

NYCC HER	
SNY	11993
ENY	4199
CNY	
Parish	8073
Rec'd	1989

# The Old Vicarage, Tadcaster

Report on investigations



West Yorkshire  
Archaeology Service

## 1. Introduction (Fig. 1)

Between 27 June and 8 July 1988 the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service carried out excavation and recording work in and around The Old Vicarage, Tadcaster. The work, on behalf of Samuel Smith, Old Brewery (Tadcaster), was planned in liaison with PR Associates in order to facilitate their proposals for the repair and restoration of this important late medieval building.

A preliminary report was forwarded to PR Associates on 29 July; the present document provides a further account, with details of the findings in each excavated trench and in small-scale investigations within the building (Sections 2-7). The latter were not part of the original brief; they were carried out after a decision to abandon plans to excavate along the south-east end of the Vicarage. This end, the site of an alleyway, was examined by very limited and rapid excavation for reasons of public safety.

The conclusions drawn here (Section 8) about the development of the Vicarage are based largely upon excavated evidence, taking into account also the analysis of the standing structure by PR Associates. Information from a few pertinent documentary sources is also included, though it should be stressed that much more detailed evidence would be forthcoming from a full and systematic search of archival sources.

## 2. The north-east side trench (Fig. 2)

The character of the foundation below the north-east wall varies considerably, as do the layers which have built up against it. The remains, shown in elevation and plan in Figure 2, are described from south-east to north-west (left to right on the drawing).

The offset foundation south-east of the passage doorway was formed by a single line of irregular, unmortared limestone blocks (005). These had been set directly upon the surface of the clayey loam subsoil (003). The foundation had been cut by recent service trenches, and in the area between the passage entrance and the kitchen window a pit or drainage sump (007) had been dug just in front of the foundation.

The foundation was interrupted by the passage doorway. The existing threshold stone was clearly an insertion: it had been slotted between the jambstones. The excavations revealed the position of its predecessor, the ends of which had supported the broach-stopped jambstones. It had been set on a thin layer of refined, plastic clay which was itself founded upon small cobbles. The surface of the existing threshold is about 110mm above that of its predecessor.

In front of the passage doorway the surface of the subsoil was level, and only about 170mm below the surface of the threshold. The absence of erosion (in marked contrast to the area to the north-west), suggests that there had been some kind of hard surfacing—probably flagging—outside the doorway.

