

FEB 87 13

TAMWORTH
MEDIEVAL
DEANERY

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SMR. No. 258 Nat.Grid Ref. SK 2083 0410

REPORT ON BUILDING RECORDING WORK

by

J. STERENBERG

TAMWORTH 1987

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INTRODUCTION

In February 1987 BUFAU were requested by Staffordshire County Council to carry out a drawn survey of the surviving walls of the medieval Deanery in the centre of Tamworth, Staffordshire (Lower Gungate, County Monument no. 258) prior to possible developments within the confines of the Deanery. Also in March of 1987 an opportunity arose to open a trial trench east of the longest stretch of wall. Both works were carried out by BUFAU's Roving Team. In June 1987 a further study of the standing structures provided the basis for an interpretation of the initial survey drawings.

BUILDING RECORDING

The stretches of medieval Deanery wall surviving comprise:

- 1 The western boundary wall, of Norman origin. (Fig. 1)
- 2 The southern precinct wall which includes fragments of medieval masonry.
- 3 The east wall, which includes blocked windows with sandstone surrounds. (Figs 2 and 3)

All the walls are associated with the earlier church of St Editha, (Meeson 1979) which is Anglo-Saxon in origin and was situated within the enclosure of the Mercian Royal Palace.

The work of recording the walls was carried out over four weeks by a team of five and comprised the detailed drawing of the standing walls at a scale of 1:10 (reductions appear in the report as Figures 2-4). The interpretative drawings, shown below the detailed elevations, were produced as a result of the second study in June.

EVALUATION TRENCH Fig 4

Following completion of the building record, BUFAU were then asked to dig a small trial trench in an open plot of a tenement to the east of the easternmost wall of the Deanery to test for surviving medieval and possible Anglo-Saxon archaeology.

A 2m x 5m trench running east-west was dug in an area to the rear of the hairdresser's at No.5 Little Church Lane. The interpretation of the trial trench results is limited for two reasons; 1) a 2m clear area had to be left between the trench and the Deanery walls for safety reasons and 2) the area investigated was quite small. As a result the archaeology could not be directly related to the Deanery wall here.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The trench was excavated down to the natural subsoil (1020), a red clay with a solid yellow-brown fine gravel overlying to a depth of 1m. The earliest features F14 (1020), F12 (1015), F15 (1018) yielded few or no finds except for F14, a circular pit 0.60m x 1m x 0.50m, which contained two pieces of burnt medieval pot. Cutting these and into the natural was a large ?pit/ditch (F16)(1019), of which only the south edge was contacted, approximately 4m long x 1.5m wide and 1.7m deep. Probably an early medieval feature, although it contained two small pieces of clay pipe (Fig 5). At first interpreted as a defensive ditch, it was subsequently found to have a sloping termination to its western end. Since only a small part of the ?pit/ditch was excavated, it was difficult to determine its relationship with the Deanery wall to the east.

Cutting the natural layer of gravel were a number of small pits, among which the most interesting finds derived from F17, a small pit, 0.4m deep, itself cut by F16. This contained a large amount of charcoal and two sherds of probably Roman pottery.

Sealing these features was a compact layer of silt/sand/loam (1004), approximately 0.3 m deep and containing large quantities of C16th - C20th pottery plus a few sherds of early medieval white wares.

This layer was in turn sealed by a 0.20m-deep layer of loam/charcoal (1001) which, along with features cutting into it (F6)(F7)(F9)(F10)(F2)(F15), suggest a modern garden soil with various plant pits cutting into it at various positions over the site (Fig 6). (Most of the latter were 0.30 - 0.40m deep, circular in shape and cutting into the layer below).

Also recorded at this depth were a double line of small trenches 0.10m x 0.10m and set 0.20m apart, running north-south across the site. These contained no finds although it is likely that they too are garden features.

