

**Consolidation Report
Historical Impact Assessment for the erven at 148, 152, and
156 St Thomas Road, and 241 and 243 Currie Road, Durban**

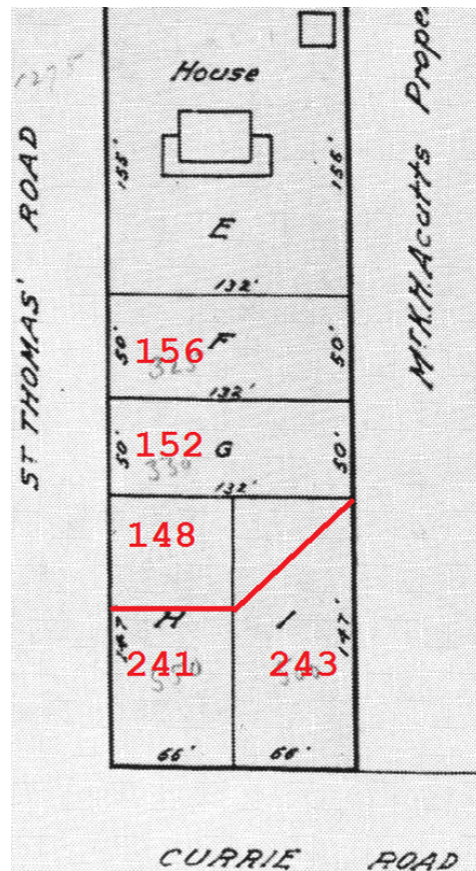


Fig 1: Contemporary sites in red superimposed on 1918 layout. Note that this is a rough plan as fragmentation of the separate erven occurred on an ad-hoc basis

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1. Introduction

Deborah Whelan of Archaic Consulting was requested by Ms Katharine Reardon of Katharine Reardon Properties to prepare a consolidation report for submission to *Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali* which addressed the heritage value of the five sites in question. The five sites, referred to by street address, are dealt with individually as composite properties since most of them consist of strange parcels of alienated land.

The intention of the developer is to demolish all buildings on the sites, and replace them with a five story apartment block which has vehicular access to all levels.

The site slopes steeply towards Currie Road and the Botanic Gardens, giving a clear view across the road towards the coastline. The old Observatory site situated below Currie Road is overgrown and ill-maintained, adding an air of neglect and increasing the need for security.

2. Methodology and terms of reference

Debbie Whelan visited the site on 19 June and met with Ms Reardon and Professor Maurice Mars, one of the property owners. A second visit was carried out on 28 June.

Plans of the original buildings currently on the property were provided to Archaic Consulting by Ms Reardon. Other information was gleaned from the Provincial Archives Repository, the Provincial Deeds Office in Pietermaritzburg, and other regional and district libraries. Known published sources were also consulted, many of them in the author's possession. In addition, the 1937 aerial photographs were consulted, but clear photos of this area were not available.

Given that the brief was in terms of a site consolidation report, it is understood that the basic reference point is the conjunction of a number of sites which at present have structures on them. This leads to the issues being broader ones of context, streetscape and landscape, rather than scrutiny of individual structures. For this reason, the external fabric has been discussed in this report, rather than in depth discussions of internal alterations and conditions.

The terms of reference for this report is the KwaZulu-Natal Heritage Act no 4 of 2008 and its consequent regulations dated March 2012, as well as the South African Heritage Resources Act no 25 of 1999.

3. History of site

The sites in question are all part of a larger erf 2220. This greater and original site itself is of interest since the 2 acre plot, known as Sub 11 Block B belonged to George Russell, a famous early settler, contemporary of George Cato and author of *History of Old Durban* (1899). The survey diagram shows that this parent property was surveyed for sale in 1857, at the same time that this block of the Berea was opened up for settlement. On this site the Russell family owned a large house named Longlands. George Russell is described in the 1889 Natal Directory and Almanac as living, simply, at 'Musgrave Road'.¹ Access to the site at the time was most likely from this direction, as the tram ran along Musgrave Road.

