

PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF FORMER STEPHENSON'S WORKS

PRESCOT, METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF KNOWSLEY



HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

GARRY MILLER
Heritage Consultancy

PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF FORMER STEPHENSON'S WORKS

PRESCOT, METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF KNOWSLEY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

MAY 2023

GARRY MILLER
Heritage Consultancy

GARRY MILLER HERITAGE CONSULTANCY

Garry Miller is a heritage consultant, architectural historian and published author who has spent more than 40 years studying and working with buildings of town and countryside, in particular those of North West England. His career as a consultant began in the mid-1980s with the Preston-based Nigel Morgan Historic Building Consultancy, of which he became a partner in 1992 upon its rebranding as Datestone. In 1997 he was commissioned by the Heritage Trust for the North West, a buildings preservation trust based at Barrowford, Lancashire, to produce an in-depth regional study of vernacular houses in southwest Lancashire: the result, *Historic Houses in Lancashire: The Douglas Valley, 1300-1770* was published in 2002. The book was described as 'scholarship as its best' by *Country Life* (June 2003), and 'well analysed and presented' in *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* (Vol 48, 2004); and was widely cited in the 2006 Buildings of England volume on Liverpool and Southwest Lancashire. Extensive research on the houses of Georgian and Regency Liverpool has also been undertaken, with a view to future publication. Following the success of his Douglas Valley book, Garry Miller established his own consultancy, producing analytical and interpretive reports on historic buildings, in particular the heritage assessments required to support planning applications affecting the historic environment. His area of operation encompasses the North West, Midlands, North Wales and parts of Cumbria and North and West Yorkshire. Several local authorities have cited his assessments as examples of best practice, and reports on more than 150 buildings or sites are produced annually.

THIS REPORT

Date of issue: May 2023

Client: Knowsley MBC

Text: Garry Miller

Site survey and photography: Garry Miller, Peter Miller

CONTENTS

1: Executive Summary	5
2: The Site	6
3: Scope and Purpose of this Report	9
4: The Conservation Area	11
5: Number 9 Market Place	13
6: Contribution of the Application Site	15
7: Summary of Significance	23
8: Planning Policy Context	25
9: Impact of the Proposal	27

1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report supports proposed demolition of the former Stephenson's print works in the town centre of Prescott, Merseyside. The application buildings date primarily from the 1950s and are themselves undesignated but stand within Prescott Town Centre Conservation Area. They also form part of the immediate setting of the Grade II listed 9 Market Place.

The heritage considerations arising are the impact upon the significance of the conservation area and the setting of the listed building. The scope and purpose of this report is to identify this significance and assess how the proposal will affect it.

The significance of the conservation area derives from its character and appearance as the ancient core of Prescott, one of the oldest settlements on Merseyside and which by 1800 had become the national centre of component and tool manufacture for the watch and clock making industry. This significance is embodied in its buildings, which are largely of 17th to 19th century date, and their relationship to each other amid a surviving medieval street layout. The best of these buildings are listed as being of national importance.

Number 9 Market Place is one of the listed elements and its significance essentially derives from its intrinsic special architectural and historic interest as a three-storey early 19th century property adjoined at the rear by what is possibly the oldest freestanding surviving watchmaker's workshop in the town. The setting of the listed building, in the historic core of Prescott, makes a positive contribution to this significance.