REFERENCES

Meeson, R.A. 1979 The Formation of Tamworth (MA Thesis, University of Birmingham)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Bob Meeson (Staffordshire County Council) and Iain Ferris (BUFAU) for their advice and help, and to last year's BUFAU Community Programme Roving Team members: Alison Mills, Pat Irwin, James Robinson and Patsy Phillips, who worked outside in extremely bad weather conditions to complete the building recording, and also to this year's Community Programme Roving Team: Lawrence Way, James Manning-Press and Laurence Jones, who did an excellent job on their first dig. Finally to the ladies of the Black Tulip Cafe who provided all the hot drinks.

ARCHIVE & PUBLICATION

The finds will be deposited in Tamworth Museum along with a copy of the archive.

A full archive copy is held at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

A report will be prepared for publication in the Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeology and History Society and a note for West Midlands Archaeology.

Jon Sterenberg
Supervisor of Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit MSC
Roving Team.

10.6.87

INTERPRETATION OF THE STANDING STRUCTURE

Further study of the standing walls, together with the detailed elevation drawings, was undertaken in June 1987. A number of factors, including lack of access to certain parts of the wall and the masking of the wall faces in a number of places by modern structures, made it difficult to offer a meaningful interpretation. However, some pattern does emerge from an examination of the two longest stretches of wall recorded, and phased interpretative drawings are presented in this report alongside the stone-by-stone drawings. The more obvious builds in each wall face have been given structural element (SE) numbers and all features such as windows and doors, architectural element (AE) numbers. A detailed recording of each element on pro-forma sheets is recommended, as is a close study of the building stone employed here and in other buildings within the town.

INTERPRETATION

The West Facing Wall (Figure 2)

The northern end of this wall was not drawn but could be seen to be of a different build to the central part, perhaps suggesting an extension to the wall. It was pierced by two openings but it was not clear whether these were doors or windows. The southern end of the wall has been demolished to make way for modern brick walls, and the stub-end of the stonework roughly finished off. However, in the yard of the 'Old Stone Cross' public house some of the lower stone coursing survives. It is constructed of large, irregular, red sandstone blocks and again is unlike the stonework in the central zone; it does seem likely however that this is the original wall build (though whether a wall of a building at that time is open to debate) and if it continues northwards it is obscured by the post-medieval earth bank pushed up against the west face.

As to the recorded face, a number of basic builds are clearly visible but their relationships are uncertain. SE 1000, to the south, is composed of generally well-laid, irregular sandstone blocks (with a number of green sandstone rocks), though there is a hint of an earlier build at the bottom south corner. This forms an almost straight face to the north where SE 1001 seems to have been built up against it. SE 1001 is mainly of red sandstone (there are five green sandstone blocks) laid irregularly, utilising rough, unfinished stones of varying size and shape interspersed with patchy, tile string-coursing. A tile string course forms a topping-off course to the composite SE 1000/SE 1001 building and above this is build SE 1002, consisting of generally well-laid, regular, red sandstone coursing, at whose southern end can be seen three scaffold-frame positions, AE 1 being a putlog hole (now backed with brick) and AE 2 AE 3 being squared worn surfaces in the wall face.

At the northern part of the wall the picture is more

complicated. Either builds SE 1001 and SE 1002 have at some stage continued further northwards than they do at present or, less likely, their butting with SE 1003 marks a point where they have turned eastwards; whatever the case, SE 1003 seems to be later. Again it would appear that the southern straight joint of SE 1003 marks the point where the wall has been tidied up roughly flush with the main wall face having at some stage continued out westwards forming the south wall of a (?)cottage here. Much of the build of SE 1003 is obscured by plastering (again arguing for its being the back wall of a dwelling) but it can be seen that the build is generally irregular and poorly coursed. Larger, squarer blocks have, however, been used, though, in the south as quasi-quoins. SE 1004 may simply represent a rise within the same basic construction as SE 1003. The whole wall length is finally roughly finished/levelled off, with SE 1005 - exposed coring - forming the lower limit of the robbing.

The East Facing Wall (Figures 3 and 4)

The first impression from an examination of this wall is how different it appears from the wall to the west, as if they were not of the same building. The groundplan (Figure 1) shows though that the two walls are roughly parallel (though the change in build at the northern end of the west wall is clearly seen on plan with a change in angle). Visually, large quantities of green sandstone and much tile string-coursing distinguish this east facing wall.