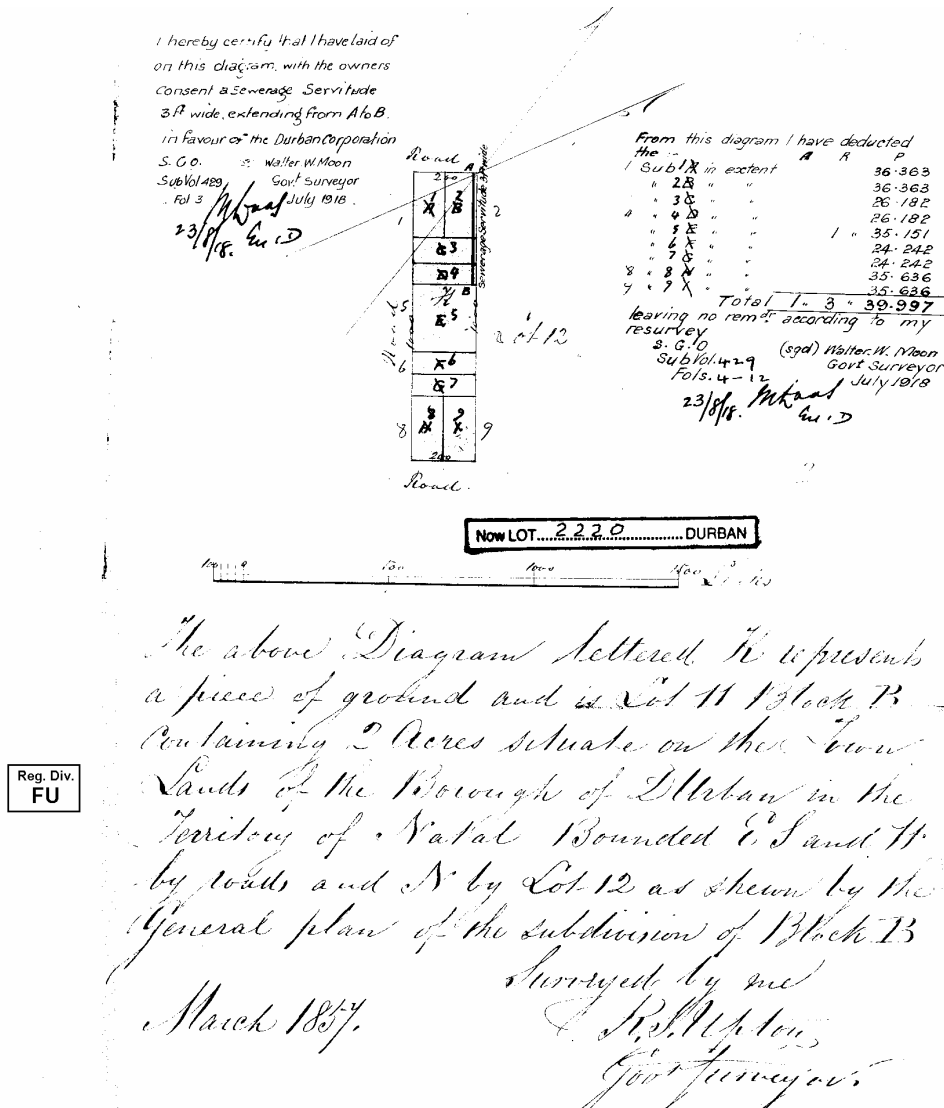


Fig 2: Survey diagram for the original site, 11 of Block B.

Brian Kearney notes of the early development of this Block B area of the Berea that 'The character of the area was (thus) established from an early time: freestanding villas in gardens with luxurious avenues of jacaranda, spathodea and other exotics winding along the slopes.' The photograph in fig below shows Longlands House as being no different. Musgrave Road was hardened as early as 1878, with the tramlines being installed the following year (Kearney 1984:102).

¹ Significantly, George Russell was in a partnership named Russell and Marriott 'Agents and Notaries Public and Co.' Today this company still exists as the financial group, Marriott.

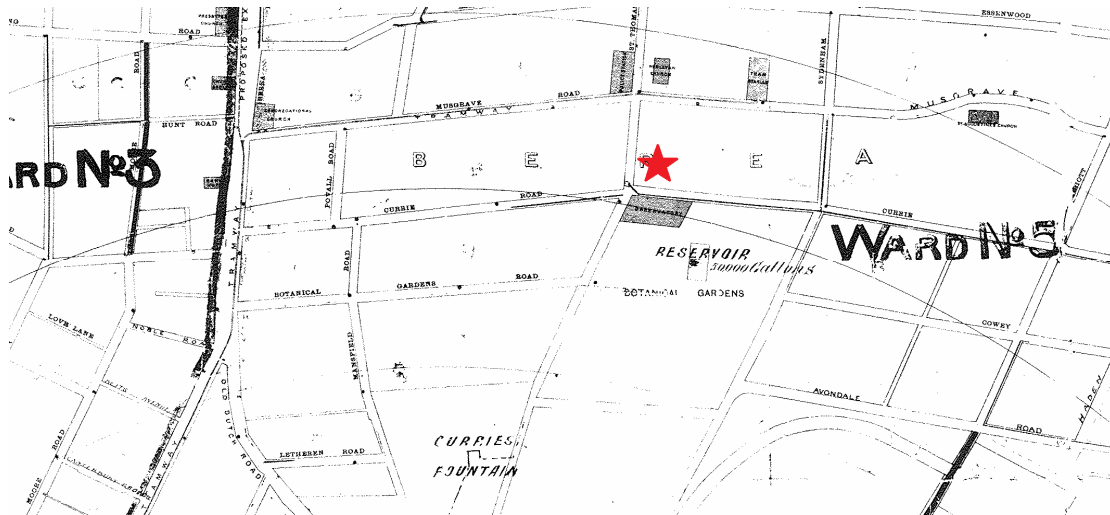


Fig 3: Borough Map 1892

The Durban Borough map of 1892 clearly shows the vicinity of the site (marked with a red star by the author). What is notable on this is the position of the Reservoir and the Observatory (the hatched block below the star). Certainly, by this point, the Russell family would have been resident in the house, with George Russell perhaps penning his famous *History of Old Durban* published only 7 years later. Certainly, in his dedication to his wife Frances in the frontispiece of his book, it is recorded that it was written at 'Longlands, Musgrave Road, Durban' (Russell 1899: dedication)².

As noted in the above figure, 11 of Block B was surveyed in 1857. 'Longlands' the house was situated on subdivision E in the above, the larger section in the middle. This house was demolished to make way for the row of houses which exist today. However, it must be stated that the properties involved in this report did not fall into subdivision E as above. Notably, it would appear that the construction of houses in this street, which all occurred at about the same time (save for number 251 Currie Road which was constructed much later) were the subjects of speculative development.

The land register record reads thus:

In 1857 the property was a 2 acre grant by the Durban Corporation to Walter Brunton, who transferred it to A Curle in 1864, and in the same year to Thomas Poynton. In 1867 it passed into the Russell family, the official owner being Frances Mathilda Russell. Frances, who was born Shaw, died in 1917³. The property was then split: In 1918 Sub C was transferred to Eliza A Dyer, Subdivisions A and B to Josephine Nichol, Subdivision E to William Henry Ric Stansen (name unclear) Subdivision F to Walter R Logan, Subdivision G to Ernest Leslie Acutt, Subdivision H and I to Aaron Kaplan, and Subdivision D to Kenelm H Acutt, who, incidentally, owned the adjoining strip of land between Musgrave Road and Currie Road (See fig above). In the interim, GM McDonald was resident at Longlands, according to the Natal Directory and Almanac for 1919, and, certainly at this point, he was the only official resident of this strip of land on St Thomas Road.

² This volume has been scrutinised for reference to Longlands, but it deals with the development of greater Durban until 1860 and has scant mention of Russell's private dealings.

