects, David Grandorge, 2015



Fig. 11. Drawing matter building, David Grandorge, 2014

Design

The shape of the Drawing Matter building follows that of the former farmhouse of which the outer walls are still standing on the street-facing side of the building, shielding the bare CLT of the new structure and preserving some of its 19th-century appearance. A corrugated sheet roof spans the entire length of the building, which consists of two mirrored rooms separated by a roofed main area that connects both entrances. The two volumes are constructed out of over-dimensioned cross-laminated timber panels that land on a concrete base, with thirty-centimeter-thick walls and forty-two-centimeter-thick ceilings, which provide enough insulation and protection from moisture for the archive.

The archive is located in the south-facing room, while the north-facing room contains the office. Each volume has a door on each end, east-facing window(s) in the wall, and west-facing windows in the sloped ceiling. They are differentiated by the type of wood from which the floors

are made: the office floor consists of large cedar panels, while the archive has smooth reclaimed Ash and Beech plank flooring found on the site. A small wood-burning furnace is the only source of warmth in both rooms, and the lights fixed onto the ceiling are powered by hanging electricity cables.

The all-wood interior creates an atmosphere that is unique for archives: the space feels warm and welcoming, made to feel comfortable while you explore the contents of the drawers. The windows provide natural light, which is not ideal for archiving, but does increase comfort for the visitor. These design decisions speak to the intention of Hugh Strange Architects to create an archive that is meant for exploring as its main function. Preserving the content of the archive is not the primary objective, but it only comes after making sure the visitor will have a pleasant experience.

