

**NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT**

Report 831

**A Building Record of Ostend House, Ostend Gap  
Walcott, Happisburgh, Norfolk**

36222 HAP

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Local Authority No.076759

Fig.1 is based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map with the permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office © Crown Copyright 'Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings' Norfolk County Council, County Hall, Norwich (07/01/2004). **Reference copy: no further copies to be made.**



Location: Ostend House, Ostend Gap, Walcott, Happisburgh  
Grid Ref: TG 3674 3235  
HER No: 36222 HAP  
Date of fieldwork: June 2003

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## **Summary**

*Ostend House is a two-cell dwelling, of probable late 16th century origin, consisting of one heated room and one larger unheated room on each floor. The details of the heated rooms are very ornate and suggest a high status, though obscure, origin. Despite so much of the fabric being visible it is difficult to arrive at any positive statement about the architectural development of Ostend House. This difficulty is exacerbated by the exceptional amount of rebuilding which took place throughout the active life of the building, between the 17th and 20th centuries.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

(Fig. 1)

Ostend House stands on the edge of a 20th-century housing estate and close to the cliff edge at Walcott, in north-east Norfolk. Permission was given for the building to be demolished and consequently a descriptive and interpretative report was requested by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA). It is the intention of this project to establish and elaborate upon the origins and nature of the building and its phases of use.

The work was carried out in accordance with a Project Design, including a Method Statement, prepared by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU/JB/1561) and a Brief issued by NLA (Edwin Rose, 24 February 2003). The project was commissioned by Mr S Holdgate.

## **2.0 Historical Background**

by Edwin Rose

Ostend House is a small 16th to early 17th century house consisting of two rooms (one heated), on two floors. The details of the heated rooms are very ornate and suggest a high status origin. The house is aligned north-south, the north gable facing the cliff. It was altered in the 18th century and extensively re-built and re-roofed in the 19th century. Its present condition is derelict.

Faden's Map of 1797 shows the track that now approaches from the south as a road leading past the house to a group of cottages named as Loungate and then returning south-east along the cliff edge. Bryant's map of 1828 shows a similar layout but the cliff edge road has moved inland. The first edition of the one inch Ordnance Survey map of 1836 shows that the same layout but calls the area "Loungate or Ostend". It is clear from these maps that a considerable amount of coastline has been lost since 1836; however, the 1906 25" map shows the cliff edge as only a short distance north of its present line. It also depicts Ostend House as divided into two properties, with another building parallel to the east, of which all traces have vanished.

The building was photographed and described by Edwin Rose (NLA) in August 2001.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The programme of archaeological works was designed to recover information relating to the date, phasing, character, function, status and significance of the building. A written account of the building, a survey and drawings of the building and photographs of the building were produced to facilitate this. The structure was recorded following Level 3 Guidelines published by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (Third edition, 1996).

### **4.0 Results**

(Figs 2 to 5 and Plates 1 to 12)

#### **Description of standing remains**

At the time of inspection Ostend House was empty and unused; the ground floor ceiling joists had been removed and likewise large areas of plaster especially from the west wall; some of the wall beneath a window at first floor level on the east side was missing and areas of the north gable were dilapidated (Plate 3). The internal partitions had been removed, although the lack of any scars on the outside walls that would have indicated their position suggest they probably had a lathe and plaster (or similar) construction.

The building is two storeys high (Fig. 3) and the principal, brick-built, west facing façade is three bays wide with a central door that is flanked by simple rectangular pilasters with a pediment, although the pilaster on the left-hand side has been removed (Plate 1). At ground floor level the window on the left-hand side is a two-light mullion and transom and on the right-hand side the window is identical, apart from a slightly more convex arch and it has three lights (Plate 1). At first floor level the windows are all two-light casements and again the window on the right-hand side is slightly different in as much as the frame is slightly heavier. The middle window at first floor level is off-centre to the left and is adjacent to a pilaster that is 0.97m away from the central door opening. There is an identical pilaster against the left-hand corner and a wider pilaster against the right-hand corner that projects out less than the other two and dies into the wall face as it approaches the cornice. The cornice has saw tooth decoration with a flat band above and below.