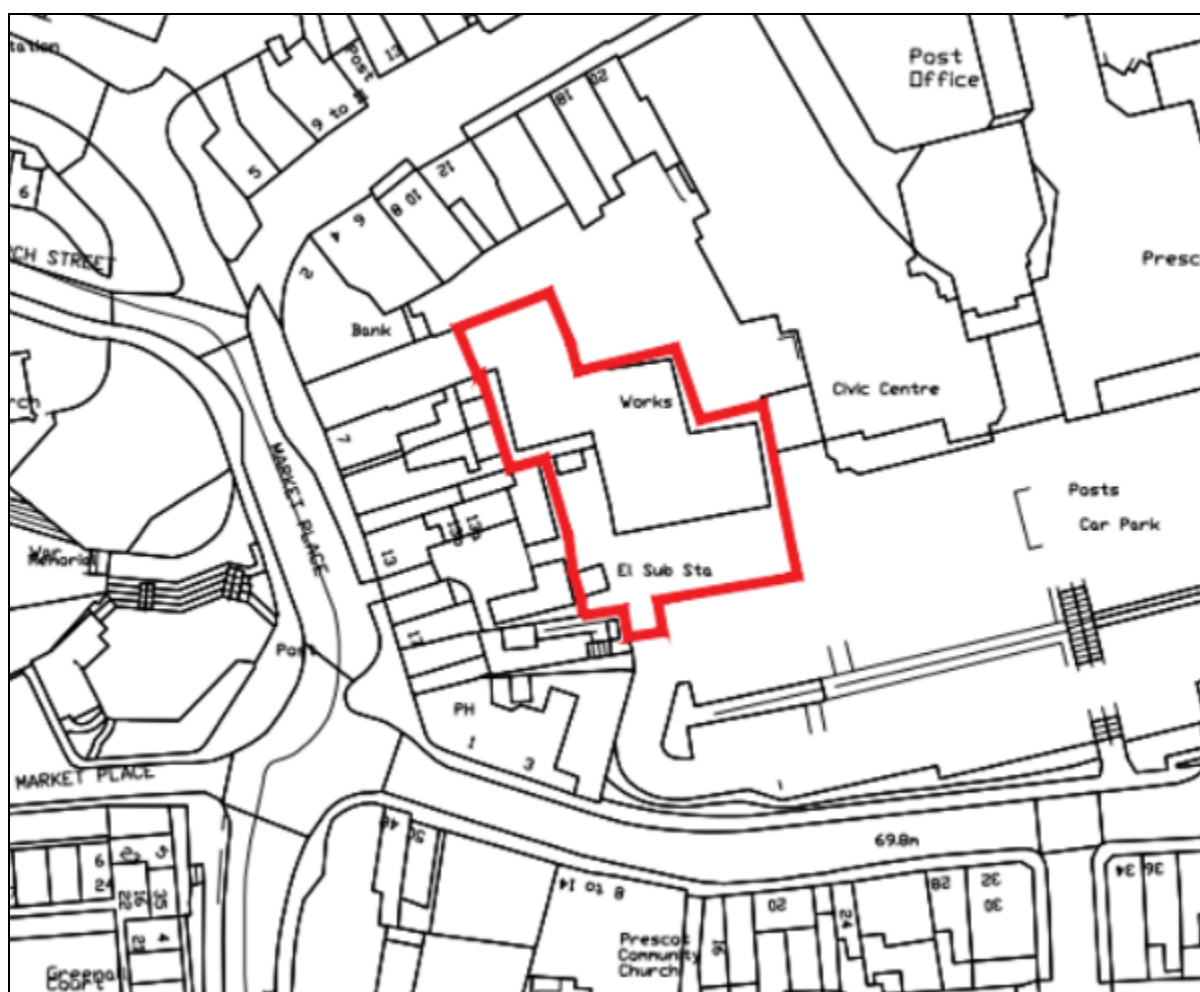
The print works buildings cover a sizeable site within the conservation area but have been disused for almost two decades and are in a state of decay. They are of no particular interest either architecturally or historically. Their contribution to the conservation area is, given their lack of interest and deterioration, negative and their significance in this context is therefore low.

The proposal seeks their demolition to allow for further development of the adjacent Prescott Shopping Centre along with additional car parking. As the existing buildings themselves are of no architectural or historic value their loss will have no adverse effect upon the character or the significance of the conservation area. Its visual appearance will however be improved by the removal of the long-derelict structures, as will the setting of the adjacent Grade II listed 9 Market Place. In addition, the proposal also delivers a significant public benefit in terms of facilitating expansion of the shopping centre, which in turn will favourably affect the local economy.

For these reasons, it is concluded that the proposal is in complete accordance with national guidance on the historic environment, along with the relevant local plan policies, and therefore merits approval without delay.

2: THE SITE

The site is located at the heart of Prescott town centre in the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley, Merseyside. It is that of the former Stephenson's print works and contains a number of disused buildings of 20th century date. The buildings are set back from the east side of Market Place, and formerly accessed from between numbers 2 and 7 following demolition of number 5 Market Place. The site is bounded to the north by properties on Eccleston Street, to the east by the Prescott Shopping Centre and to the south by the latter's car park. The buildings have been disused for almost 20 years and are now in a derelict state.



