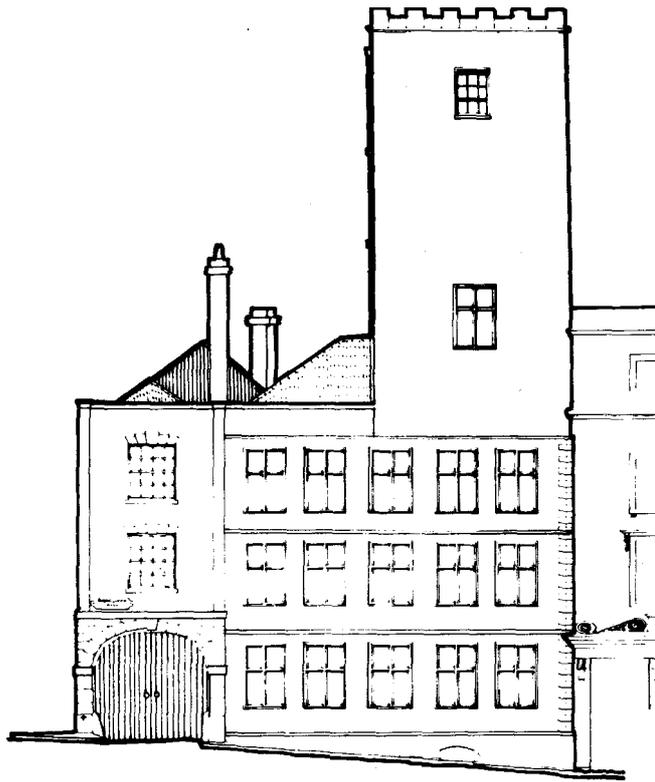


REDCLIFF SHOT TOWER by John Mosse



John Mosse

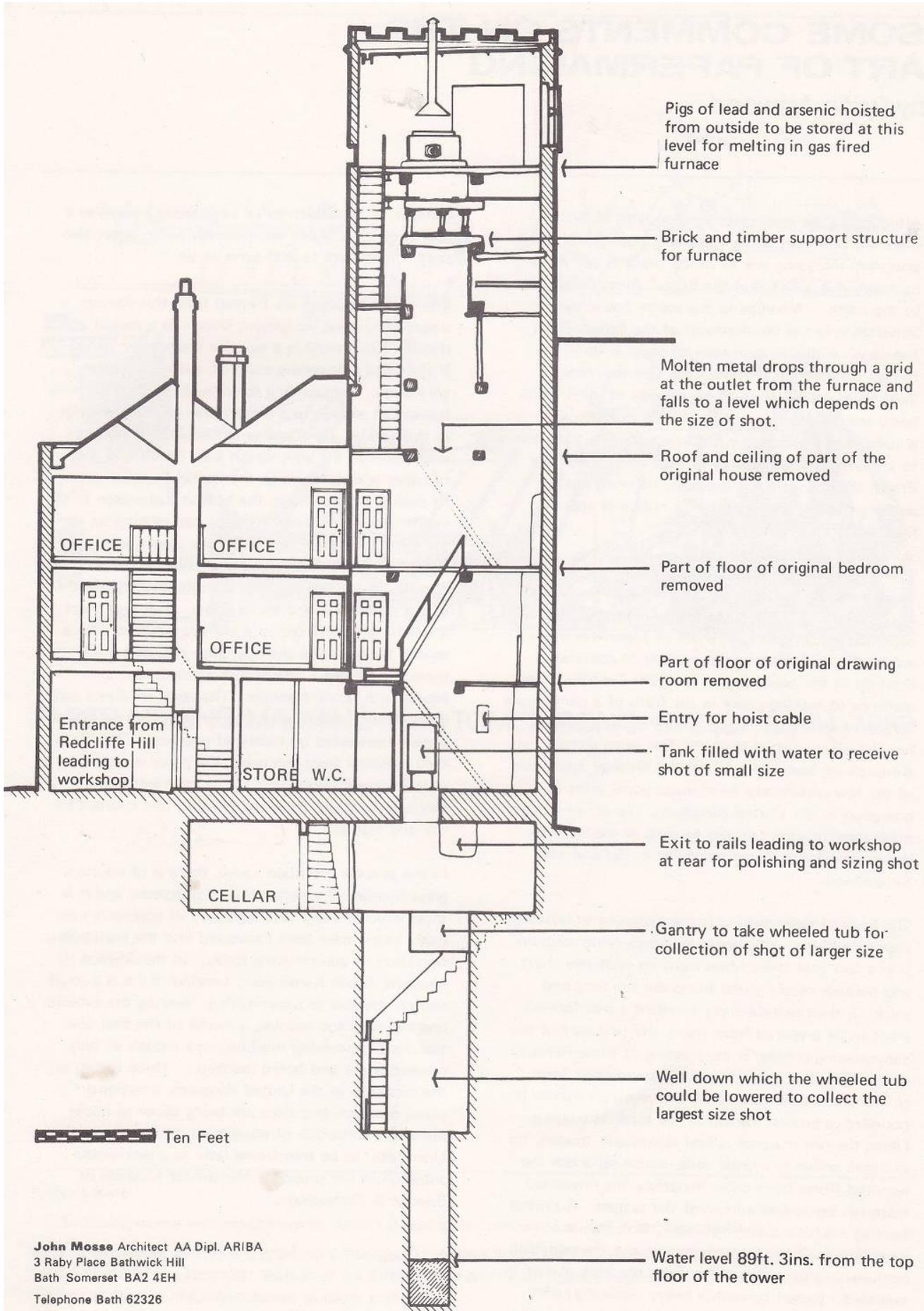
(William Watts took out a patent in 1782 for an improved method of manufacturing lead shot, and shortly afterwards he built a shot tower on top of his house in Redcliff Hill. This building, the first shot tower in the world, was in continuous use for the manufacture of lead shot until the end of 1968, when Sheldon, Bush and Patent Shot Company transferred their shot-making to a new tower in Cheese Lane and the old shot tower was demolished in the interest of road-widening. Immediately before its demolition, Bristol City Museum commissioned John Mosse to make a set of drawings of the tower. He has written the following note for BIAS Journal, to accompany two of his drawings).