The main build, SE 1006 can be subdivided into three separate rises A, B and C. Seemingly contemporary is a buttress, AE 4, at the northern end of the wall. In the centre of the wall is an infilled vertical scar (infill is SE 1007) that may mark the position of another buttress, AE 5 subsequently demolished (or collapsed) and tidied up flush with the rest of the wall face. Two windows are also contemporary with the main build, these having good green sandstone frames. The south window, AE 8, is framed by blocks, SE 1014 and is now blocked with brick, SE 1019. The north window, AE 6 has its green sandstone frame, SE 1008 still in situ but the window has at some stage been made smaller with the insertion of grey sandstone jambs SE 1009, and the window later still has been blocked with brick, SE 1010.

Towards the southern end of the recorded wall is a very large doorway AE 9 framed by large, well-cut and squared sandstone blocks (those to the south being green) and now infilled with irregular sandstone rubble, SE 1016.

The final disturbance noticeable in the wall face is at the northern end. This disturbance, AE 10, is marked by irregular scars and collapse or cave-in to the north. This has been infilled with sandstone rubble, SE 1012, and a remnant of a brick arch, AE 7 can be seen to the south. No explanation can be offered for this feature since the inner face of the wall is here obscured.

The main build of the wall can be divided up into a number of separate structural elements, SE 1006, SE 1011, SE 1013, SE 1015, but their relationship one to another is unclear. Likewise, to the south of blocked doorway AE 9, are two builds SE 1017 and SE 1018, that do not directly relate to the sequence to the north, though they may be contemporary.

A large number of putlog holes can be noted in this face.

CONCLUSION

Because of logistical problems with the survey, no satisfactory interpretation can be offered. The two walls examined are so different as to question their inclusion within one structure. Only a short stretch of the western wall survives and this can be divided into three phases; a fourth (?) earlier phase can be seen in the pub yard at the Old Stone Cross. The northern end of this wall is much more recent and on a different alignment. The eastern wall has its earliest phase surviving to a greater height and two windows, one and possibly two buttresses, and possibly a large doorway seem to be contemporary. Later work on this wall is difficult to interpret and impossible to relate to any build in the western wall.