³ MSCE 0 2096/1917



Fig 4: Photograph of Longlands (Malherbe 1965: 261)

Of the subdivisions concerning this report directly, Subdivision 7, originally known as Subdivision G transferred to EL Acutt, remained intact: today this forms part of 152 St Thomas Road. The transactional history reads thus:

Sub 7 of Lot 2220
1918 FM Russell to Ernest Leslie Acutt
1920 Madeline Churchill Acutt
1925 Muriel G Woodhead
1925 Constance H Gibson
1943 Lawrence C Clarkson
1960 Doris Aileen Edwards
1962 Edward Christian Kriel
1975 Sarah Kathleen Dottridge
1980 Felicity Harcourt

Sub 8 and 9, ie Subdivisions H and I purchased by Kaplan, have a similar history: viz:

1918 FM Russell to Aaron Kaplan
1920 Zelda Kaplan
1921 John PW Howden
 Sub 3 1922 Builders Ltd
 Sub 2 1922 Builders Ltd
 Sub 1 1922 Madeline Churchill Acutt

The portions that this report is directly concerned with thus the above: those awarded to Walter R Logan, Ernest Leslie Acutt and Aaron Kaplan in the 1918 transfers. Interestingly, the document depicted in Fig 5 below is thought to have been the auction notice for this particular series of subdivision sales. The fact that R Acutt and Sons were the auctioneers and that two Acutt family members purchased plots is surely no coincidence.

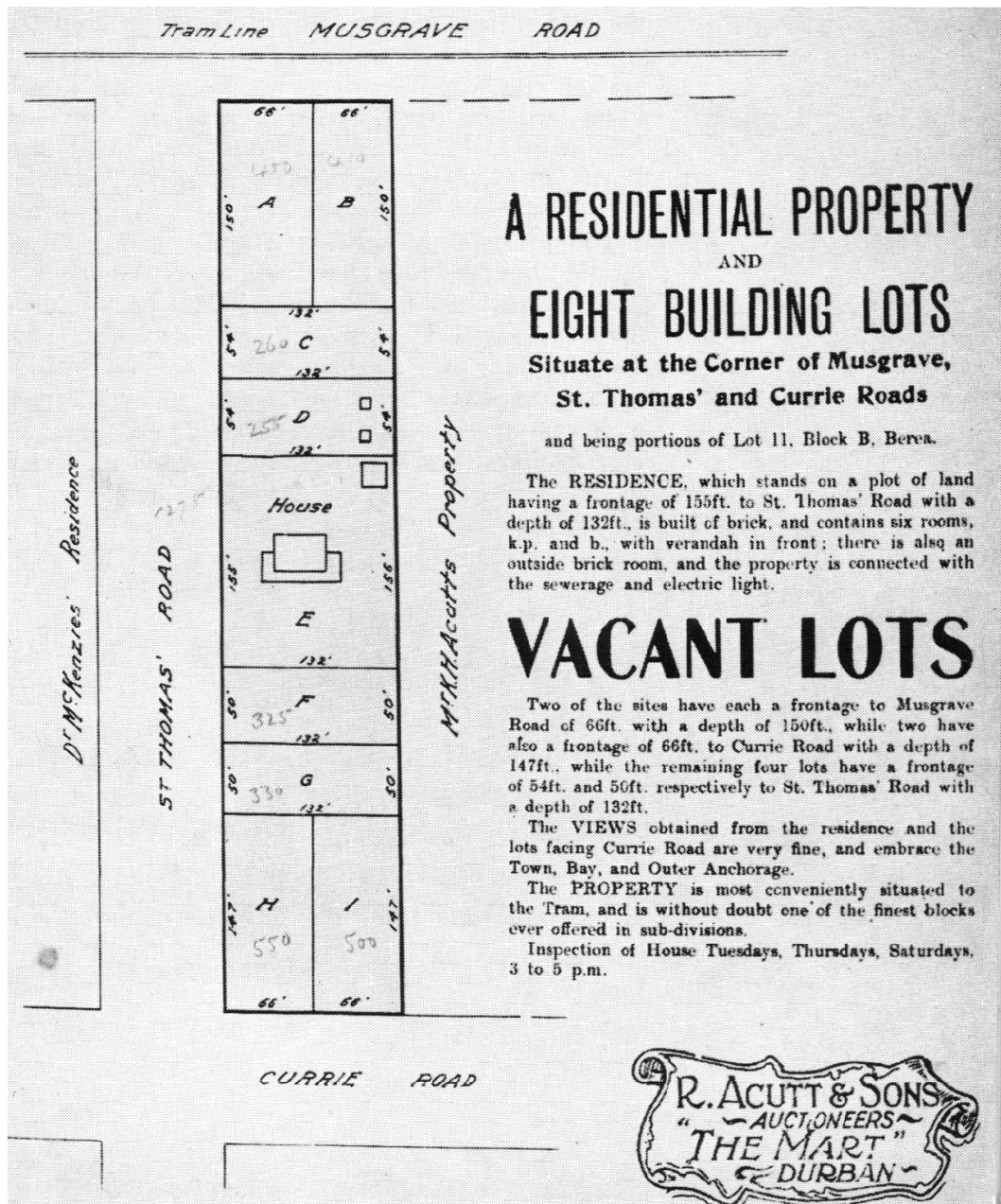


Fig 5: Description of auction of properties forming 11 Block B (ca 1918)

Note that the Longlands House is described as being of brick with 6 rooms, 'kp' and b' with veranda in front'. At the time of this division of lands, it was supplied with electricity and sewerage connections.

4. Assessment of buildings: architectural and historical significance

It is to be noted that, in Brian Kearney's 'A Revised listing of the important places and buildings in Durban' (1984) there is no mention of properties of architectural value in this section of St Thomas Road.

4.1 148 St Thomas Road (15 of 9 and 12 of 8 of Lot 2220)

148 St Thomas Road consists of 2 separate erven, namely Subdivision 15 of 9 and Subdivision 12 of 8. Both have the same transactional history, as evidenced in the Land Register information below.

1922 JP Howden to Builders Ltd
1922 Emma Cordelia Ridgeway
1928 Theodore Pitcairn
1939 Hugh S Forfar
1943 Naomi Chanani
1954 Cecil Middleton Stuart
1956 Paul Ernst Mars
1980 Maurice Mars

148 St Thomas was designed in an Arts and Crafts domestic style, as a 'cottage' double story for Builders Ltd, a construction company that was the owner in 1922. It is suspected that Builders Ltd was owned by WE Logan, who built the house for himself at 156 St Thomas. Builders Ltd were also responsible for the construction of 243 Currie Road.⁴ The Natal Almanac and Directory of 1924 shows Mr JH Ridgeway (Solicitor) resident in this house. In the Land Register above it is noted that Emma Cordelia Ridgeway purchased the property in 1922. By 1932, JS Barry had moved in, suggesting that Pitcairn had leased out the property.