Very shortly before its demolition last year, I was asked by the Bristol City Museum to undertake an architectural survey of the Redcliff Shot Tower. I was warned not to interfere in any way with the production of shot, and advised to take very great care because of the condition of the building. The Museum very thoughtfully arranged for insurance, which gave a helpful feeling of confidence during the survey, and in the event there was no damage either to myself, or to the building, or to my wife - who came to take measurements. She rightly claimed a cleaning bill at the end of the survey, together with a hair-do, and her natural caution kept us both out of danger.

There is little doubt that the building had reached the end of its useful life, and although one regrets its passing, it did not altogether compliment the architecture of St. Mary's Church across the road, which now stands free against the skyline. Within the Shot Tower itself, many of the walls and particularly the floors and roofs had grown tired. On one occasion, as I walked across an upper floor, we realised that the windows were moving in and out in rhythm with my footsteps. The deflection of the floor was sufficient to act as a diaphragm pump and change the air pressure within the space as I went: I kept moving, and returned along the wall.

The survey showed that the Tower itself was thirteen inches out of true, and that in one place its walls were lath and plaster. The more one explored and examined the building, together with the process of pouring shot, the less likely the whole enterprise seemed to be, and just as the aerodynamist has doubts as to the prospects of flight on the part of the bee, one wonders if perhaps the process of pouring shot would ever have started if it had been approached in a scientific manner. Nevertheless, the building has provided many tons of shot, and it is the "Father" of many other purpose-built shot towers throughout the world. We were on one occasion privileged to witness the silvery stream of lead alloy falling down the Tower into the water tank below, and later to see the familiar round grains being sieved and polished in the buildings to the rear of the Tower. But the workman seemed to be in attendance, rather than in control of the process, and our curiosity for descriptive information went unrewarded.

The finished drawings were much assisted by the fine photographs taken by Neil Cossons before and during demolition. There was also real co-operation with the owners and with all sections of the City Authorities, which has ensured that, although it has disappeared, the Redcliff Shot Tower has become a properly recorded part of Bristol's Industrial Archaeology.



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