I. FERRIS

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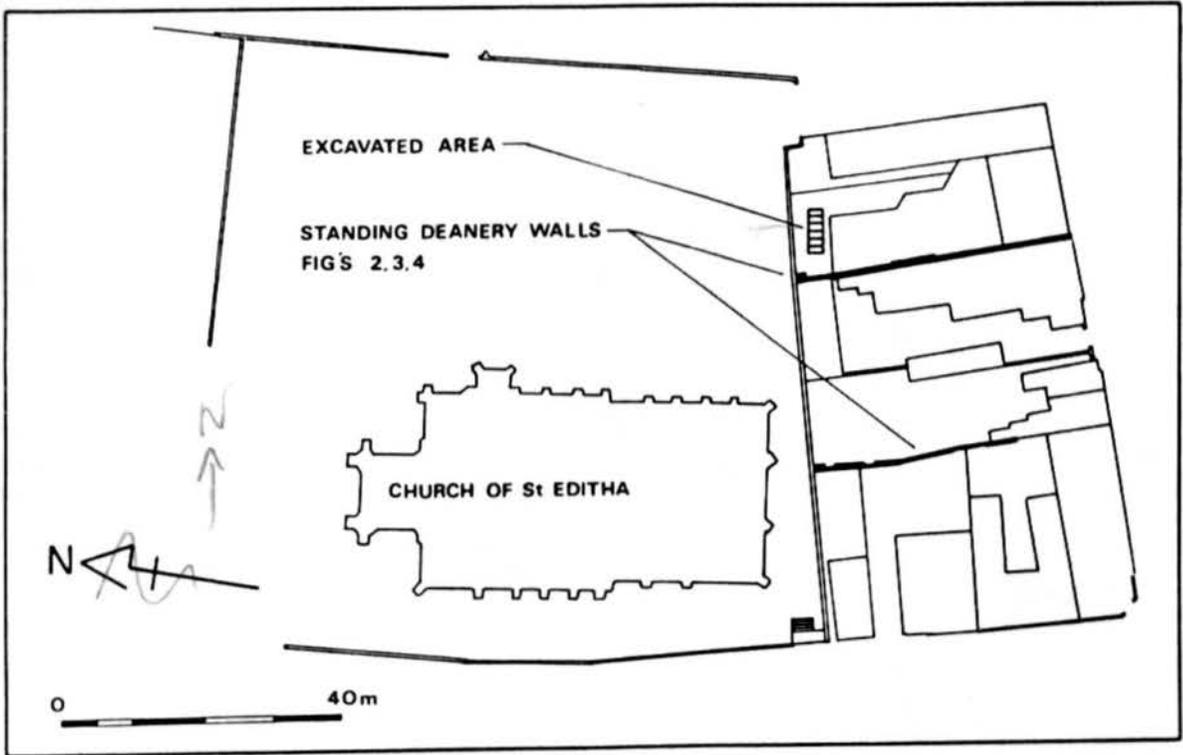