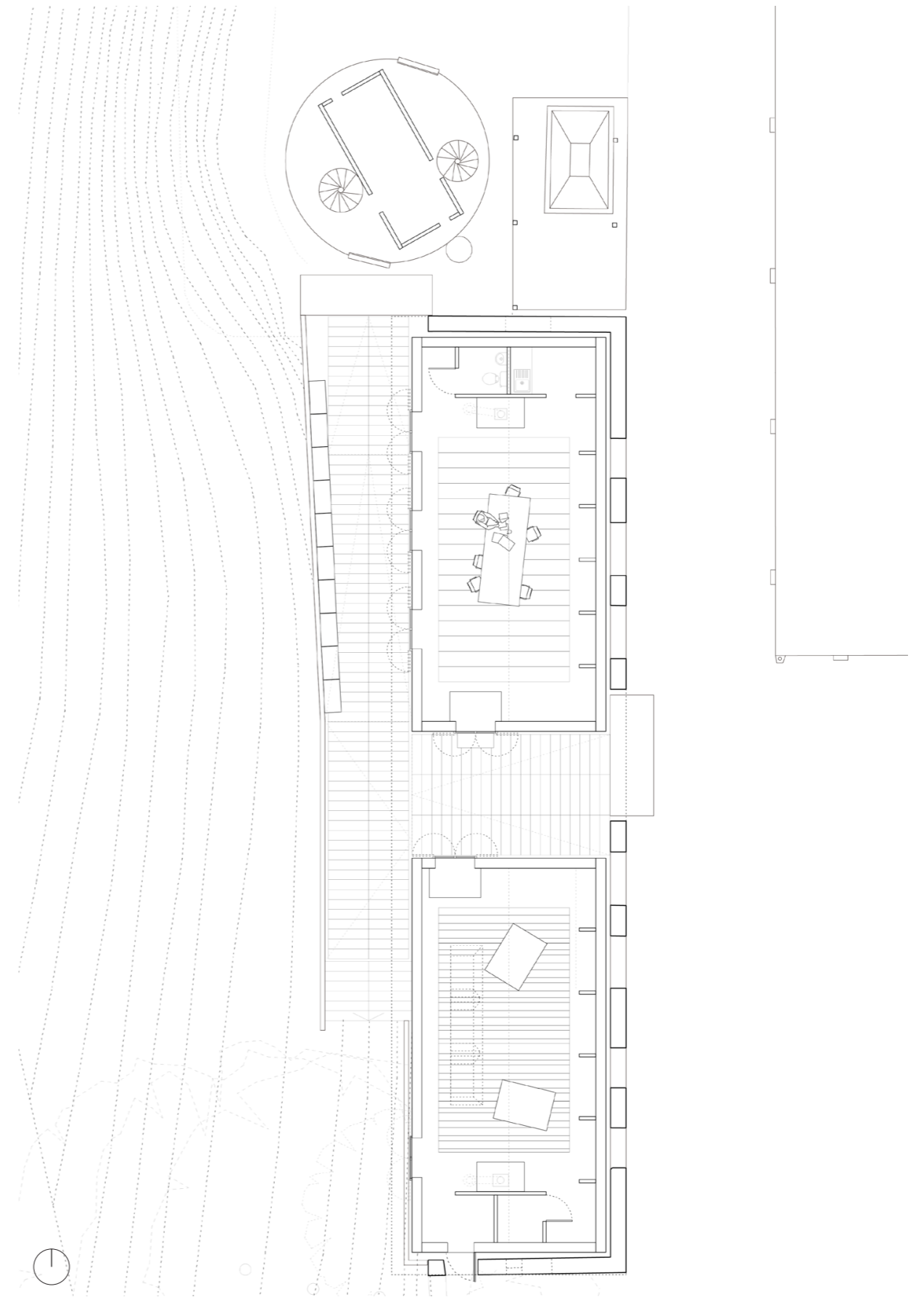


Fig. 12. Detail Plan 1:100



Fig. 13. The archive building in relation to its surrounding

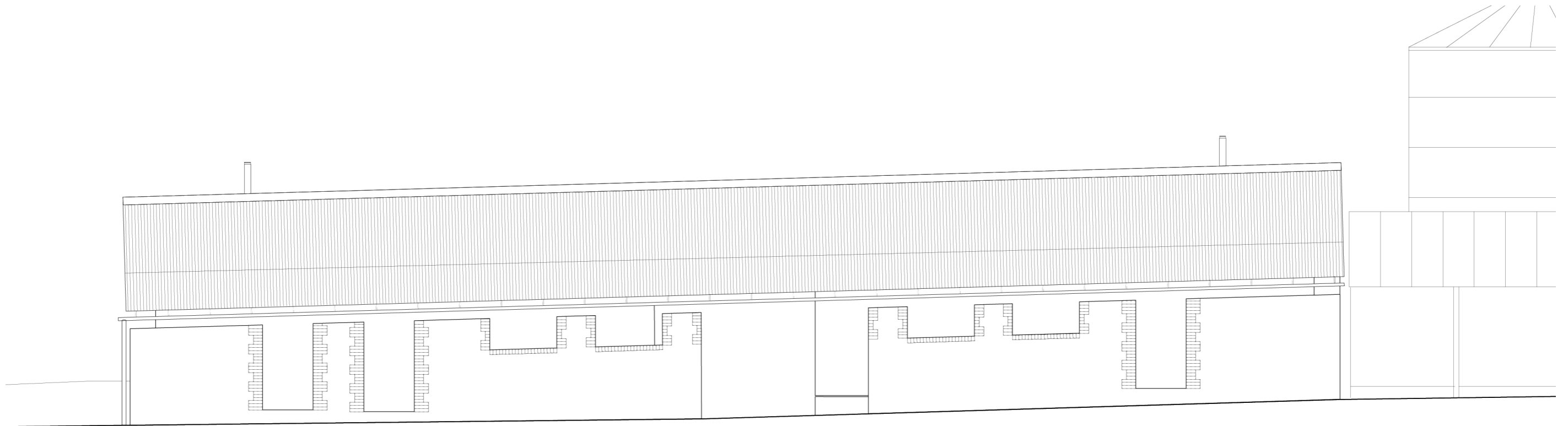


Fig. 14. East Elevation 1:100

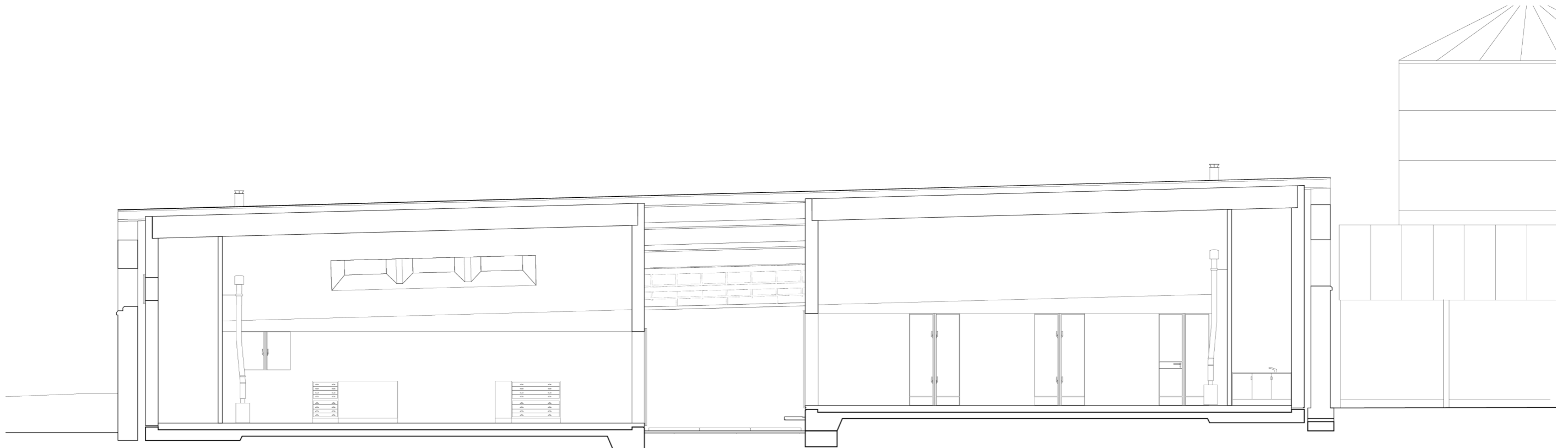


Fig. 15. Section 1:100

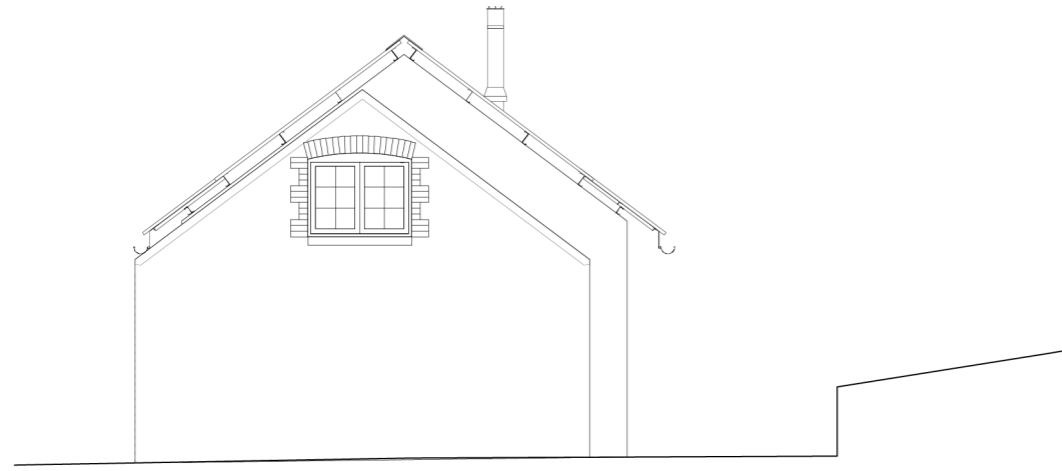


Fig. 16. North Elevation 1:100



Archive materials

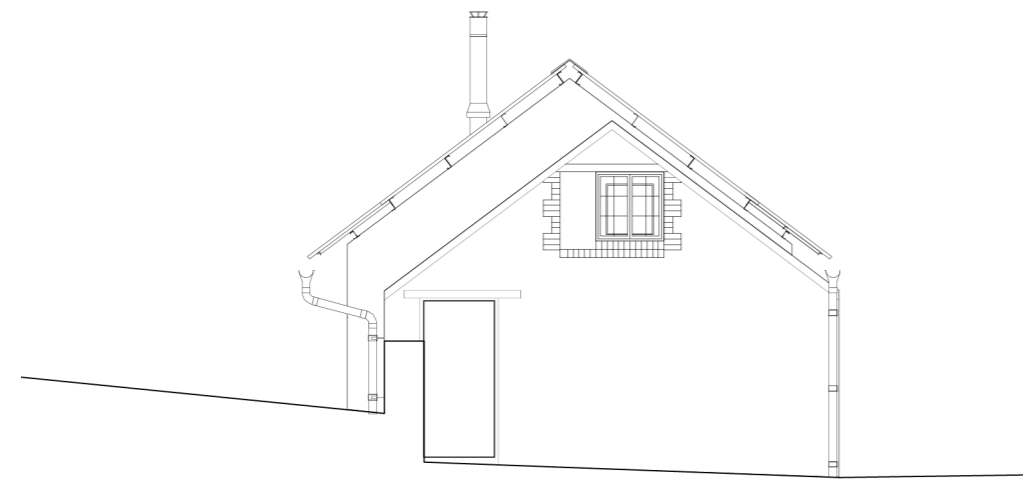


Fig. 17. South Elevation 1:100



Surrounding materials



Fig. 18. A similar tone of archive materials with surrounding materials in the site.



Fig. 19. The office space, David Grandorge, 2014



Fig. 20. A study symposium in the archive, Drawing Matter 2023



Fig. 21. Student drawing in the cow shed, Tom Kobayashi, 2023

Practical

The Drawing Matter archive was initially established by Niall Hobhouse, funded by capital from the sale of his family's farm estate. It is now primarily supported by The Drawing Matter Trust, a charity created to ensure the archive's ongoing activities.