The east facing façade (Plate 2) has an irregular pattern of fenestration with a door opening plus adjoining window on the extreme right-hand side with two small single-light windows to the left. From left to right at first floor level there is one two-light casement window, a three-light frieze window and a large empty former window opening with a badly damaged sill. This façade has been heightened in brickwork by just over a metre for its entire length and from about two-thirds of its length away from the right-hand side this heightening is above bricks laid in an irregular brick-on-edge bond.

The south gable is rendered on the outside face and there is a two-light casement window at ground floor level on both sides of the large chimney stack; a plinth extends across the wall and returns across the pilaster on each of the side walls. As seen from inside the building this façade appears to have been constructed away from, and is consequently later than, the stack.

There is an external chimney stack against the north gable (Plate 3) and the wall on the right-hand side of this was rebuilt in brick in line with the external face of the

stack when the west façade was rebuilt. On the left-hand side of the stack there is a doorway that gave access to a two storey high extension of which only the joist holes in the masonry survive. The corner of the main block consists of single bricks equally interspersed with beach pebbles and a coursed version of this combination is seen on the inside face of the end wall.

As stated earlier no internal partitions survive and three principal ground floor ceiling beams and an encased secondary beam that dates from the 19th or 20th century remain intact. The decoration on the northernmost ceiling beam is particularly fine (Fig. 4, beam 'A' and Plate 4) with a stepped double segment moulding; the bar has a double bobbin profile with scrolled decoration ends and the stop has a bisected foliate motif.

The two other beams have a simple straight chamfer that is terminated with a faceted bar and a simple shallow stop (Fig. 4). The chamfer on the north side of the northernmost of these two beams is 1.3m away from the east wall suggesting that some kind of arrangement for the stairs was against the wall on this side of the beam (Plate 5).

The opening at ground floor level in the north stack has been blocked by the insertion of a 20th century fireplace and the lintel reduced in length by the creation of the door (Plate 10) that gave access to the extension. The lintel has a relatively small straight chamfer that is terminated by a broach stop (Plate 7). At first floor level and to the left of the ground floor fireplace there is a much smaller fireplace with moulded brick cheeks, the design (Plate 6) of which is in the same family as that seen on the beam with the stepped double segment moulding. The top of the opening has been destroyed and is now spanned by a simple timber lintel although the slight beginning of a curve in the brickwork on the right-hand side suggests that initially the opening had a three- or four-centred moulded arch.

The fireplace against the south gable was rebuilt in brick as a 'fireplace-within-a-fireplace' in the 20th century (Plate 12) and is adorned with various niches although the back of the niche on the right-hand side nearest the fireplace is formed by bricks that are part of the 18th-century stack.

The internal face of the east wall shows that all of the openings have been created by altering existing openings (Plate 9), apart from the small central square window and even this has a vertical joint from the right-hand side of the sill to the floor. The origin of this vertical joint is unclear.

The outside face of the west wall is rendered (Plate 1) and the removal of the plaster on the inside shows that the wall has been completely rebuilt in bricks laid in an irregular English bond with the occasional course of brick headers laid both vertically and at an angle (Plate 10). From a point 0.66m away from the right of the doorway to the north corner in the west wall, as seen from inside, the wall increases in width by 0.11m. The top of this increase in thickness corresponds in height with the underside of the former ceiling joists, now discerned by the empty mortises in the ceiling beam.

The roof is in seven bays (Plate 11) and the principal trusses are numbered I to VII from south to north (Fig. 3, truss IV illustrated). There are two purlins in each pitch with chamfered-back ends and two straight collars although the lower collar is absent in the truss adjacent to the each of the stacks. The trusses near the stacks and truss IV have associated tie beams and there is another tie between trusses II

and III. All the joints throughout the roof are reinforced with relatively long pegs. The common joists are relatively small and simply rest on top of the tie with a small supporting batten nailed to part of the face of the tie. Although there is a trap door to the attic space, which appears to be modern, the size of the joists seems precariously small for a used attic, which brings the purpose of the closed partition, that is constructed within truss IV, into question. The roof may have been open to the apex from first floor level and if so the closed partition would have continued down from the tie to the floor level below although this is open to speculation.