By the time the Chanani's applied for an extension in 1950, it had already had extensive alterations to the rear. The Chanani's applied to add a veranda on to the front elevation, removing much of the essence of the original Arts and Crafts building.



Fig 6: Street Elevation: 148 St Thomas Road

⁴ Interestingly, J Logan, builder is noted in the Natal Directory and Almanac, but this is much later in the late 1940s.

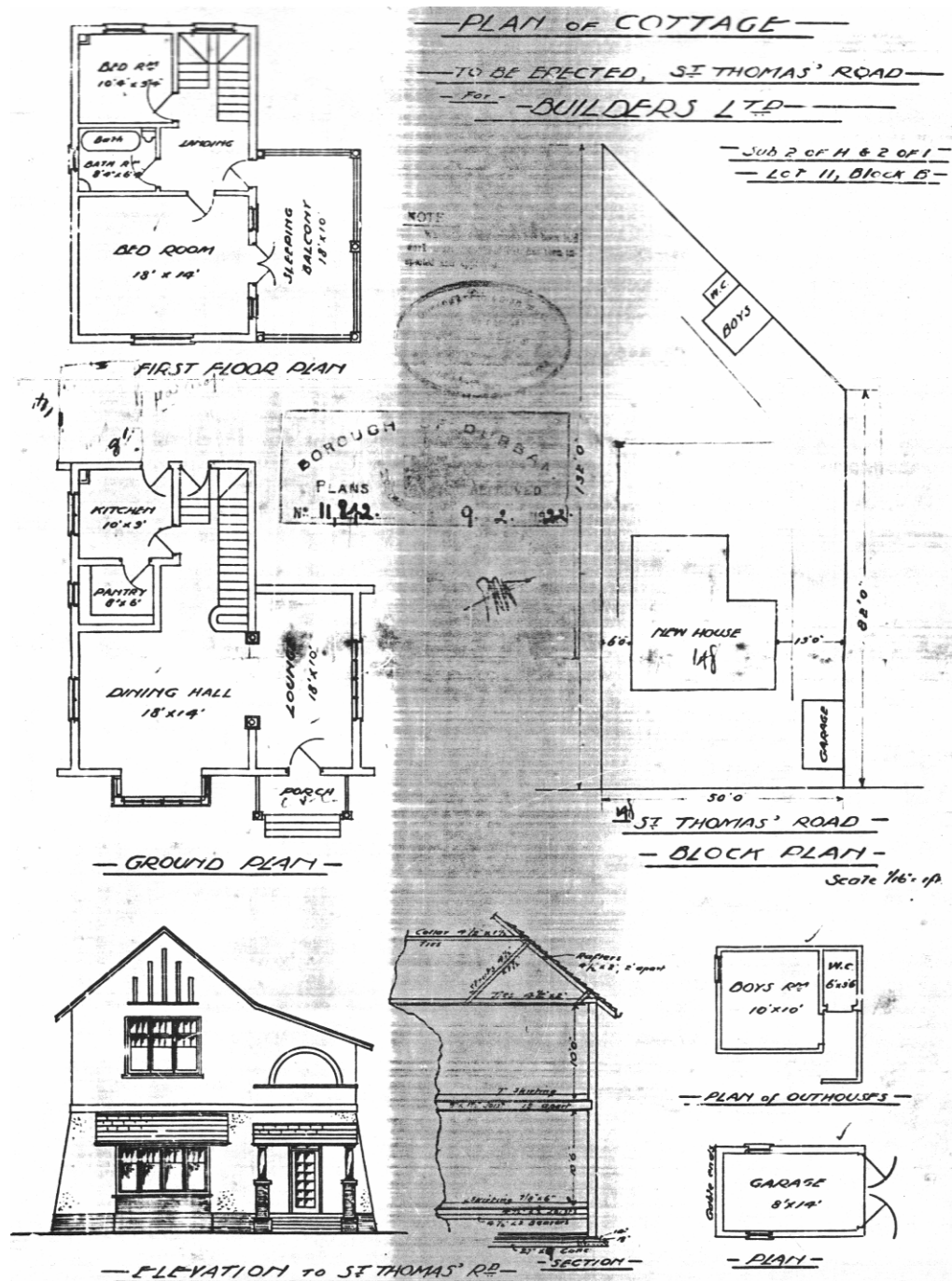


Fig 7: Original plan of 148 St Thomas Road

Currently, it is inhabited and is well maintained.

Significance:

148 St Thomas Road	Local	Regional	National	International
Architectural	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low
Technical	low	low	low	low
Scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

The house situated at 148 St Thomas Road has limited significance on all levels

4.2 152 St Thomas Road (Subdivision 7, 11 of 8 and 14 of 8 of Lot 2220)

152 St Thomas Road consists of 3 portions, namely Subdivision 7, the original subdivision G, Subdivision 11 of 8 and Subdivision 14 of 8.