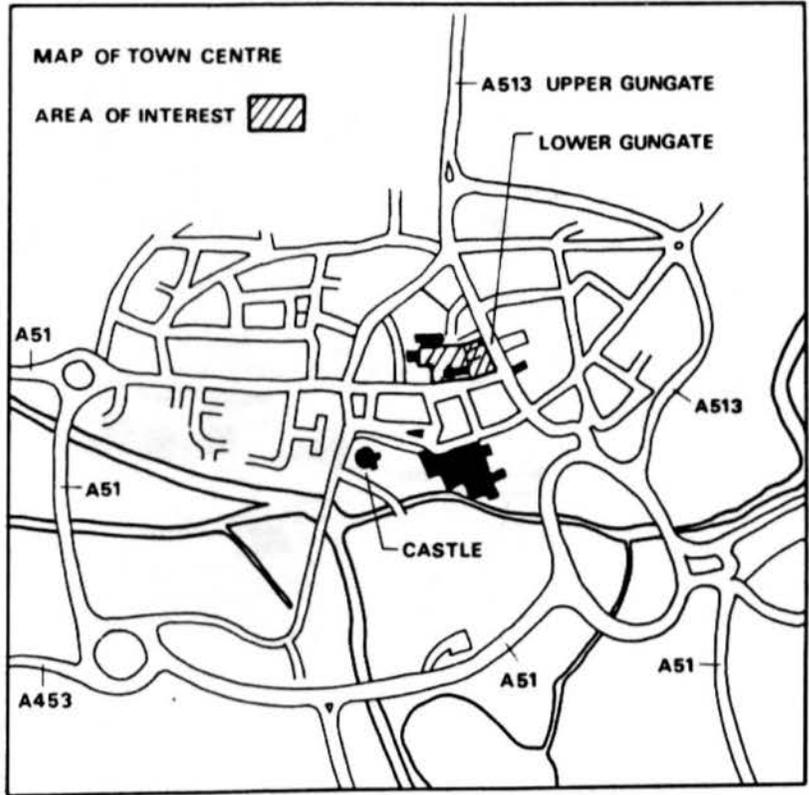
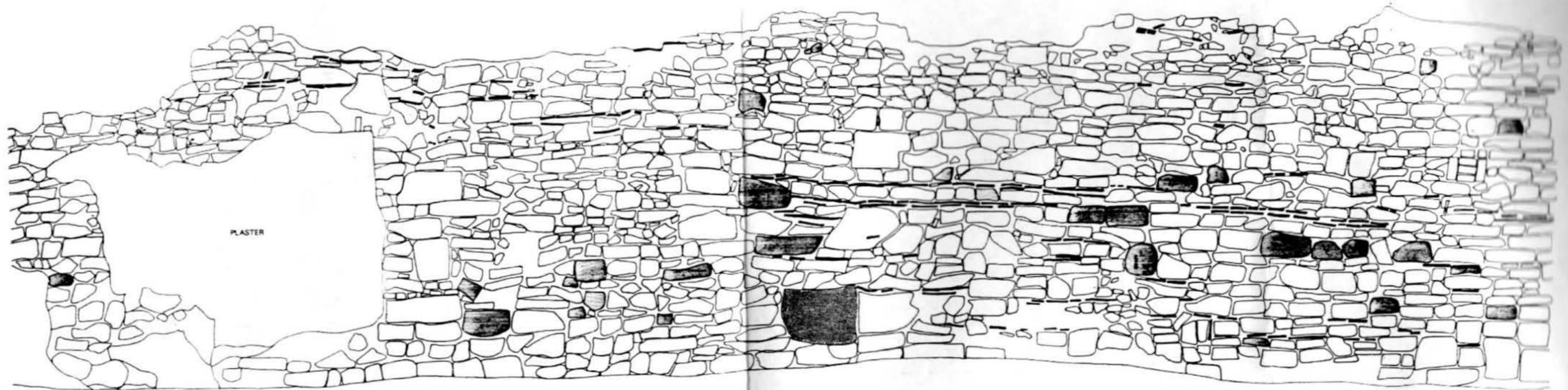