## **Discussion**

Despite so much of the fabric being visible it is difficult to arrive at any positive statement about the architectural development of Ostend House, a position exacerbated by the amount of rebuilding.

The earliest dateable features are the fireplace at first floor level in the north gable and the adjacent ground floor ceiling beam, the details of which suggest a late 16th century date. The chamfer on the lintel associated with the fireplace at ground floor level has a small broach stop that could conceivably be contemporary with the beam and fireplace at first floor level. However, given the quality of the detail on the beam and the moulded brickwork around the fireplace the broach stop seems outclassed and this could suggest that the lintel is a 17th-century replacement although obviously the fireplace opening dates from the 16th century.

The gable wall associated with the 16th-century fireplace openings is constructed with a mixture of brick and beach pebbles (Plate 8) and this combination of materials continues for some 9.25m along the east wall to a point corresponding with bricks that form the side of a blocked window. Within this stretch of wall there is evidence for three windows at ground floor level and one or possibly two at first floor level, the uncertainty arising because of the eroded state of the wall.

As stated earlier, the east wall has been heightened by about a metre and it is not possible to ascertain if this completely replaced the top of the 16th-century wall or the building was simply made taller. Whatever the case the sills of the 16th-century were very low and were consequently abandoned when the wall was increased in height.

There was an intermediate, 17th-century phase from which only the two ground floor ceiling beams with the straight chamfer survive and the next phase occurred in the 18th century when the east wall was extended (or partly rebuilt along its length) and the large stack was erected to the south of the building. However if the east wall was completely rebuilt, replacing an earlier wall, the position of the 18th-century stack would represent the either the length of the 16th century building, or 16th block plus a 17th-century addition as suggested by the position of the two ceiling beams.

The difference in the design between the cornice on each side of the building suggests that the walls differ in date. The cornice on the east side is associated with the heightening of that stretch of wall along with the rebuilding of the south gable wall including the pilaster on each of the side walls. It is possible that the west wall was extended (or rebuilt) and heightened at the same times as the east wall and then rebuilt again in the 19th century in two phases. The first of these two phases saw the rebuilding of the wall from the side of the 16th-century external



stack to the corner and then along the side wall to the off-centre pilaster. Very soon after this the wall was extended to the earlier pilaster that was associated with the rebuilding of the south gable and this is shown by the difference in the brickwork seen on the inside face and the slight difference in the windows and arch profiles associated with each of these two phases.

Because of the complete lack of evidence for the plan forms that may have been associated with the various campaigns of alteration it is impossible to put Ostend House into any context. The number and extent of the alterations to the outside walls seems remarkable, when from a practical point of view it would have seemed as if a simple refacing of the principal façade would have sufficed rather than a complete rebuild.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank Mr S Holdgate who commissioned this work. This report was edited by Alice Lyons (NAU), the report and illustrations were formatted by David Dobson (NAU). Becky Croft and John Percival (NAU) assisted the author on site.