Fig 8: Street Elevation: 152 St Thomas Road

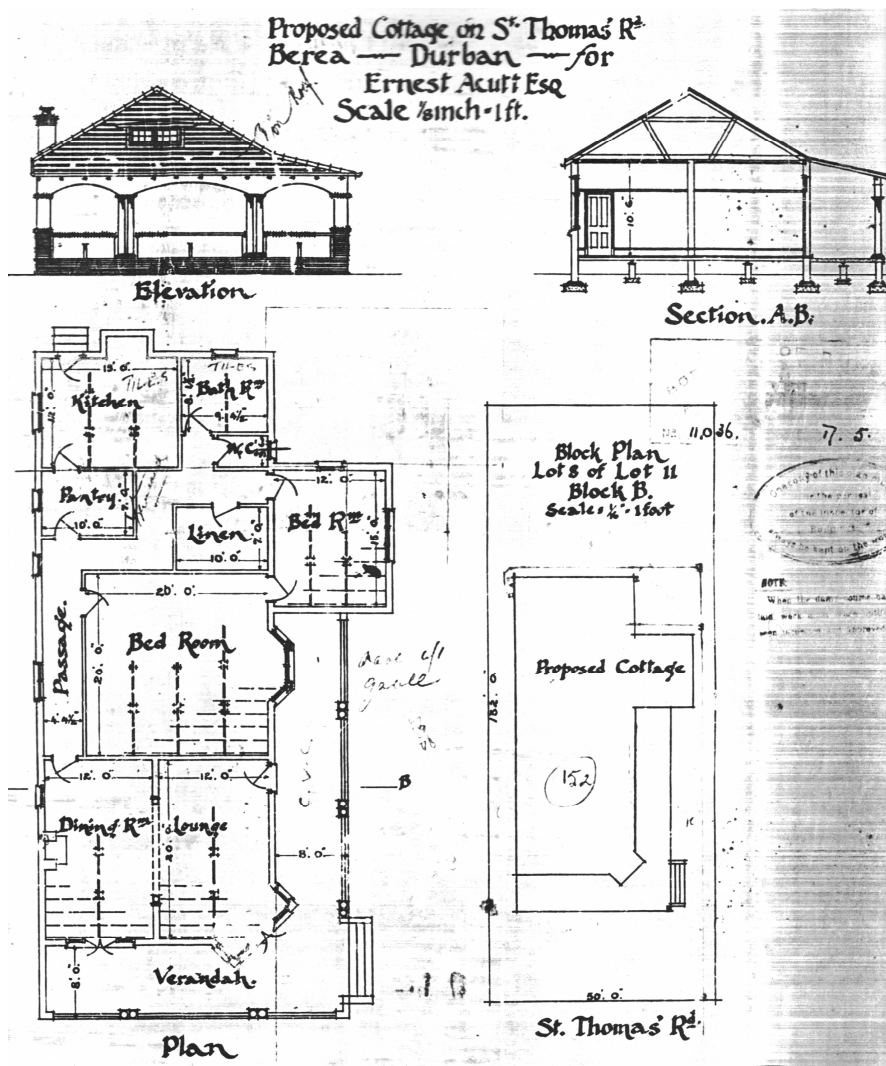


Fig 9: Original Plans of 152 St Thomas Road

The Land Register history of the latter two subdivisions is as follows:

1922 JPW Howden to Madelaine Churchill Acutt
1925 Muriel G Woodhead
1928 Constance H Gibson
1943 Lawrence C Clarkson
1960 Doris Aileen Edwards
1962 Edward Christian Kriel
1975 Sarah Kathleen Dottridge (born Smythe)
1980 Felicity Harcourt

The plans of the house record that it was designed in 1920 for Mr E Acutt Esq, but he does not appear to have lived in it: The Natal Directory and Almanac of 1924 records that WJ Mill, Hairdresser, was resident at this address. In 1932 J Gibson, presumably Constance Gibson's husband or son was resident, and in 1949, Major LC Clarkson, supporting the land register information. Certainly, plans submitted to Durban Corporation in 1934 show the construction of a double stories section at the rear, adding on to was essentially a simple Arts and Crafts Cottage. Major Clarkson also carried out renovations in 1951. In 1961 Doris Aileen Edwards enclosed what was a good east facing veranda. The final drawing submitted is a reproofing drawing approved in 1988, with the alteration of roofing from corrugated iron to slate tiles.

It is understood that this house has been vacant for some time, and is in bad condition having been partly stripped in the duration.

Significance:

152 St Thomas Road	Local	Regional	National	International
Architectural	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low
Technical	low	low	low	low
Scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

The house situated at 152 St Thomas Road has limited significance on all levels

4.3 156 St Thomas Road (Subdivision 6 of Lot 2220)

156 St Thomas consists of portion 6, previously known as Lot F. The transactional history is as follows:

1918 FM Russell transferred to Walter E Logan
1945 John Logan, Catherine Brown, Edna Logan
1953 Jean S Woodford
1985 Susan Mars

This property was originally designed and built for WE Logan, around the time of the other houses in 1922 (the writing is not very distinct on the plans). Notably, Logan was reasonably well off, given that the original plans make provision for a 'Motor garage'.

In 1924, the Natal Almanac and Directory records WE Logan as being resident, and then in 1932 elaborates, with noting WE Logan, Builder, as resident at 156 St Thomas Road. By 1956 J Logan, builder, was recorded as being resident.

Again, the architectural idiom is domestic Arts and Crafts revival. This is a large double story house with a truncated veranda meeting a bay window at ground level. The access was from steps to the side. Alterations enclosing the veranda and adding a new door to the access were only carried out by the present owners in 1990.



Fig 10: Street Elevation: 156 St Thomas Road

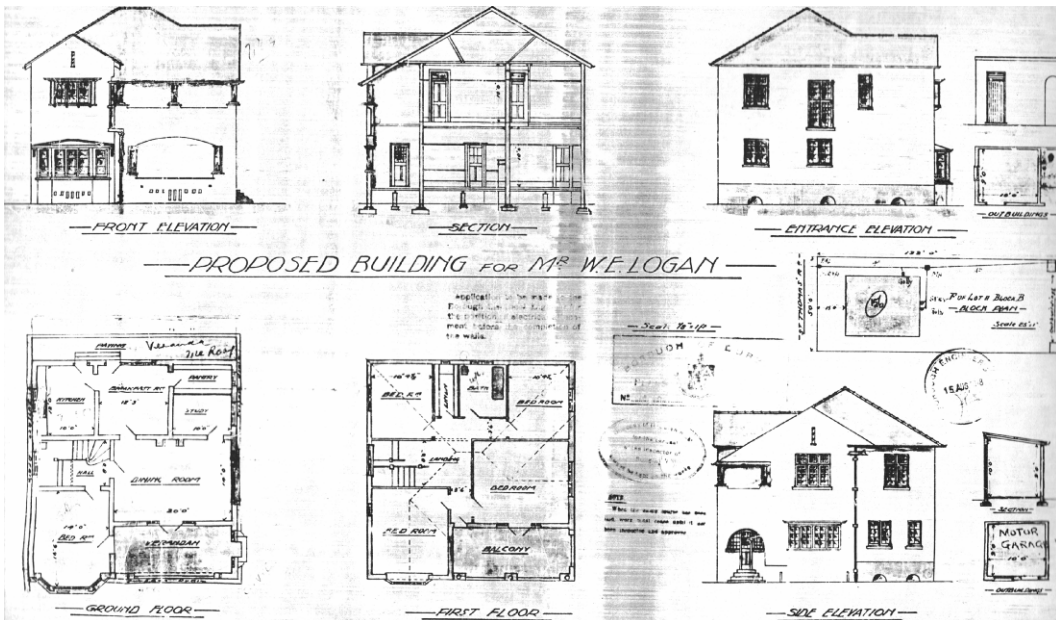


Fig 11: Original plans of 156 St Thomas Road

Significance:

156 St Thomas Road	Local	Regional	National	International
Architectural	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low
Technical	low	low	low	low
Scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

The house situated at 156 St Thomas Road has limited significance on all levels

4.4 241 Currie Road (Subdivision 13 and 16 of Lot 2220)

For some reason, Builders Ltd did not develop this site, and it appears to have been considered part of its neighbour at 148 St Thomas Road⁵. Certainly, the same owners owned both plots, until the transfer by Chanani to Greenstone in 1953. 241 Currie, on the corner, consists of unconsolidated Subdivisions 13 and 16. Their transactional history is as follows. Incidentally, the house remains in the Parkington family.