³ The trust supports a wide range of initiatives, including exhibitions, publications, and educational programs like workshops for students and professionals. These efforts, along with specific projects such as the annual summer school, are further funded through partnerships with architectural practices and institutions like the Kingston School of Art and Hauser & Wirth Somerset. All these activities explore the unique potential of private organizations in ways that public institutions might not be able to replicate.

Visits to the archive offer opportunity to work with the Drawing Matter collection and examine original design drawings in natural lighting. Since the archive and office are both sheltered under the same continuous roof, objects and activities regularly extend to both the spaces. The door to the archive is sometimes left open to let a gentle breeze in. Being present on the farm brings people close to nature and climate. Whether inside or outside, or somewhere in between, this environment encourages dynamic interaction with the collection. The archive makes full use of the surroundings, espe-

cially during the annual Architectural Drawing Summer School, which is designed for A-level students to gain insight into how to record and develop an idea through drawing. Initiated by Robert Bargery of the Royal Fine Art Commission Trust and Niall Hobhouse in 2017, the school remains entirely free with support from its partners and many architectural practices. During a week-long stay, students attended lectures in the warehouse nearby, explored the terrain by measuring, and developed drawings in the field. Students intervene, here, in the archive, drawing and making critical responses. Under a unique rural atmosphere, the summer school transforms the archive from a space in which drawings are stored to a space in which drawings can be actively engaged.