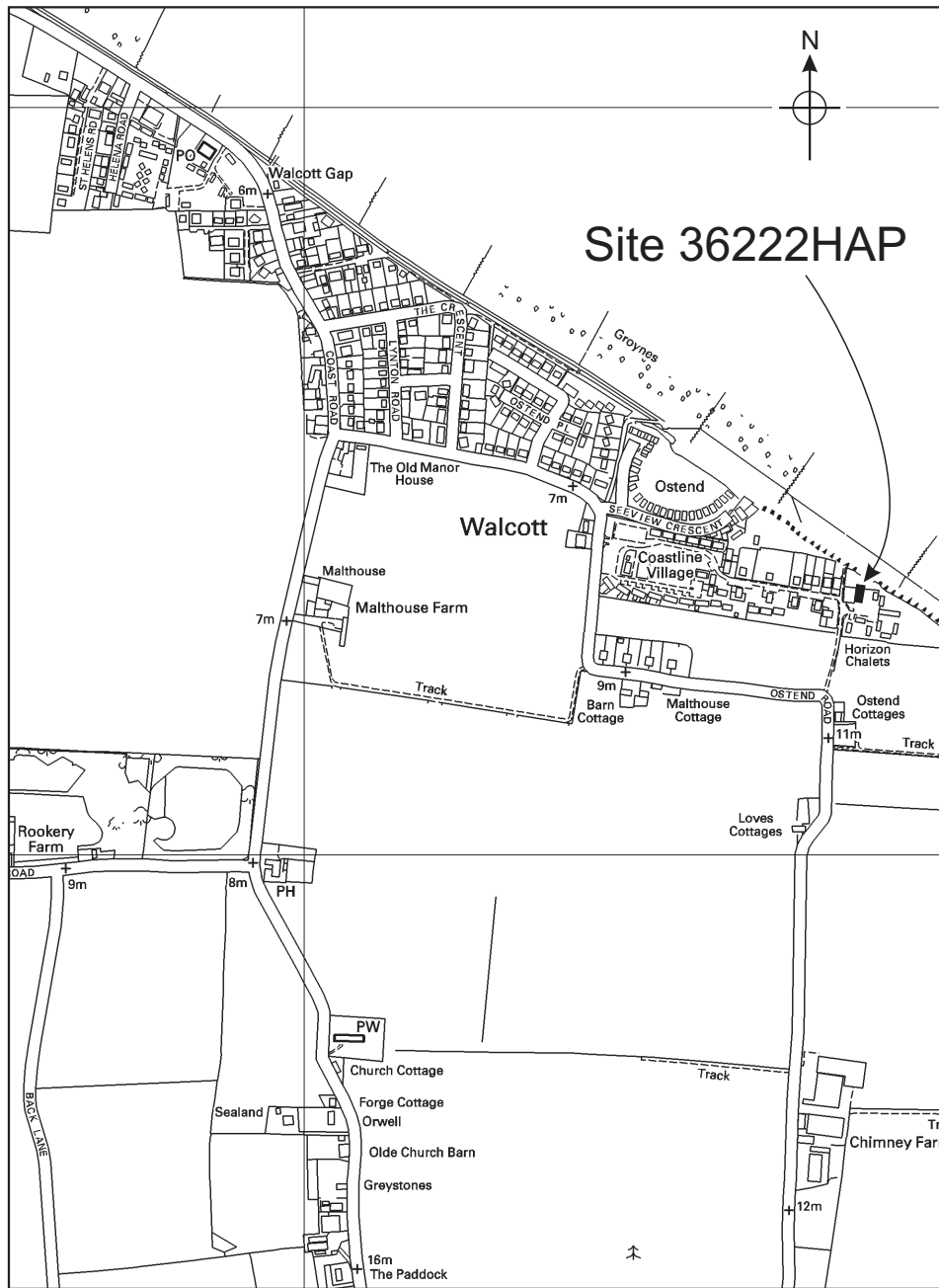


Fig. 1 Site location. Scale :1:10,000

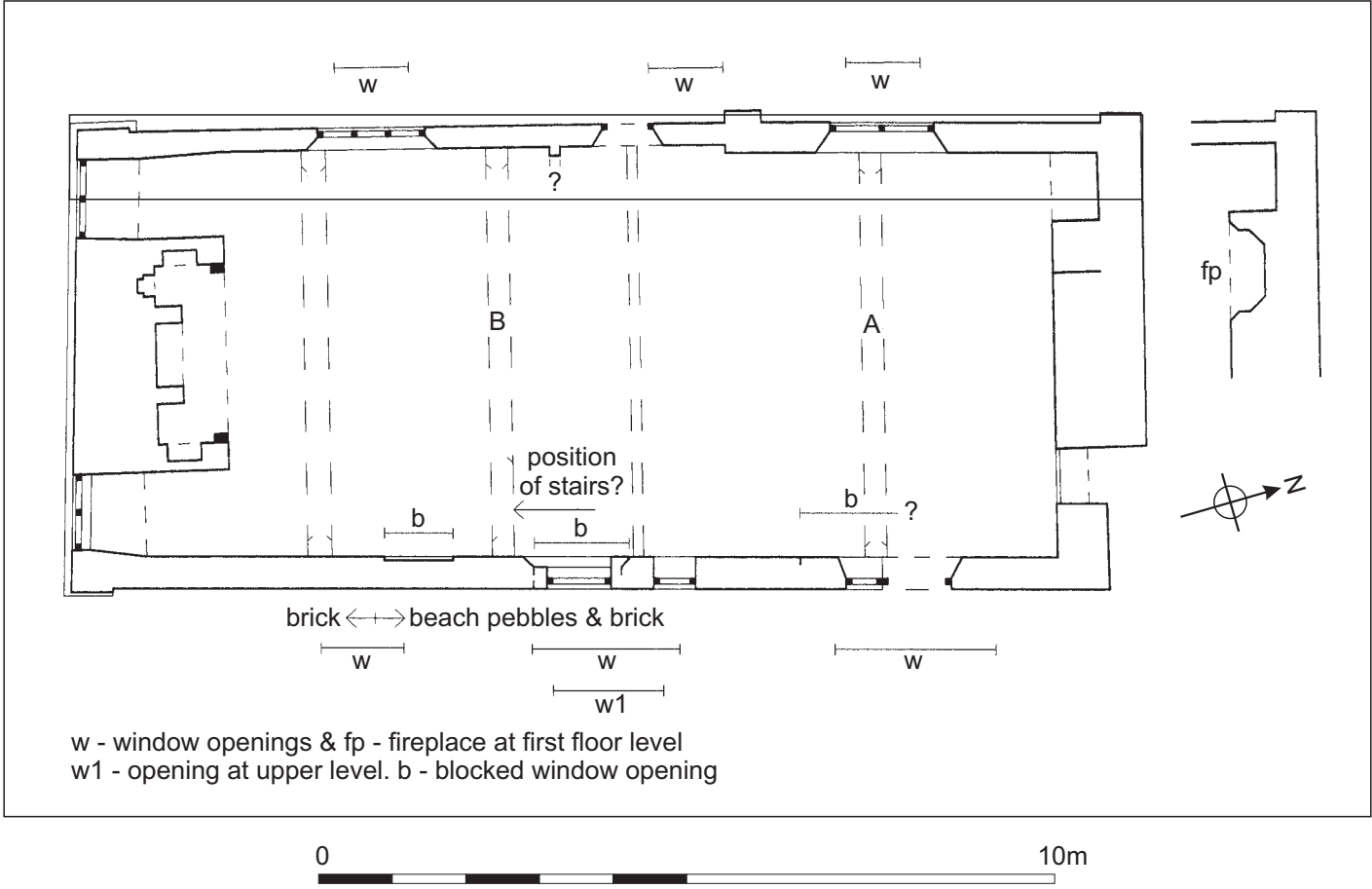


Fig. 2 Plan at ground floor level. Scale 1:100

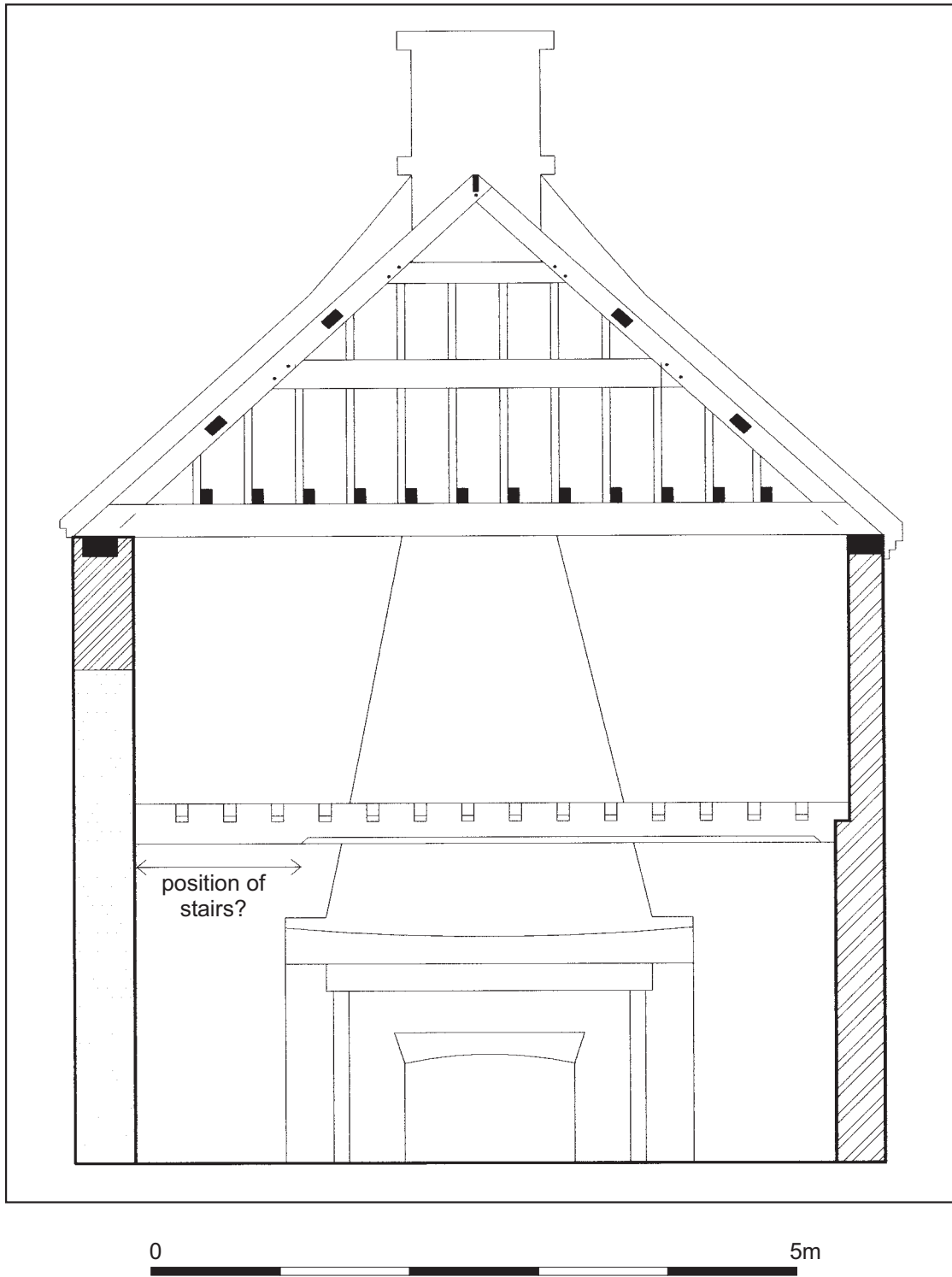


Fig. 3 East to west composite section, truss IV. Scale 1:50