Fig 12: Street Elevation (on St Thomas Road) of 241 Currie Road

1922 JPW Howden to Builders Ltd
1924 Emma Cordelia Ridgeway
1928 Theodore Pitcairn
1939 Hugh S Forfar
1943 Phyllis E Duffield
1945 Naomi Chanani
1953 Leah Greenstone
1956 Selwyn Tomson
1975 Richard Allan Jones
1983 Evelyn Louise Christie Parkington

This house is unlike all of its neighbours and is somewhat of an anomaly in the area. Designed by Campbell, Bernstein and Irving consulting Engineers⁶ in 1957, it is a modernist ranch style house, in the idiom of Frank Lloyd Wright constructed of face-brick and timber with ribbon windows to the south.

The primary entrance is from Currie Road, via a little used pedestrian stair and vehicular entrance. It would appear that this has changed to access from St Thomas Road, as the Currie Road edge is highly planted and riddled with razor wire. In addition, the large floor to ceiling picture windows on the east side which face the view have been largely obscured by intensive vegetation.

⁵ Note that in the Natal Almanacs and Directories 1924 through to 1949 there is no mention of 241 Currie Road, reinforcing the idea that this was a vacant site.

⁶ 'CBI was established initially in Durban in 1944, when Walter Campbell, retired Durban City Engineer, and Mark Bernstein formed a partnership which Hugh Irving joined in 1950.'
(http://www.cbiconsulting.co.za/jit_default_1080.htm)

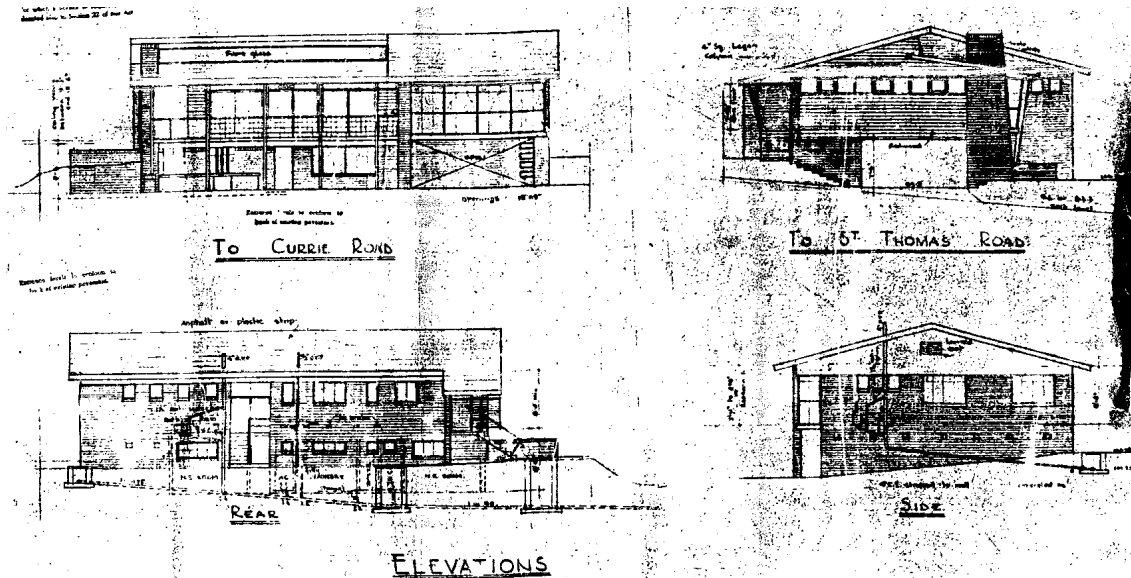


Fig 13: Original plans of the house at 241 Currie Road

Significance:

241 Currie Road	Local	Regional	National	International
Architectural (CBI Engineers)	medium	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low
Technical	low	low	low	low
Scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

The house at 241 Currie Road has medium significance, designed by Campbell, Bernstein and Irving Consulting Engineers. It has no known significance on other levels. Other examples do exist in the Berea area and suburbs around Durban.

4.5 243 Currie Road (Subdivision 17 of 9 of Lot 2220)

243 Currie Road is located on what was known as Lot II Subdivision I. The transactional history is as follows:

- 1922 JPW Howden to Builders Ltd
- 1922 James Findlay Henderson
- 1923 Mary Ellen Burns
- 1928 John Symes
- 1937 Frieda R Evans
- 1941 Trevor Blake
- 1970 Jack Harry Douglas Arnold
- 1983 David John Wilson Campbell and Ian Stuart Wilson Campbell
- 1990 ½ share joint Estate of the Estate of Ian Wilson Campbell and Bernice Scott Campbell

This is also a speculative building constructed by Builders Ltd in 1922, but is a single story Arts and Crafts building. It originally had a centrally located veranda to the front, flanked by matching bays. It was also supplied with a wood and iron garage. Extensive alterations were carried out in 1986, when the Campbells owned it, adding the dormer windows in the roof, enclosing the front veranda and carrying out extensive alterations to the rear of the house.