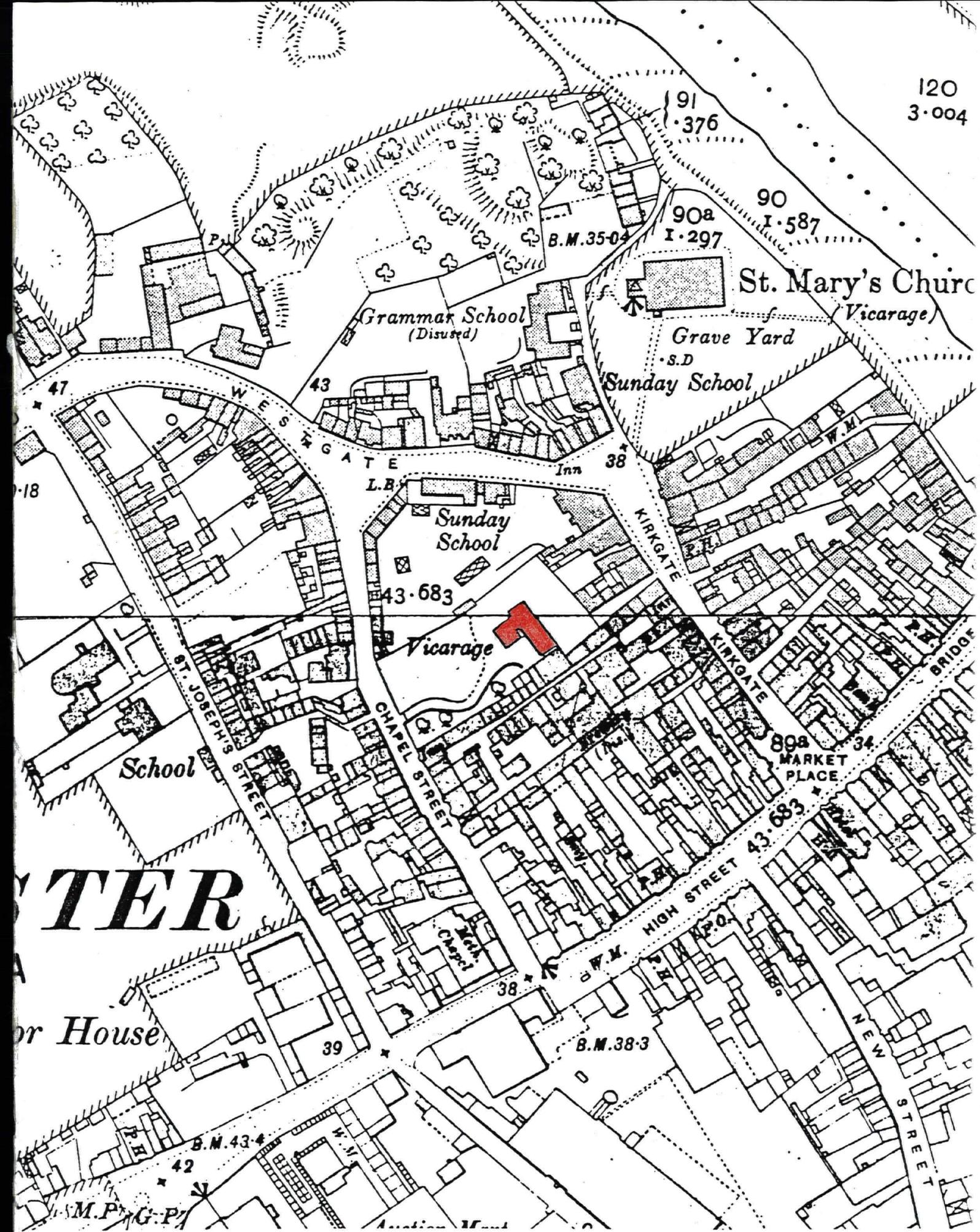
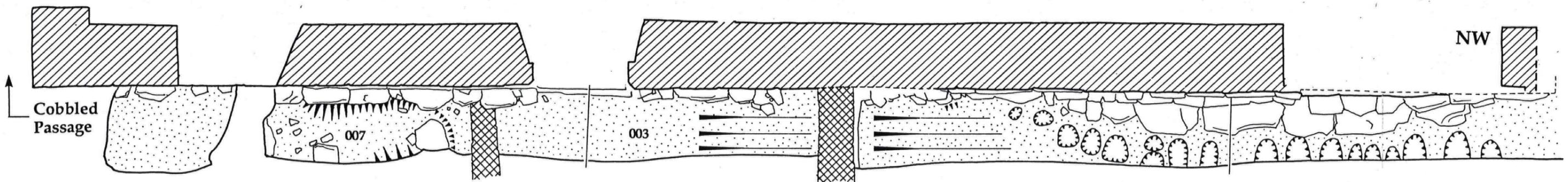
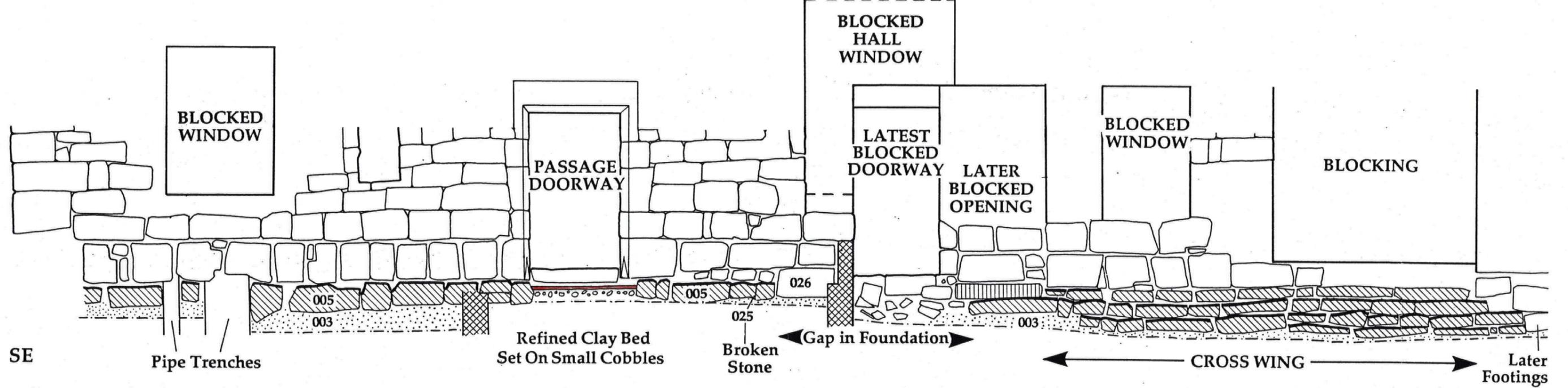
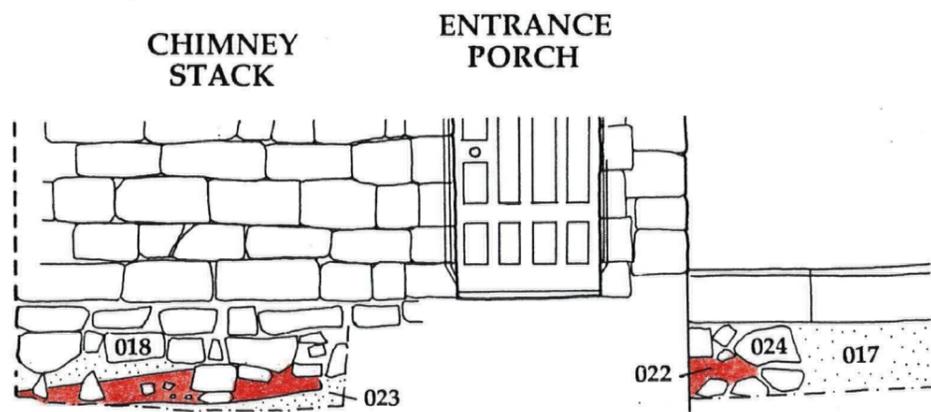