In October 2024, after twelve years at Shatwell Farm, Drawing Matter moved to a new location at Smart's Place in Covent Garden, London. This relocation can be seen as part of the archive's ongoing efforts to expand its accessibility and reach. The new space makes the archive easier to reach and provides more opportunities for workshops and visits. Additionally, the entire Drawing Matter collection has been digitized, providing a new, interactive way for audiences to engage with it online.



Fig. 22. The Loughborough studio, Drawing Matter, 2022



Fig. 23. Workshop in the new location, Drawing Matter, 2024

Besides the collection activities, the drawing matter archive publishes physical journals and online article series by invited writers and researchers, dedicated to the exploration of practices, histories, and material cultures of drawing in architecture and related fields. Their social media also publishes engaging contents about archive activities and new discoveries. Through exhibitions, public events, and workshops, the archive explores the role of drawing in architectural thought and practice.

Ref. 3. Park, "Interview With Space Magazine," 2022

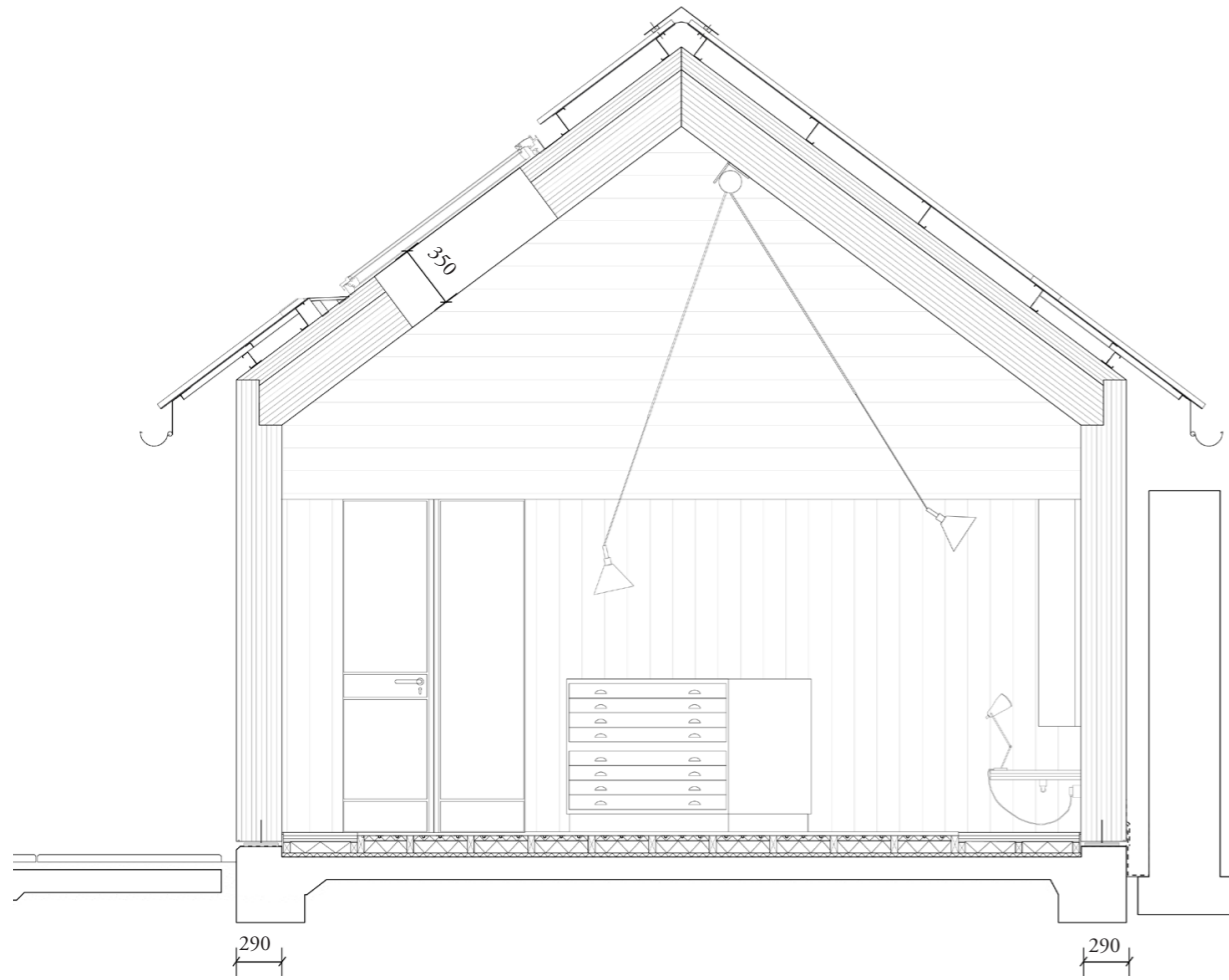


Fig. 24. Detail Section 1:50

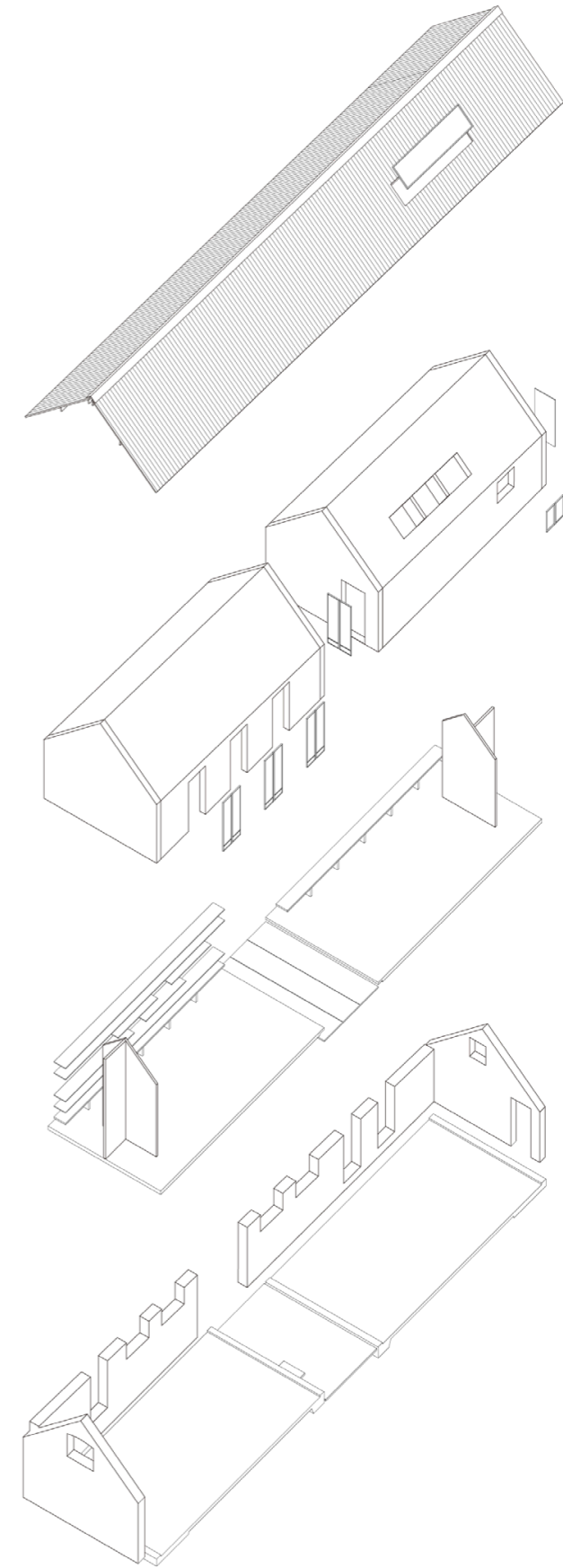


Fig. 25. Spatial Composition Diagram



Fig. 26. Process photo

The Model

Building the model of the Drawing Matter Archive has allowed for an understanding of its semantics. By synthesizing the elements that make up the space, two main parts emerged: the drawing chest and the space's boundaries to the exterior. This constataion affected the choice of scale: if the main object is the chest of drawers, then the scale should have the ability to reveal enough detail to replicate it, 1/12.5 was thus chosen.