Fig 14: Street Elevation: 243 Currie Road

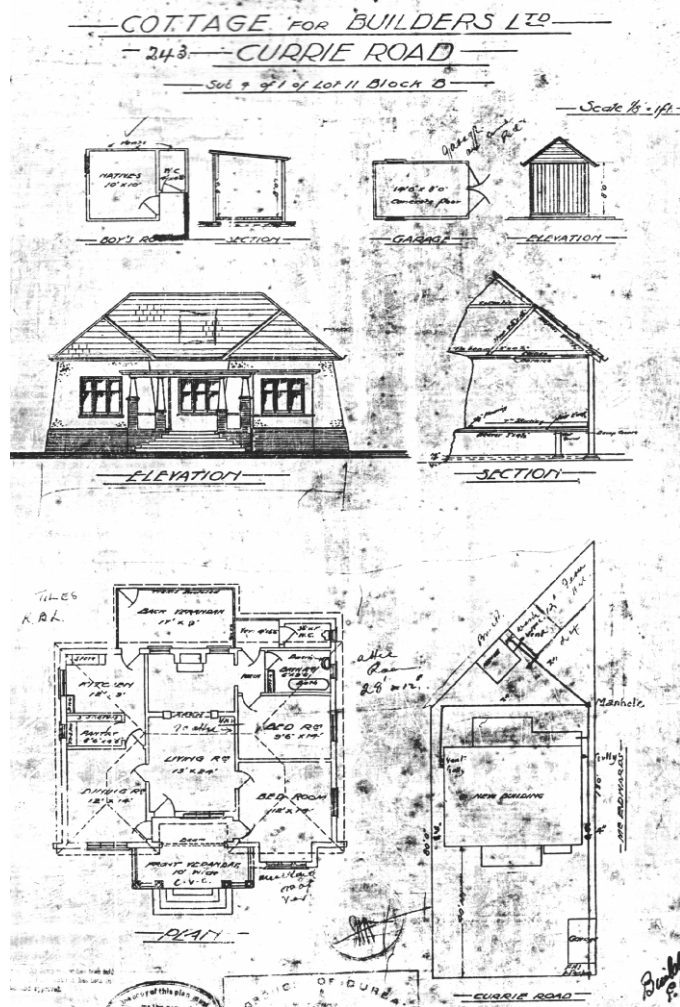


Fig 15: Original plans of 243 Currie Road

Significance:

243 Currie Road	Local	Regional	National	International
Architectural	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low
Technical	low	low	low	low
Scientific	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low

The house situated at 243 Currie Road has limited significance on all levels

5. Area grain study

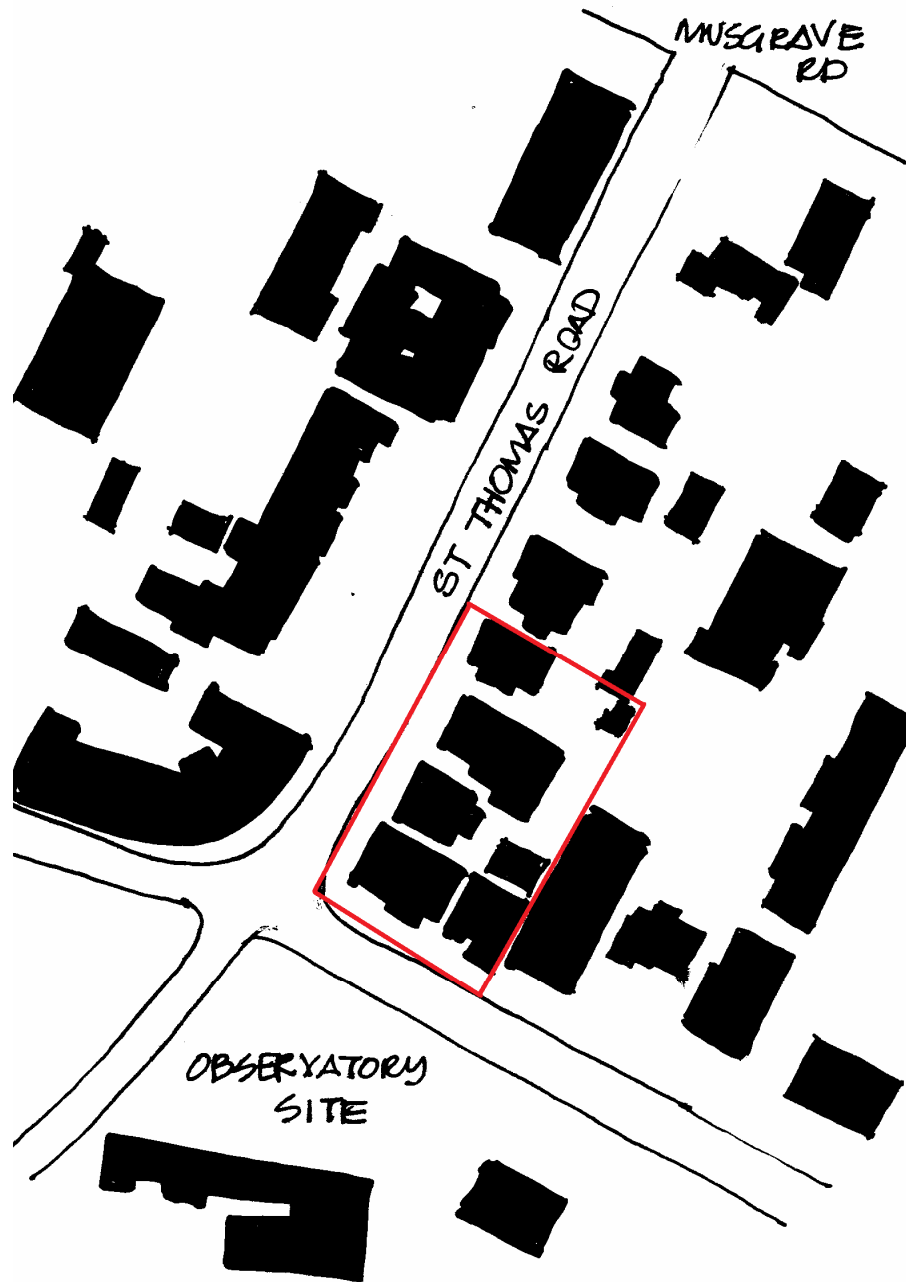


Fig 16: Figure ground of immediate area: properties under discussion are encircled in red

The figure ground study above shows that the building fabric in the area is being hard pressed towards densification: across St Thomas Road are substantial blocks of apartment buildings, and certainly what is left as a rather dislocated streetscape is encroached upon by structures of similar ilk. Kilburn Avenue and Caister Crescent in the next block north display a more rational method of densification, whilst keeping the streetscape more intact.