Fig. 1 The location of the Vicarage (shown in red)

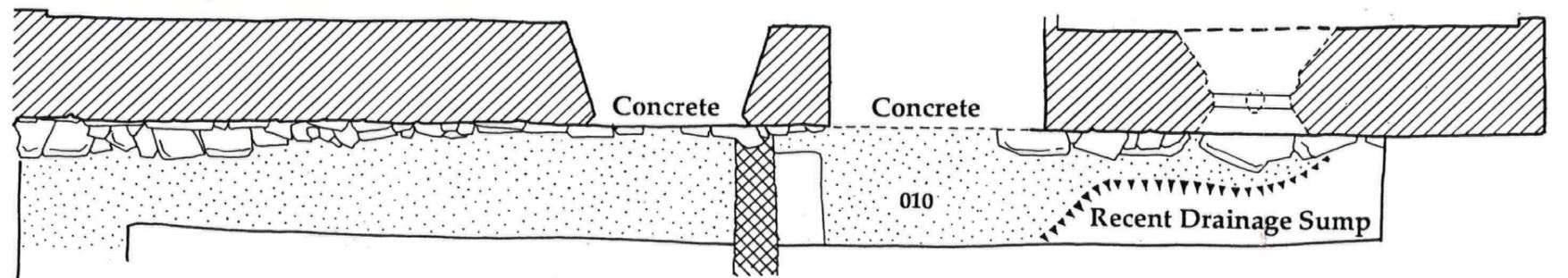
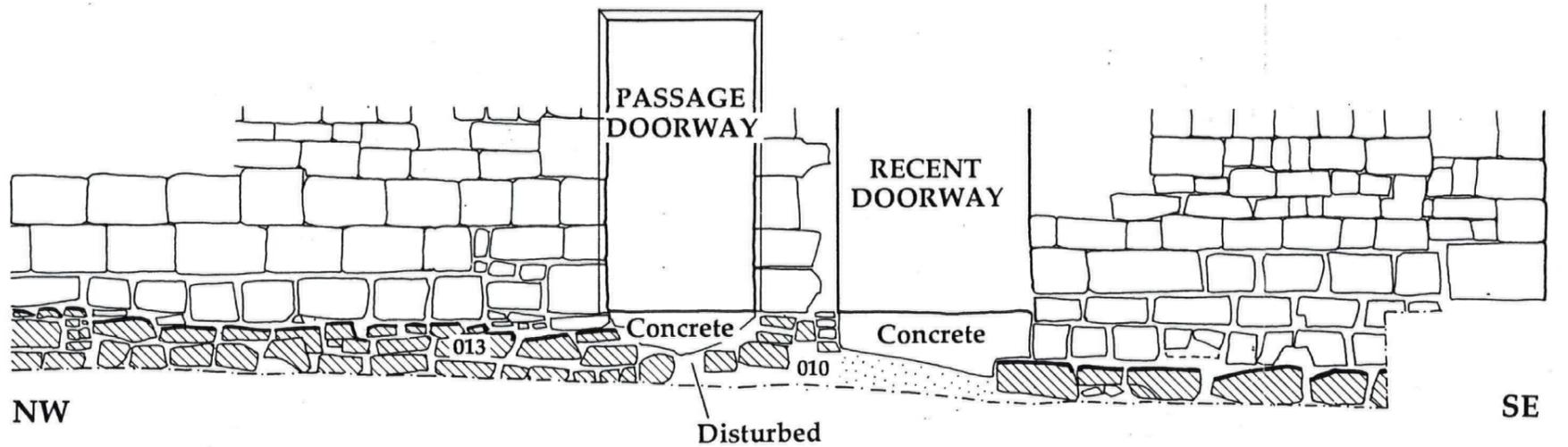


NORTH-EAST SIDE TRENCH

-  Dressed Stone
-  Plastic Red Clay (refined)
-  Stone Walls (plan only)
-  Brick Walls
-  Foundation (stone)
-  Offset Foundation (elevation only)
-  Natural Subsoil