Fig. 1 LOCATION PLANS



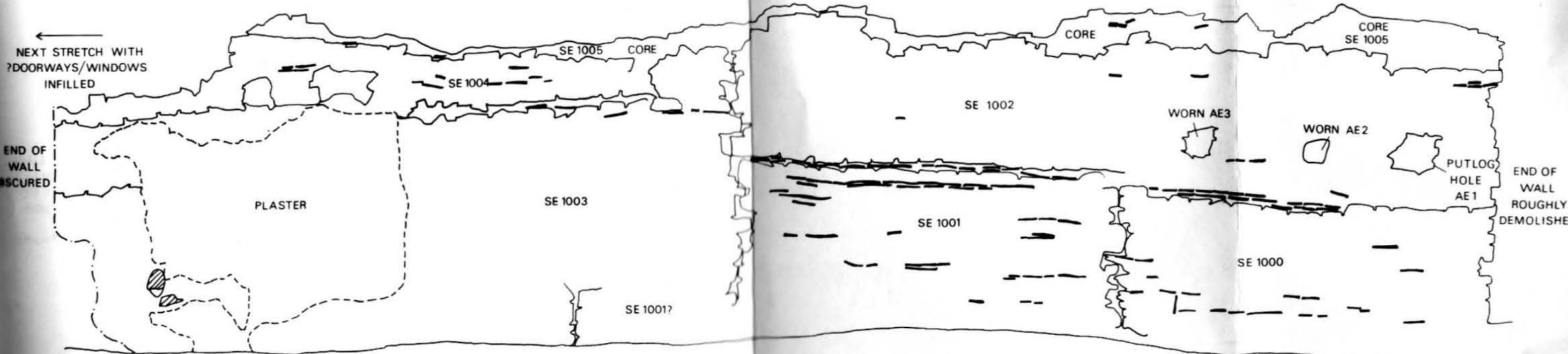
0



4 metres

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GREEN SANDSTONE 



← NEXT STRETCH WITH
?DOORWAYS/WINDOWS
INFILLED

END OF
WALL
OBSCURED

PLASTER

SE 1003

SE 1005 CORE

SE 1004

CORE

CORE
SE 1005

SE 1002

WORN AE3

WORN AE2

PUTLOG
HOLE
AE1

END OF
WALL
ROUGHLY
DEMOLISHED

SE 1001

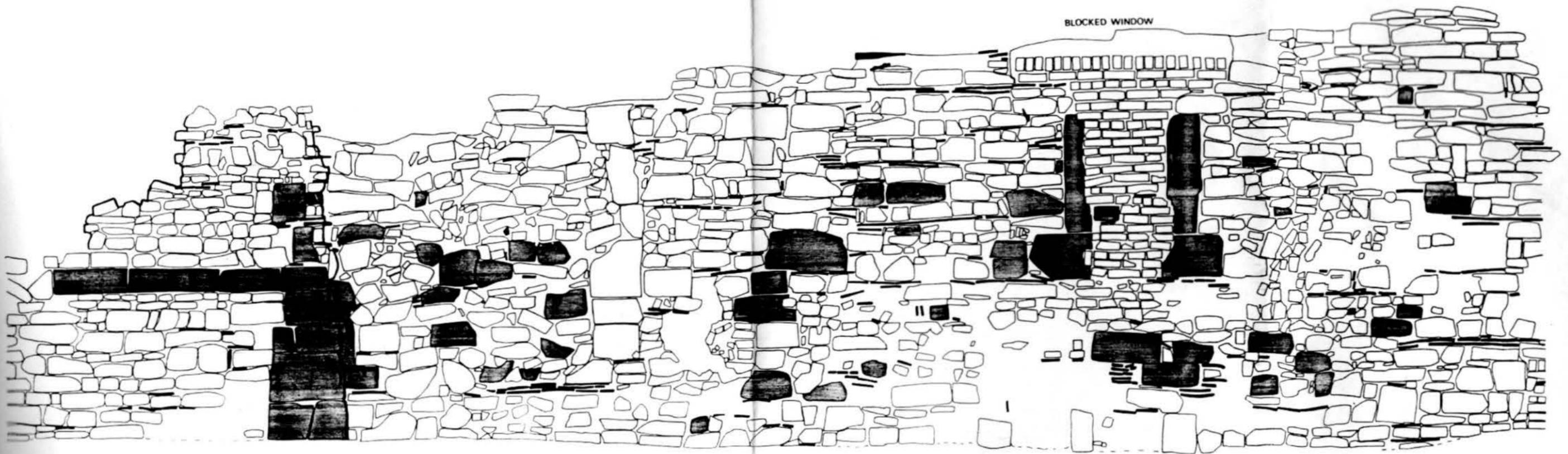
SE 1000

SE 1001?