Below Currie Road is the old Observatory site, largely overgrown and not visible from the road.

6. Comments on streetscape and amenity

The group of buildings discussed, apart from the modernist anomaly at 241 Currie Road, are modest examples of largely speculative housing from the 1920s. They vary in scale and are largely obscured due to the high walls that conceal them. Most are also highly barricaded, indicating issues with security, which, it appears, does not seem to affect their neighbours above 158 Currie Road in the same fashion.⁷ This has the effect of creating an exclusive wall architecture, obscuring the houses behind. Despite this, as a group the buildings have limited value: even though they have a rhythm in their spacing, they are inconsistent in their scale and proportions, and, apart from 156 St Thomas Road which has some discourse with its neighbour at 158, do not contribute in any major way to the streetscape as a whole.



Fig 17: Showing streetscape looking up St Thomas Road



Across the road are the more noteworthy Observatory Court, and two blocks of Modernist apartments named Woodhall and Forest Hill which provide a coherent entrance and wallscape to the southern edge of St Thomas Road. Indeed, these more recent structures represent better architectural examples, compared with the much altered and concealed examples on the northern side.

It is also to be noted that the contours are steep moving towards Currie Road, and that the houses situated at 241 Currie and 148 St Thomas are barely seen from the intersection of Musgrave and St Thomas Roads.

Fig 18: Streetscape of Forest Hill and Woodhall

⁷ The proximity to the pedestrian extension of Currie Road and the dilapidated Observatory site are indicated as problems.



Fig 19: Streetscape on the south side of St Thomas Road, showing slope



Fig 20: Showing streetscape closer towards Musgrave Road, with more modest walling and security precautions.



Fig 21: Showing sweeping Entrance into St Thomas Road with Observatory Court

Amenity in on the north side of the road appears scant. The high level of security minimises neighbourhood and personal interaction.

7. Conclusions and mitigatory recommendations

The author is of the opinion that demolition of the structures at 148, 152, 156 St Thomas Road, and 241 and 243 Currie Road is an option.

Nothing exists of the original site and its homestead, notably owned by George Russell. This was obliterated in the early 1920s with the fragmentation of the property after the death of Russell's widow. Small plots were sold off, and some developed by a property speculator named Logan, who is assumed to have owned Builder's Ltd⁸, a construction company that designed and built some of the houses. Ernest Acutt, another property speculator, is also involved with the development of 152 St Thomas Road. Indeed, in some ways, the history of this street is a microcosm of early Durban property speculation personalities.

Interestingly, 241 Currie Road remained undeveloped until the 1950s, when Selwyn Thomson constructed an anomalous Frank Lloyd Wright-styled ranch house from timber and brick. Oddly, the neighbours were under the impression that the land belonged to them, and were alarmed with the sudden commencement of construction. This remains perhaps the most significant house in the row, albeit falling without the 60 year clause. As noted, other examples still exist on the Berea and the greater Durban area.

The remainder of the houses, those as 148, 152 and 156 St Thomas Road, and 243 Currie Road, are all modest construction in Arts and Crafts revival idioms built by property speculators. They have been altered and modified through the years, requiring extra accommodation from their humble beginnings, and added security as times changed. They are hidden behind large walls, and present little streetscape, unlike their counterparts further up St Thomas Road. Architecturally their merit is limited, and much better examples of these houses, and better streetscapes, are littered across the Berea.

However, in sanctioning demolition, it is the responsibility of the developer to provide equal or better street amenity than exists. This can be achieved to better effect by acknowledging the extant built environment, and using the structures as clues for the articulation and massing of the new building.

7.1 Addressing scale



Fig 22: Cognizance can be taken from adjacent structures in the establishment of scale and its articulation- see red line as generator of height and scale for new structure

⁸ The Natal Almanac and Directory was checked for ownership of the property, but nothing was forthcoming from this source.

Sympathetic scale is important in coherent and cohesive urban environments. In this case, opportunity is presented by the steepness of St Thomas Road as it runs towards Currie Road, enabling partial excavation and the achievement of a higher building which is, in turn, disguised by the landscape.

It would be sensible to use the height of the building at 158 St Thomas Road, as well as taking cognizance of that of Woodhall across the road, as a starting point for generating the new building's height. Massing can also be indicated by the structures across the street, balancing out the entrance to St Thomas Road, as it were.

7.2: Addressing streetscape

Little active streetscape of any value exists on the northern edge of the lower end of St Thomas Road at present, for a variety of reasons.



Fig 23: Entrance to upper section of St Thomas Road with Observatory Court on the left- an unbalanced urban scenario

Proactive design tactics can remedy situations, and, in this case, the unbalanced 'entrance' to upper St Thomas Road is an example. The possibility of changing this can be achieved by creating a positive streetscape, rather than a collection of modest buildings which individually disappear behind walls as at present.

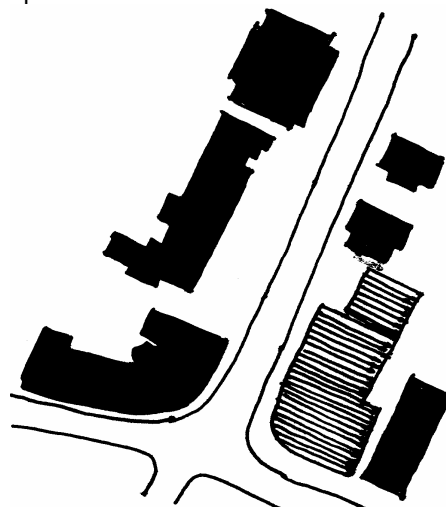


Fig 24: Showing possible massing in order to balance entrance to St Thomas Road. New structure hatched

7.3. Opportunity

Opportunity exists for the architects to address both the scale and streetscape issues: the former is made easier by the strong slope to the road and the latter by intentionally creating a streetscape: an entrance to this portion of upper St Thomas Road by forming a balanced bookend to Observatory Court. Indeed, it is felt that using this building as a reference point for scale, proportion and modulation, a new structure with similar massing can contribute and improve what presently is a dislocated and unbalanced streetscape in Currie Road.

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