NORTH-WEST END TRENCH



SOUTH-WEST SIDE TRENCH

*Fig. 2 The trenches excavated outside the Vicarage:  
plans and elevations of wall foundations*

The row of offset foundation stones resumed on the north-west side of the doorway and continued for a distance of 1.5m; the north-west end stone (025) had a broken face, as if it had once projected outwards from the face of the wall, and had been roughly cut back. Beyond it, there was an ashlar block (026) identical to the walling stones above and flush with them. It marked the beginning of a 2.5m gap in the offset foundation. The broken foundation stone and the gap suggest that originally there had been a small outward projection of the building at this point. The implications of this for the structural history of the building are discussed below (Section 8). The former existence of such a projection could not be confirmed, since there were no foundation blocks running outwards from the wall. The erosion of the subsoil and the disturbances caused by more recent extensions would, however, have obliterated any evidence which might once have existed.

On the north-west side of the gap the offset foundation recommenced but its character was markedly different. It was composed of thinner, longer slabs, stacked up into receding courses. The depth of the courses increased as the surface of the subsoil sloped downwards to the north-west. The slope of the subsoil surface is itself significant. To the south-east it began close to the entrance passage, but occurred only in front of the foundation: the stones themselves were seated on a ledge of uneroded subsoil. North-west of the gap, however, erosion had clearly taken place before the foundation stones were laid down. This and the change in character of the stonework indicate two distinct phases of foundation. The cause of erosion was gardening: a series of small scoops in the surface of the subsoil had been created by spade digging.

### **3. The north-west end trench** (Fig. 2)

Excavation outside the north-west end of the building was hampered by recent brick sub-structures, and by the need to retain access to the door. Nevertheless, it revealed foundations and other features from medieval times onwards.

The earliest remains were features—pits or postholes—cut into a silty loam layer 023. These remains were examined only superficially: they were below the level of the footings, and therefore related to earlier occupation; they could not, in fact, have been investigated adequately in the limited area excavated. Nevertheless, the associated pottery indicates that they mark occupation during the 14th and 15th centuries, if not earlier.

The stone footings of the present projecting chimney were founded upon a sticky refined clay (022) which largely sealed 023. The clay was similar to that used to bed the threshold stone at the north-east end of the cross passage. The foundations were less well constructed than those at the north-west end of the north-east side, which appeared to turn the corner and support this end wall. Therefore the projecting chimney may have been additional.