In parallel, the tasks of building the model were divided into two: a shell with a CLT wood finish and a varnished antique chest of drawers. All other objects present related to one or the other: they are either attached to the shell (the pipe, the pin-up boards, the bench, the door, the lamps etc.) or resting on the chest. This spatial simplicity led to understanding and appreciating the chest as the body of the drawing archive protected by the monolithic

shell. As one was dimensioning the intricate details of the molding on the face of the chest, the other was analyzing and decomposing the elements that made up the CLT wood grain, to best replicate them.



Fig. 27. Final photos, archive space before and after use.

Sources

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Figures

All the drawings are based on Hugh Strange Architects.

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Reflection

In her essay *On the Architecture of Hugh Strange: Footnotes, backgrounds, sheds*; Elizabeth Hatz characterized Hugh Strange's Drawing Matter archive as a work that has the power to utilize its architecture beyond its visual qualities, in a subtleness that renders the space forgettable¹. Architecture as a background, with the symbolic presence of a foreground. One could interpret Hatz's advances as the Drawing Matter Archive's attempt to exist as a background of Architecture History, and simultaneously function as a foreground for the production of architecture.

Hatz brings forward the juxtaposition of the Archive and the shed, an overlap of the institution, and the rudimentary outbuilding. Ultimately, this correlation underlines a common denominator in the archive and the shed: the act of storing. The polarity of these two components is, according to Hatz, expressed by their architectural detailing: rough and brittle edges for the exterior ruin-shell; versus the sharp and clear edges for the wooden interior layer. This encounter of parts brings the visitor through the old pre-existing into the new CLT enclosure. The temporal narrative of this overlap evokes a sense of neutrality in that the old and new equal each other. Hatz refers to the subtle cohabitation between the rough ruin and the pristine timber volume as dislocated vernacular - the new intervention is sharp yet not predominant to the original shell. With sufficient space for both the old and the new fragments, they can coexist and interact in a way that distances the user from time, distorting the chronology of the space and thereby permeating it against time.

The interface of the CLT shed and the stone ruin is characterized by a physical gap that permits the appreciation of the chronological transition in the architecture, both from the inside and the outside. The respectful collage of

local materials, vernacular techniques, and modern construction methods allocates to the archive the neutrality of the shed. The archive becomes a footnote in designing, transmitting, and remembering Architecture.

The Drawing Matter takes on the position of a humble timber chest, dissimulated within agricultural surroundings, safekeeping its contents from the accelerated architectural world it exists in. The archive goes beyond the walls of the shed: in the peculiar rural context of the Shatwell farm, the accumulation of architectural objects transposes the Archive from the boundaries of the shed to the ones of the farm: a collection of drawings within a collection of Architecture-s. The act of safekeeping orchestrated by Niall Hobhouse redefines the process of traditional archiving as an intimate and uninterrupted interaction with the artifacts. The unconventional environment that the Drawing Matter provides, is far from its clinical, sterile, or codified counterparts, and reconsider what the typology of the archive could be.

In expressing neutrality through subtleness and proud simplicity, the Drawing Matter archive offers a renewed interaction with physical collections and built structures to serve as a background for inspiring, transmitting, and studying the craft of Architecture in the present and for the future.

Ref. 4. Hatz, "Footnotes, Backgrounds, Sheds The Drawing Matter Archive by Hugh Strange Architects," 2018