Map 1. The proposal site



1. Glimpsed view of the buildings between numbers 2 and 7 Market Place



2. The buildings viewed from inside the site

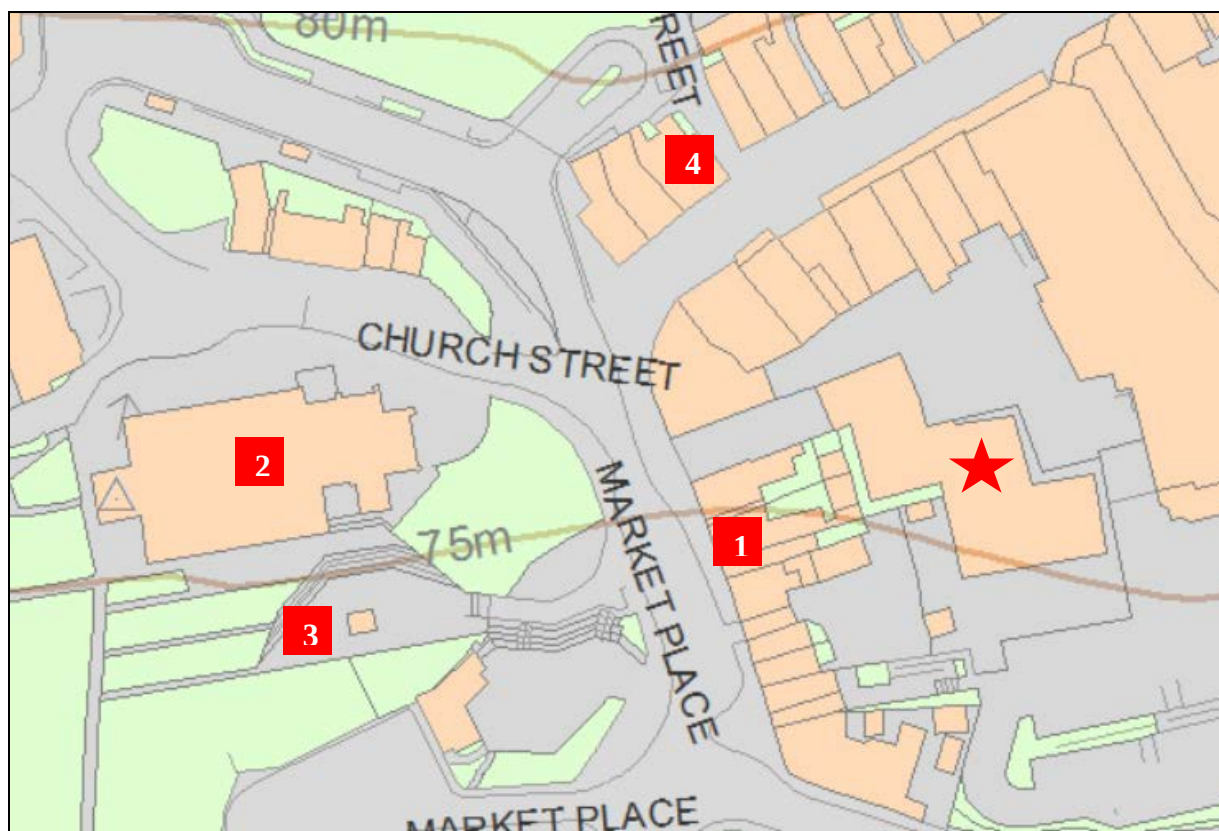


3. *Aerial view of the site*

3: THE PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

3.1 Designations

The application buildings are themselves undesignated, but stand within Prescott Town Centre Conservation Area. The site also adjoins the Grade II listed number 9 Market Place and therefore forms part of its immediate setting. At further distance are the Grade I parish church of St Mary, of 14th to 19th century date, and the Grade II War Memorial of 1916, which stand around 100 metres to the west off Church Street. The site also lies to close to numbers 7-13 Eccleston Street, around 50 metres to the north, which are undesignated but considered to make a positive contribution to the conservation area.



Map 2. The site (starred) in relation to (1) 9 Market Street, (2) the church of St Mary, (3) the War Memorial and (4) numbers 7-13 Eccleston Street

3.2 Proposed development

Proposals have been submitted to Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council for demolition of the application buildings.

3.3 Heritage impacts

The heritage considerations arising from the proposal are:

1. Its impact upon the significance (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the conservation area as a whole
2. Owing to proximity, the setting of the Grade II listed 9 Market Place

It is considered the setting of the Church of St Mary and the War Memorial are not affected owing to the greater separation distance, and the fact that the site is largely screened from them by the massing of buildings on Market Place. For similar reasons of screening, the setting of the undesignated 7-13 Eccleston Street is also unaffected.