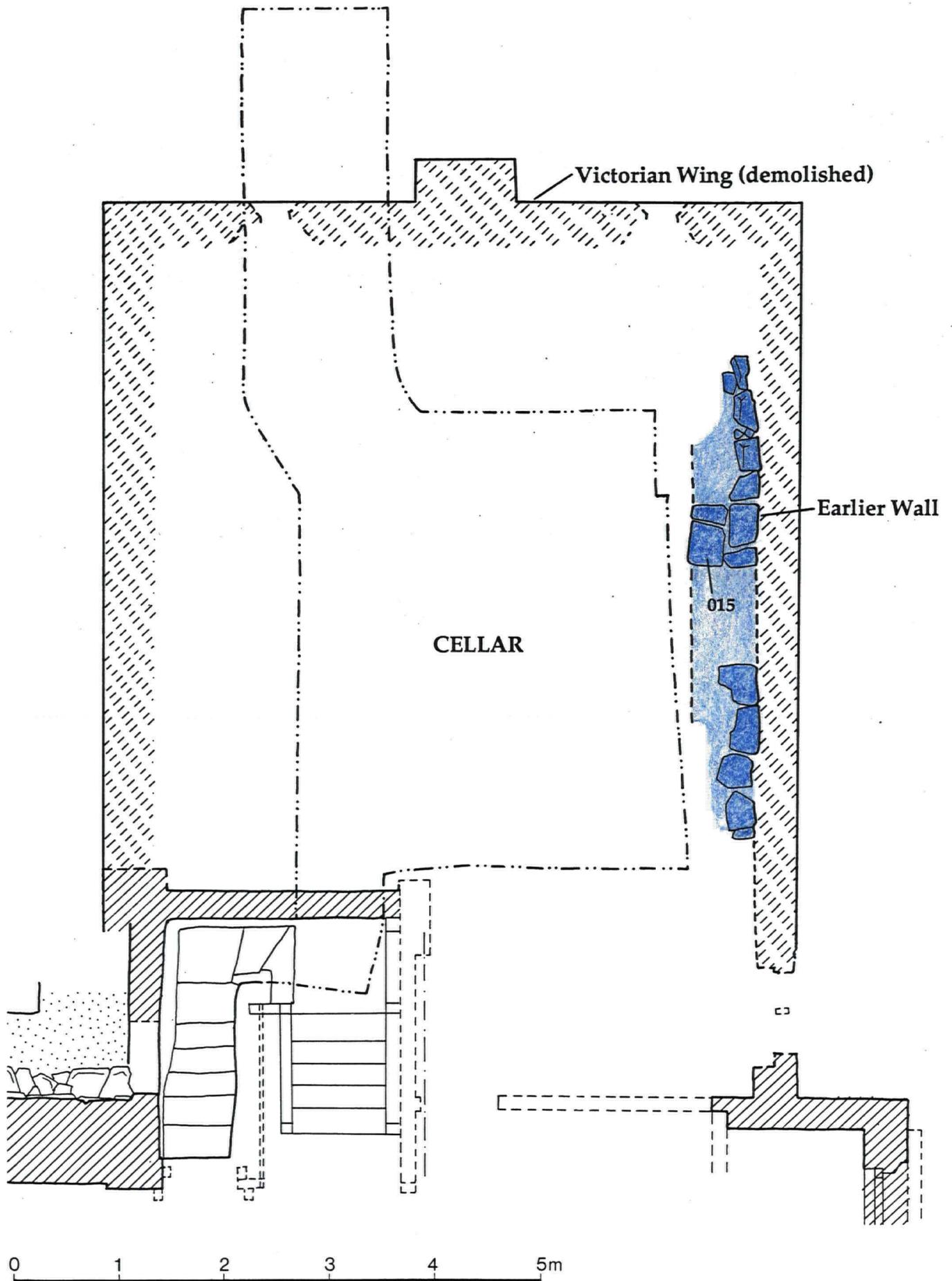


Fig. 3 Foundation stones of the pre-19th-century wing (marked in blue)

The entry porch, to the side of the chimney stack, did not have such deep foundations; it was probably a Victorian extension. It seems, however, to have replaced a shallower but longer projection, visible in the trench beneath the side wall of the entrance porch. This projection extended a little way beneath the adjacent foundation of the Victorian cross-wing: it is visible on the accompanying drawing (numbered 024). It may be the foundation of a first-floor latrine projection.

#### **4. The north-west wing** (Fig. 3)

A Victorian wing at the north-west corner of the building had been demolished before investigations began. It is known to have been on the site of an earlier wing, and excavations were carried out in an attempt to establish the dimensions and position of the pre-Victorian structure.

Only on the north-west side was there any trace of the earlier structure. Fragments of the lowest course of unmortared foundation stones survived in the space between the Victorian foundation and the cellar; these are shown on the accompanying drawing (Fig. 3). They were sufficient to locate the precise position of the 18th-century wing, the dimensions of which are recorded in historical records.

#### **5. The south-west side trench** (Fig. 2)

A further trench was excavated along the south-west side of the building. It stopped short of the south-east end to avoid impeding public access.

Towards this south-east end, the footings of the kitchen bay were very similar to those on the opposite side of the room: a simple course of offset, undressed boulders. These boulders had been removed in front of the recent doorway; but immediately beyond that doorway, beneath the jamb of the original passage entrance, the foundation stones were smaller, and the height of the brown clayey loam (010) in which they were set indicated that the boulder foundation had not continued to this point.

On the far side of the cross-passage doorway the character of the footings changed yet again: the stones (013) were stacked up in rough courses to a higher level. There was no evidence of substantial subsoil erosion (as there was towards the north-west end on the far side). The undisturbed subsoil 010 was overlain by old topsoils 008 and 009 which had themselves been sealed by recent extensions to the building.

## 6. The south-east end

The south-east end wall of the existing building may represent a shortening of the original structure: this is suggested (though not proved) by the character of the walling. In an attempt to obtain further evidence on this point, a small-scale investigation was carried out just beyond the south-east corner of the building, in line with the north-east side.

The excavation revealed an area of cobbles level with the top of the wall footings further north. No boulder footings remained, though they might well have once existed, and have been replaced by the cobbles: there was no evidence to determine this point. Alternatively the cobbles may have surfaced an alley which was covered by a continuation of the building at first-floor level.