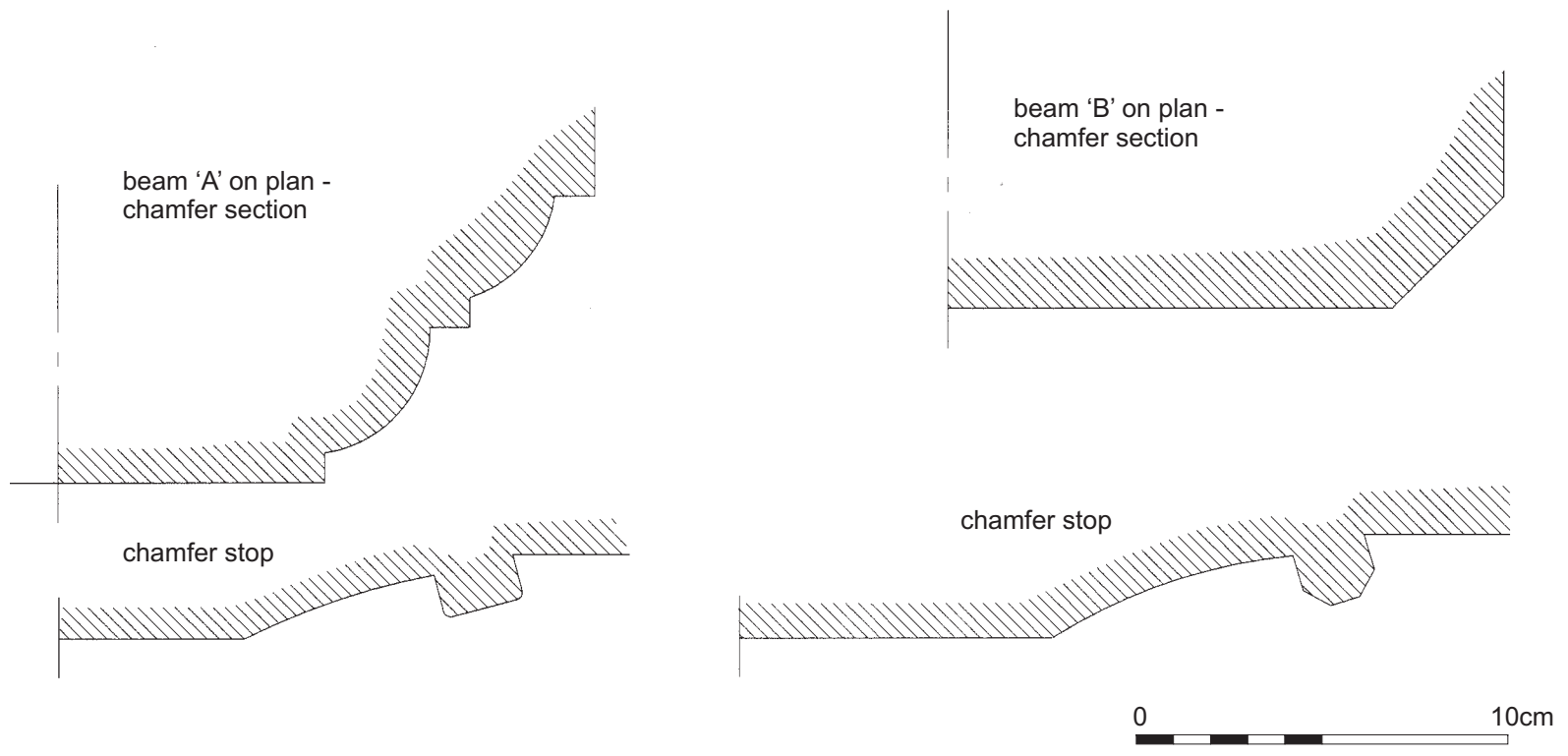


Fig. 4 Ground floor ceiling beams, moulding details. Scale 1:2

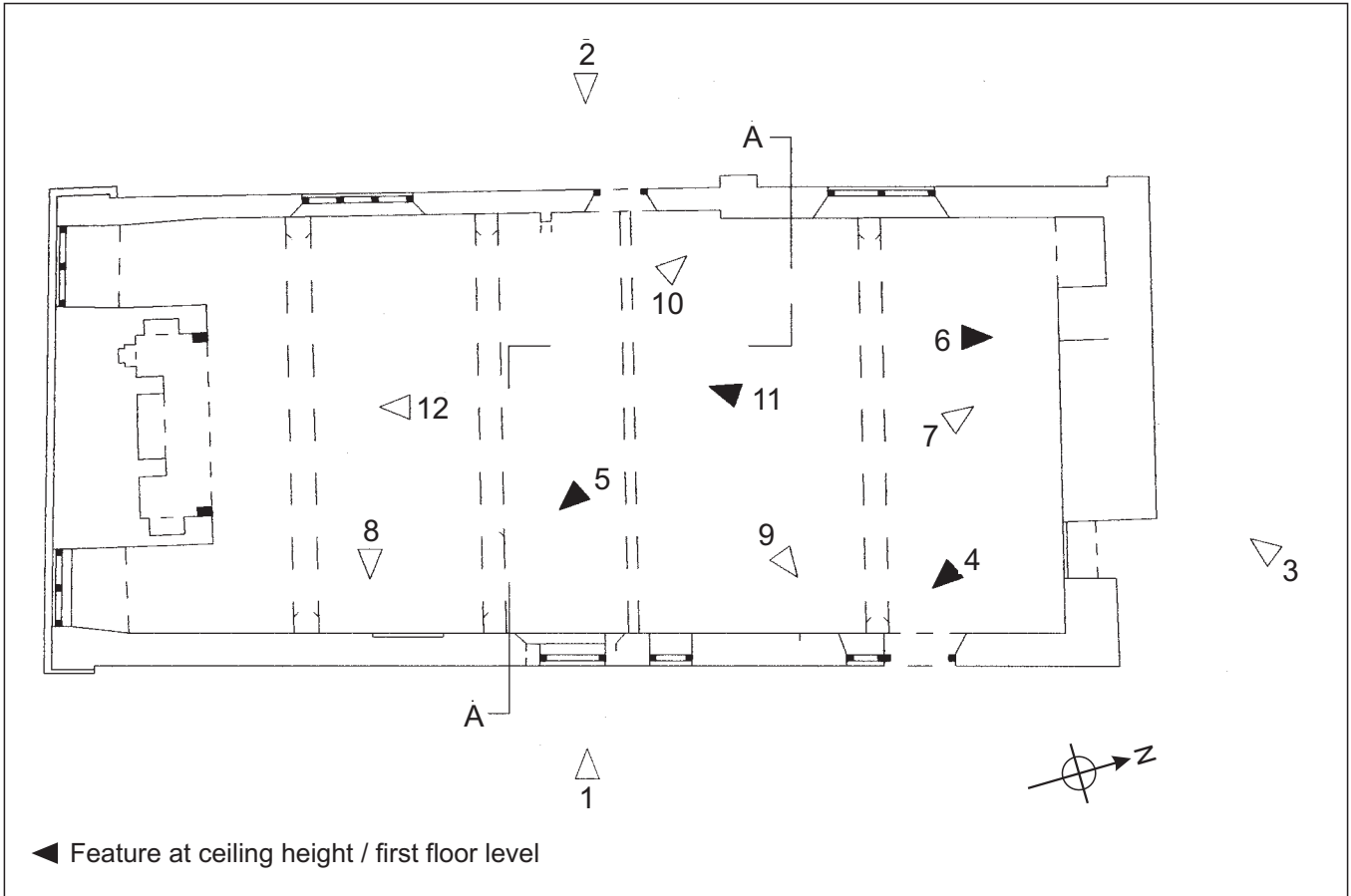


Fig. 5 Key plan for photographs and section. Scale 1:100



Plate 1 The west elevation



Plate 2 The east elevation





Plate 3 The north gable



Plate 4 Chamfer and stop on 16th-century beam ('A' on Fig. 4)



Plate 5 Position of stairs on 17th-century beam as indicated by the position of the chamfer stop



Plate 6 The 16th-century fireplace, north wall, at first floor level



Plate 7 Chamfer stop associated with the north stack fireplace at ground floor level



Plate 8 Junction between brick and beach pebble and brick construction



Plate 9 Right-hand side of blocked 16th-century window



Plate 10 The increase in thickness of the ground floor west wall that starts 0.66m away from the door



Plate 11 The partition at the attic floor level



Plate 12 The 20th-century fireplace inside the  
18th-century south stack