3.4 Scope and purpose of this report

Paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the particular significance of the heritage assets affected, including the contribution made by their setting. The scope and purpose of this report is therefore to identify the significance of the conservation area and 9 Market Place, and to assess how this will be affected by the proposal. The level of detail is considered proportionate to the importance of the heritage assets, in accordance with paragraph 194, and no more than necessary to understand the impact of the proposal. This report is to be read in conjunction with other documentation supporting the application.

3.5 Report structure

This is as follows:

1. Brief descriptions of the conservation area (Section 4) and of 9 Market Place (Section 5)
2. A summary of the contribution made by the application building (Section 6)
3. A summary of the heritage significance of the conservation area, 9 Market Place and of the application site (Section 7)
4. A review of the planning policy context in which the application will be determined (Section 8)
5. Evaluation within this context of the proposal's impact upon the significance of the conservation area and listed building (Section 9).

4: THE CONSERVATION AREA

4.1 Overview

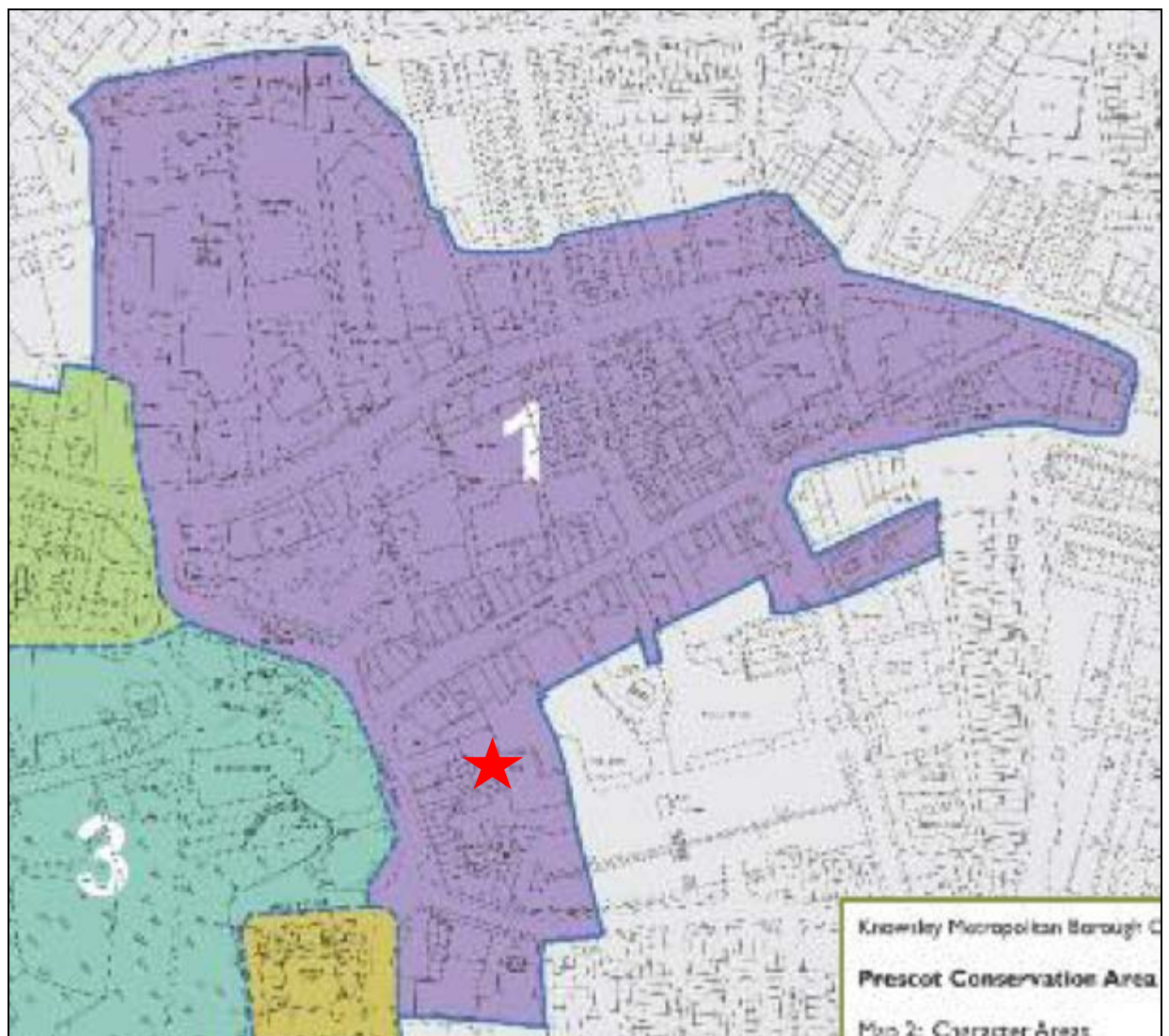
Prescot Conservation Area was first designated in 1978, when two previously-separate conservation areas were merged. It was subsequently extended to include Sewell Street in 1997. A full description of its qualities and special interest is contained in the character appraisal adopted by Knowsley Council in May 2012, and hence only a brief summary is necessary here. Prescot is one of the oldest settlements on Merseyside, first referred to in 1178, although the church is believed to be a 7th century foundation. A medieval market town and centre of a large ecclesiastical parish, it today retains an intact street layout from this period. By 1800, Prescot had become the country's leading centre for producing components and tools for the watch and clock making industry, a prosperity reflected in its Georgian properties. The built character of the conservation area is therefore largely typified by buildings resulting from this 18th and 19th century heyday, and its special interest derives from these buildings and their relationship to each other amid medieval street layout. The conservation area is divided into four character zones:

- The Town Centre (High Street, Eccleston Street and Market Place)
- Derby Street and West Street
- Church Street and Vicarage Place
- Sewell Street

4.2 Contribution of the site

The application site lies within the conservation area's Town Centre zone (Map 3, following page). The key positive qualities of this character zone are described in the 2012 appraisal as:

- Its medieval street layout, with some narrow alleys connecting Eccleston Street with High Street
- Its role as the commercial core of Prescot, containing a number of shops and offices
- Number 30 Eccleston Street, an ornate timber-framed property dating to the early 17th century
- No. 9 Market Place is listed grade II for the survival of a late 17th century watchmaker's workshop behind it
- Atherton Street, which retains the best preserved streetscape, where number. 17 is listed because it retains a watchmaker's workshop
- Good views westwards towards St Mary's Church
- Some high-quality paving details using natural materials



Map 3. Detail of map from 2012 conservation area appraisal showing how the site (indicated) lies within the conservation area's Town Centre character zone

5: NUMBER 9 MARKET PLACE

5.1 Overview

Early 19th century three-storey house, part of a row of Georgian properties on the east side of Market Place, along with possibly the earliest surviving freestanding watchmaker's workshop in Prescott.

5.2 Historical context

The National Heritage List for England description of the property, compiled at the time of its designation in 1991 and identifying it as *Number 9 with Former Workshop to Rear*, reads:

House with shop, and former workshop to rear. The house fronting Market Place early C19, the workshop possibly C17 in part. Rendered brick, slate roof; the workshop random rubble. Double-depth house with rear wing; 3 storeys, regular 2 window range. Parapet raised and shaped to centre, with moulded cornice. Hornless sash windows, 9-pane to 2nd, 15-pane to 1st floors, stucco pilasters. Mid to late C19 shop front with central doorway (under rectangular overlight), and renewed brick plinth. House doorway to left, the door panelled. Large brick stack to front shape of roof to left. To the rear a structure understood to be the earliest free-standing tool and watchmaker's workshop in Prescott (which was one of the national centres of watch making in England); plain rectangular plan, single-storey, much patched (with brick in part), flag floor; various openings altered.

5.3 Setting

The property forms part of a row of Georgian properties that survives on the east side of Market Place, facing the parish church. As such it is experienced in its historic setting at the ancient heart of the market town, where it forms a notable and definitive element of the streetscene.