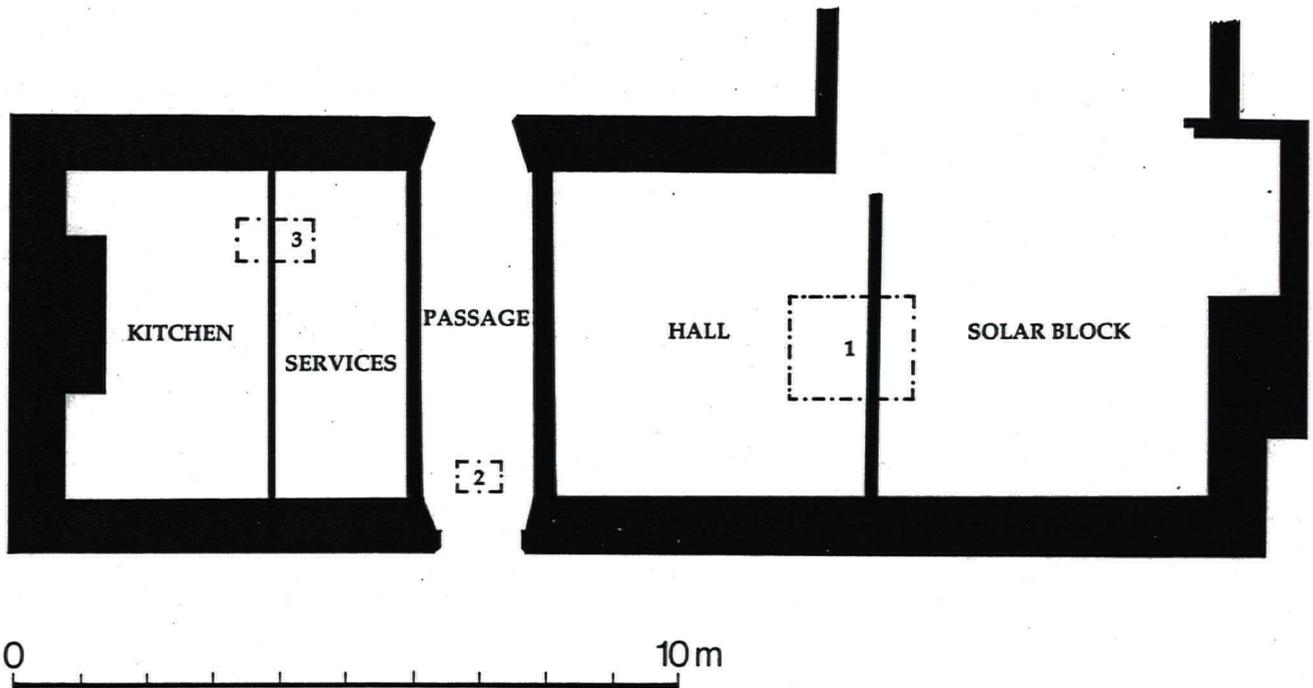
## 7. The interior (Fig. 4)

Three small-scale investigations were carried out within the building, to gather evidence on early floor levels and types of flooring. The work took place at the junction of the hall and cross-wing, in the cross-passage and in the kitchen bay.

The excavation of the hall/parlour junction (Fig. 4, no. 1), close to the post supporting the cross-wing truss, revealed two phases of concrete flooring, extending to a depth of c. 450mm below the present surface. The limestone rubble base of the lower floor lay directly on the subsoil; though pre-concrete floor surfaces had been removed, there was a ledge in the subsoil surface in line with the hall/parlour partition, the hall being about 40mm higher.

An area exposed behind the north-east doorway of the cross-passage (Fig. 4, no. 2) revealed a floor of heavily worn and cracked limestone paving slabs measuring 400mm by 200-300mm by 140mm thick. The surface of these, about 80mm below the present floor surface, was at the correct level for the original (now absent) threshold stone in the north-east doorway. At the south-west end of the cross-passage there had been deeper disturbance in recent times; the paving slabs had been removed, leaving only the subsoil surface directly below the modern flooring.

The final area examined (Fig. 4, no. 3) straddled the line of the partition between kitchen and service rooms. In the services, there was further, but very fragmentary evidence of flagging: this was set about 160mm below the present floor surface, at a level lower than the passage flagging. On the kitchen side of the partition there was only burnt earth. The area examined in this trench had been very extensively disturbed by pipe trenches; nevertheless, it appears that the kitchen may have had an earth floor rather than stone flagging.



*Fig. 4 Approximate location of investigations inside the building*

## 8. Conclusions

The excavations achieved their immediate aim of providing information on internal and external floor levels, the position of the foundations for the cross-wing, and other structural data necessary for PR Associates to formulate their proposals. They also provided some clues as to the early development of the Vicarage, a development which probably began in the late 13th century.

The church at Tadcaster was first provided with a vicar in 1290, but the Vicarage in its present form has been assigned to the later 15th century, both on architectural grounds and on documentary evidence: it is recorded as being the work of William Cleveland, the vicar who died in 1504. The excavations indicated, however, that the foundations were earlier than the walls which they supported; indeed some of the foundations might well go back to the late 13th century.

The evidence for this came principally from the north-east side, where the gap in the foundations in front of the blocked hall window clearly pre-dated the wall. The gap is best interpreted as the site of a projecting, oriel window which lit the high table in the hall. The position of the extant blocked hall window indicates that though the projecting bay was removed in the late 15th century, arrangements in the body of the hall continued as before.