WALL DIFFERENT AGAIN

WALL CHANGES
COMPLETELY TO SOUTH
MUCH MORE RED
SANDSTONE IN LARGE
BLOCKS
STEPPED DOWN

Fig. 2 WEST-FACING WALL



0 ————— 4 metres

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GREEN SANDSTONE

END OF WALL
ON FIG 4

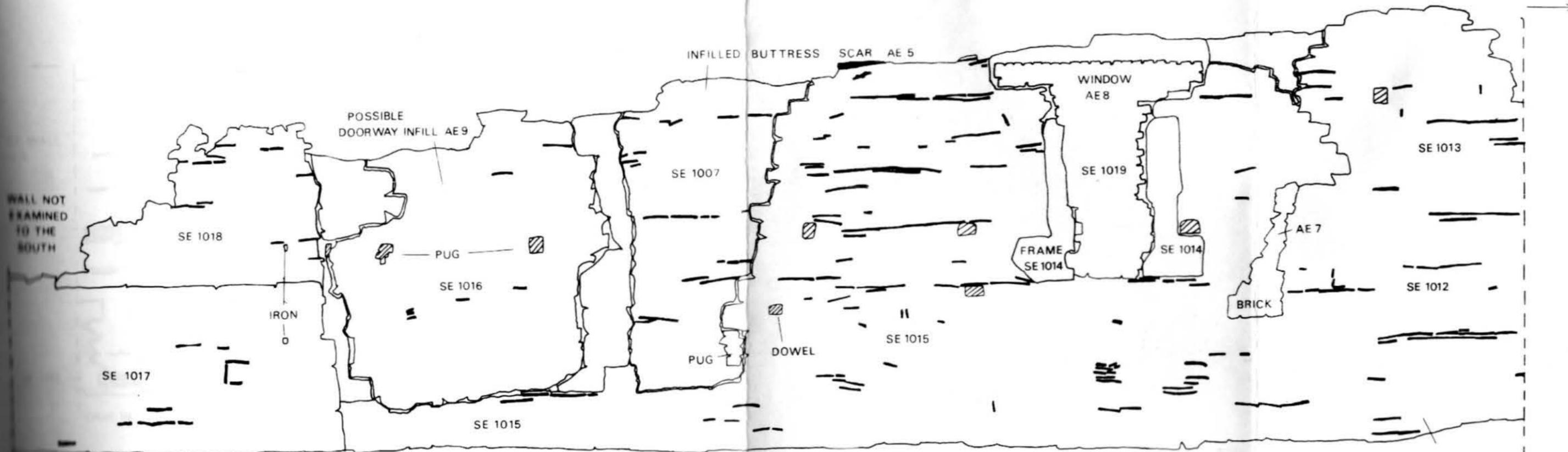
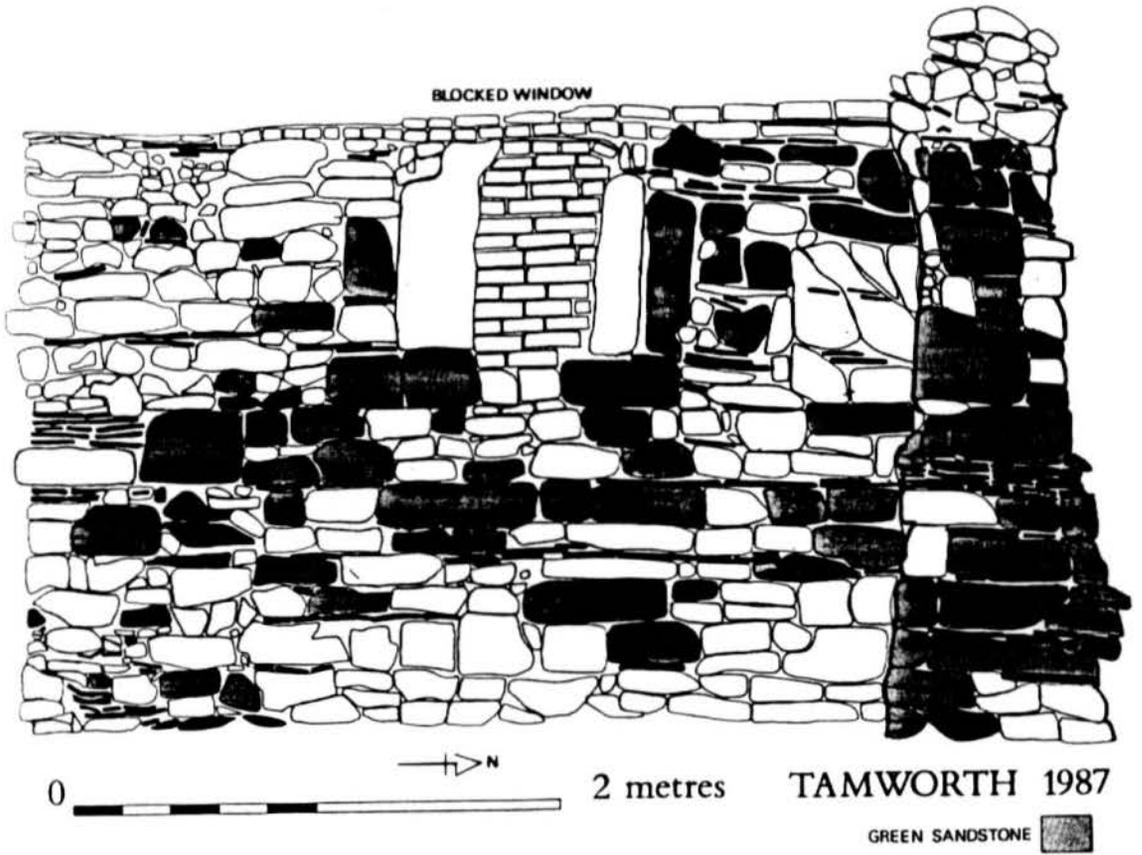