4. The listed building (right) is a prominent element of the Market Place streetscene



5. Mid-20th century view of the Georgian row of which it forms part

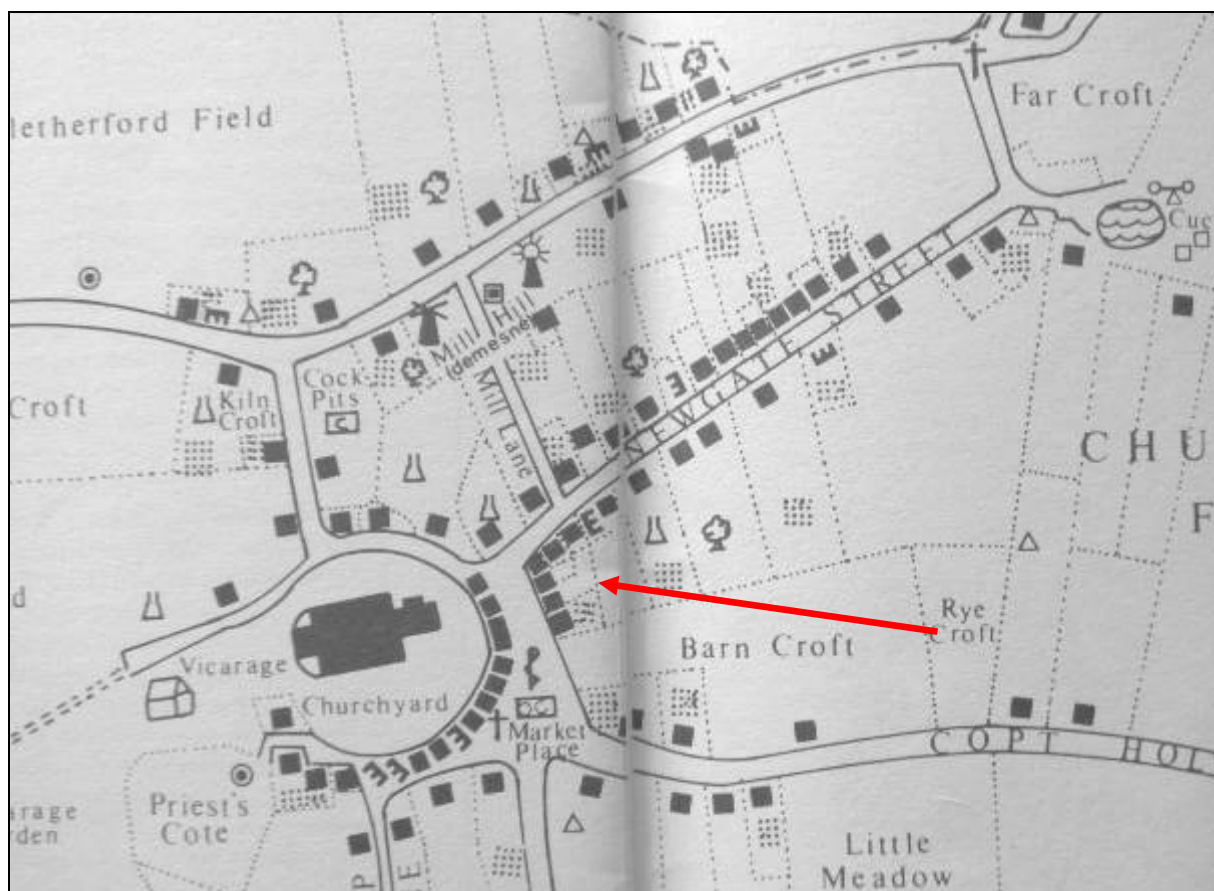
6: FORMER STEPHENSON'S PRINT WORKS

6.1 Overview

Group of 20th century former print works buildings, disused for almost two decades.

6.2 Historical context

The site historically lay on the eastern fringe of the ancient core of the town, which was focussed upon the Church of St Mary and the Market Place. The map of Prescott drawn in 1592 (Map 4, below) shows it as an area of gardens and fields behind properties at the northern end of Market Place. By the mid-1840s, a piecemeal collection of buildings had appeared although gardens remained to the east and south (Map 5). This mixture of buildings and spaces remained into the early 20th century (Map 6) prior to the appearance of the present print works probably in the early 1950s.