Another break in foundations occurred below the threshold of the passage doorway. The jambstones of the door surround did not line up precisely with the gap in the foundation: on Figure 2 it can be seen that the right-hand jamb oversails the footings. This is, admittedly, a minor point of detail. Nevertheless, considered along with the indications of an earlier projecting hall window, as well as with the clear signs of rebuilding in the south-west wall on the opposite side, it does provide grounds for suggesting that the Vicarage as it survives is a late medieval rebuilding of an earlier timber house. Irregularities in the coursing of the south-west wall suggest building or rebuilding in stages; these coincide with changes in the character of the foundations. One of the window lintels has been identified as a reused fragment of medieval grave slab.

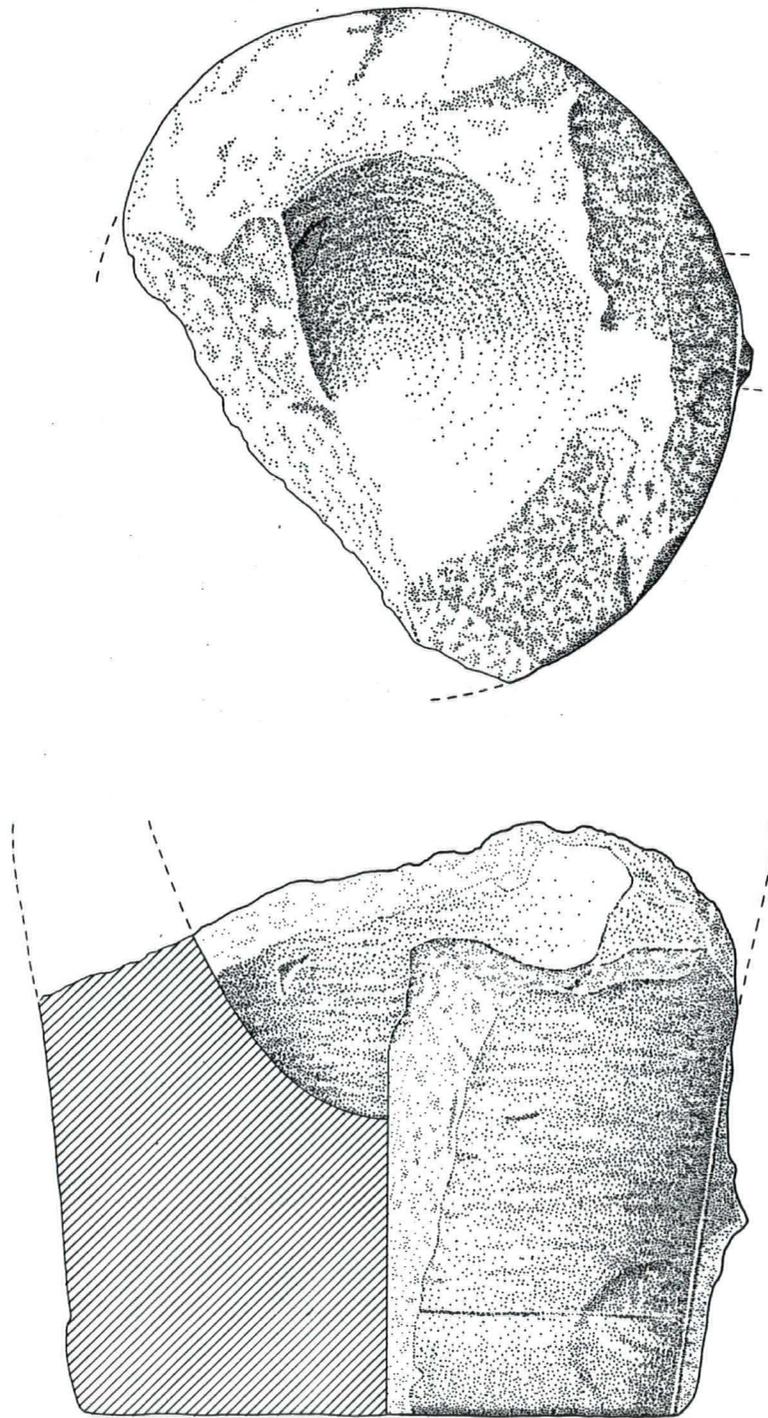
The foundations of the cross-wing in the north-east trench were undoubtedly of secondary construction: they had been laid after a period in which the site of the cross-wing had been part of a garden. In view of what has already been proposed on the early development of the building, it is possible that the addition of the wing occurred in the timber phase, before the late 15th-century rebuilding in stone.

A remaining problem is the relationship of the chimney and possible latrine projection at the north-west end to the early development of the Vicarage. The question could be answered only by further excavation within the 19th-century entrance porch; but at present it seems possible that both facilities were installed when the present, late 15th-century walling was erected; this would account for the differences in footings visible beneath the north-west end of the building.

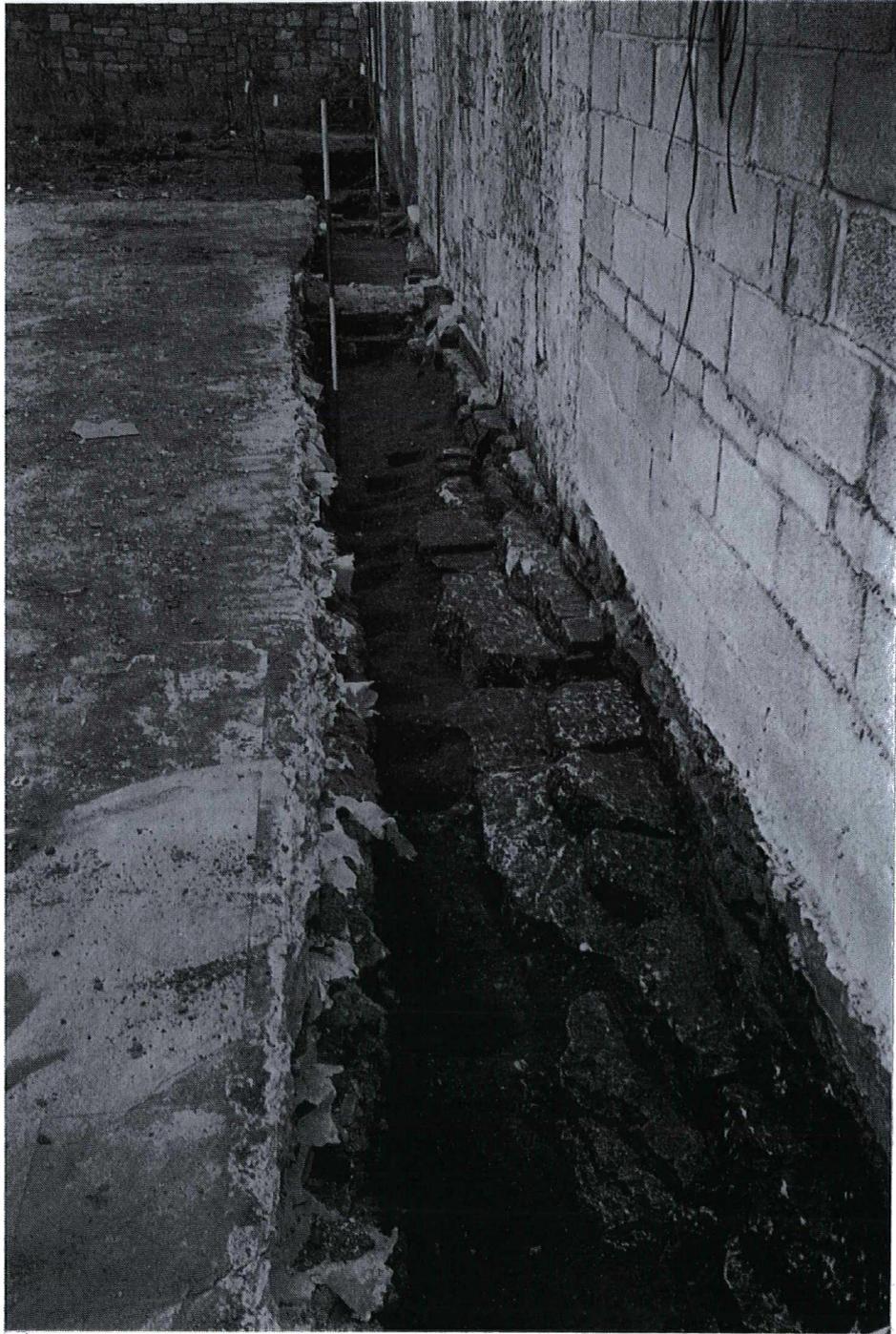
The artefacts recovered from the excavations were limited in range and in their value for dating the building. The small number of medieval pottery sherds, mainly from the excavations outside the north-west end, confirmed activity on the site during the 14th and 15th centuries. The only object of particular note was part of a stone mortar (Fig. 5), recovered from 20th-century builders' rubble but unquestionably dating to the later 14th or 15th century. It had been used with a pestle for pounding up foodstuffs and probably came from the Vicarage kitchen.

There are many as yet unanswered questions about the development of the Vicarage: where, for example, was the hearth which must have heated the hall? What were the form and size of the earliest medieval building? Some of these outstanding problems could be determined by further archaeological work within the building; others could be elucidated by a systematic survey of documentary sources.

S. Wrathmell  
West Yorkshire Archaeology Service  
30 January 1989



*Fig. 5 A stone mortar found on site; probably used in the Vicarage kitchens in the 15th century, for pounding up foodstuffs*



*Photograph of the trench excavated along the north-east side wall. The coursed offset foundation stones of the cross-wing and the scoops caused by medieval spade-digging are in the foreground.*