Map 4. Copy of 1592 map of Prescott (from Prescott, A Town Trail, 1979)



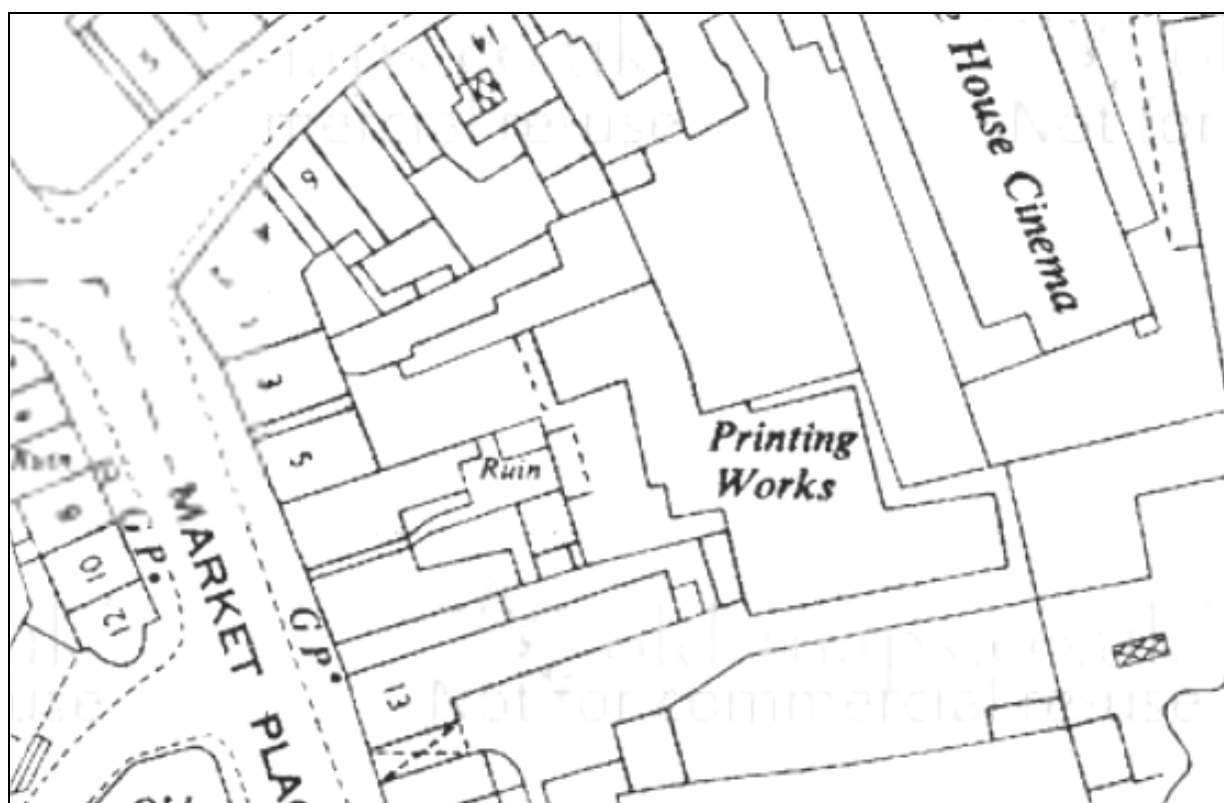
Map 5. The six-inch OS map, surveyed 1846-1847 shows a piecemeal collection of buildings and spaces upon the site



Map 6. Relatively little change is recorded by the edition of 1928

6.3 Description

- a. **Elements of the site.** The buildings are a staggered formation of largely two-storey structures that in the main date probably from the early 1950s: they are first shown on the OS edition surveyed in 1955 (Map 7, below). The northernmost element of the formation however incorporates the remnant of an earlier building probably of the 1920s, of four bays with two tiers of segment-headed windows on its north side. Its west elevation has been further altered by means of a 1950s flat roof extension to form entrances to the office and works. The appearance of the 1920s remnant, in particular an absence of chimneys, suggests it was a warehouse or store rather than an industrial building. Grafted on to its south elevation are the main 1950s buildings, which assume a roughly L-shaped footprint. These terminate to the south in a three-storey block, owing to the fall of the ground, which is conspicuous from the adjacent shopping centre car park. The application site also incorporates an electricity substation and car park.
- b. **Visibility.** Apart from the three-storey building, the remainder of the structures are largely hidden from public view behind buildings on Eccleston Street and Market Place. The remodelled entrance front was previously visible from Market Place, through the gap created by demolition of number 5, but at the present time is now largely concealed by infrastructure relating to site works at numbers 2 and 7 Market Place.
- c. **Appearance.** The buildings have a functional mid-20th century Modernist industrial/office aesthetic. As typical but unremarkable examples of their time and genre, they are of no particular merit or interest.



Map 7. The buildings depicted on the OS edition of 1955



6. The entrance front, viewed from Market Place in 2021



7. The building is now largely obscured from view by adjoining site works



8. The entrance building, a 1950s extension of the 1920s structure behind



9. North elevation of the 1920s building



10. Brickwork reveals how the building was extended to form the entrance



11. The 1920s building shown in an aerial image of around that time



12. View west through the site, showing 1920s building (right) and 1950s elements attached



13. Three storey block at the south end of the site



14. The same building viewed from the shopping centre car park (pictured in 2021)

7: SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

7.1 Rationale

Paragraph 195 of the National Planning Policy Framework states local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of a heritage asset, including its setting, and take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal in order to avoid or minimize conflict between the asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Significance is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

7.2 The conservation area

The significance of the conservation area derives from its character and appearance as the ancient core of Prescott, one of the oldest settlements on Merseyside and which by 1800 had become the national centre of component and tool manufacture for the watch and clock making industry. This significance is embodied in its buildings, which of 17th to 19th century date, and their relationship to each other amid a surviving medieval street layout. The best of these buildings are listed as being of national importance, including the Grade I parish church of St Mary. The conservation area is divided into four character zones, with the application site standing within that which covers the historic town centre.

7.3 Number 9 Market Place

Grade II designation denotes this is a building of national importance for its special architectural and historic interest. Its significance essentially derives from this special interest, and is that of a three-storey early 19th century property that forms part of a Georgian row on the east side of the Market Place. The site also contains at the rear what is possibly the oldest surviving watchmaker's workshop in the town, the physical legacy of the domestic industry for which Prescott was nationally renowned. The setting of the listed building, in the historic core of the town, makes a positive contribution to its significance and is illustrated in the public realm near and mid-distance views obtained from along Market Place and the adjoining Church Street.

7.4 Former Stephenson's print works

These buildings cover a notable site within the conservation area but are long disused and are in a state of decay. They are of no particular interest either architecturally or historically. Their contribution to the conservation area is, given their lack of interest and deterioration, negative. Their significance in the overall context is therefore low.

8: PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

8.1 Statutory duty

Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require local planning authorities to give special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. Section 72 (1) of the Act requires local planning authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing their character.

8.2 Relevant policies

Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework provides the guidance on how the statutory duty is to be put into practice. Paragraph 197 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- *The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation*
- *The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, and*
- *The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*

Regarding designated heritage assets, paragraph 199 states that ‘great weight’ should be given to their conservation and the more important the asset, the greater that weight should be; and that significance can be lost through development within its setting. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

The principal local heritage policy is CS20 (Managing the Borough's Historic Environment) of the Knowsley Core Strategy, which states:

Development proposals in Knowsley should preserve or enhance the Borough's historic and architectural assets, including Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Historic Parks and Gardens and archaeological remains, together with other local areas, buildings and structures of historic importance. The Council will:

- a. Require preservation of the local distinctiveness and character of historic assets through sensitive design of new development, including appropriate integration with their setting and immediate landscape;*

- b. Prevent demolition and/or development which adversely affects historic assets subject to statutory designation or its setting; and,*
- c. Facilitate long term conservation and enhancement of local assets and areas of historic importance, including through the preparation of Conservation Area Management Plans.*

9: IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

9.1 Summary of the scheme

The proposal seeks consent for demolition of the long-disused and derelict buildings to allow for further development of the Prescott Shopping Centre along with additional car parking spaces in the future. Specific details of the demolition process have been provided in other submitted documentation. It is therefore sufficient here to state that it will be undertaken with minimal disruption to the public, with the site screened off and all construction vehicles and facilities contained within the hoarding. Building materials will be retained on site to build up the levels and reduce the amount of waste material disposal and vehicle movement.

9.2 Effect

The existing buildings themselves are of no architectural or historic value and in their present derelict state detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area. Their significance is correspondingly low. Hence the loss of the buildings will have no adverse effect upon the character or the significance of the conservation area. Its visual appearance will however be improved by the removal of the long-derelict structures, as will the setting of the adjacent Grade II listed 9 Market Place. In addition, the proposal also delivers a significant public benefit in terms of facilitating expansion of the Prescott Shopping Centre which in turn will generate a favourable effect upon the local economy.

9.3 Conclusion

For the reasons given above, it is concluded that the proposal is therefore in complete accordance with national guidance on the historic environment, along with the relevant local plan policies, and therefore merits approval without delay.