Fig. 3 EAST-FACING WALL



PILLAR/BUTRESS AE 4
 - ONE BUILD WITH WALL

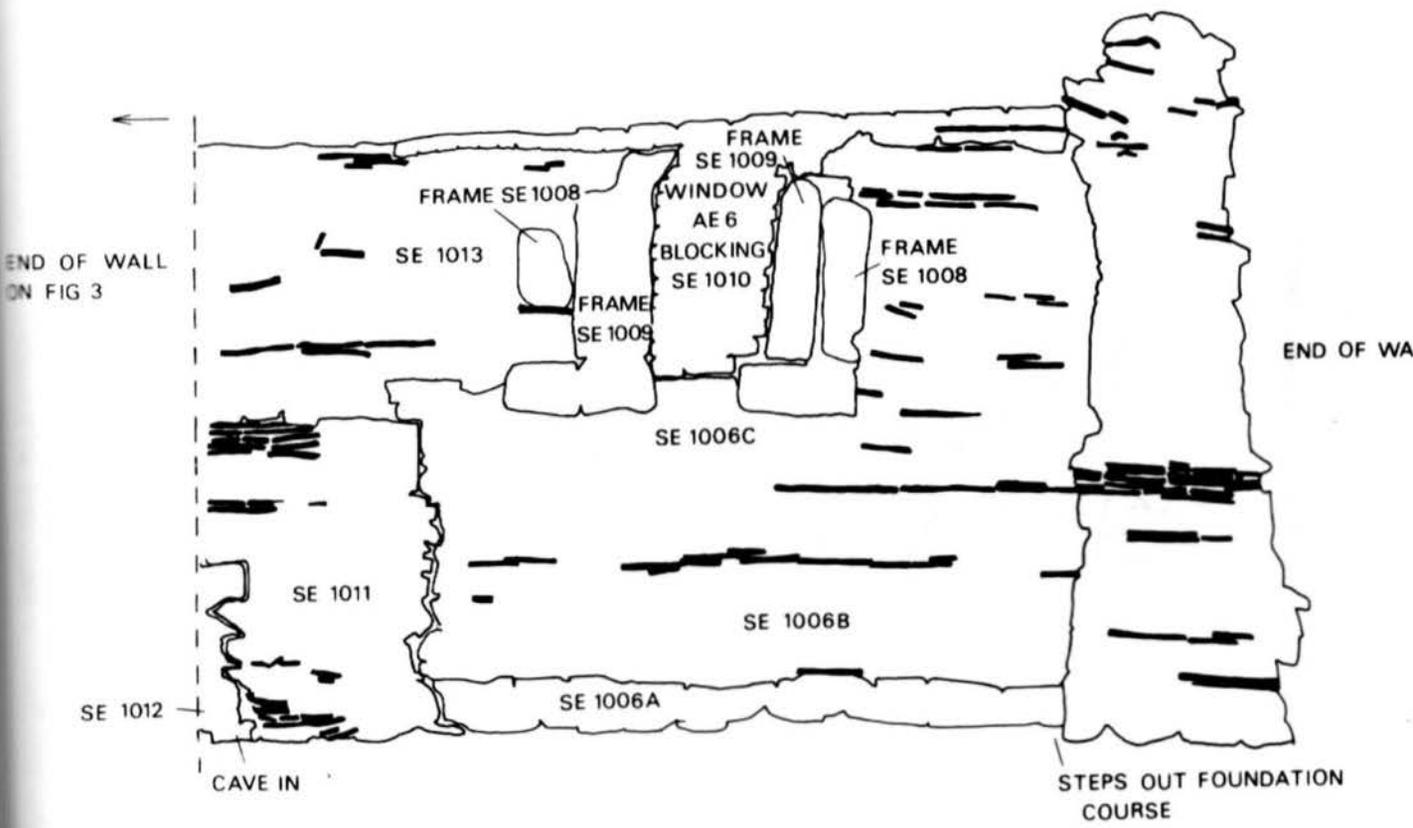


Fig. 4 EAST-FACING WALL

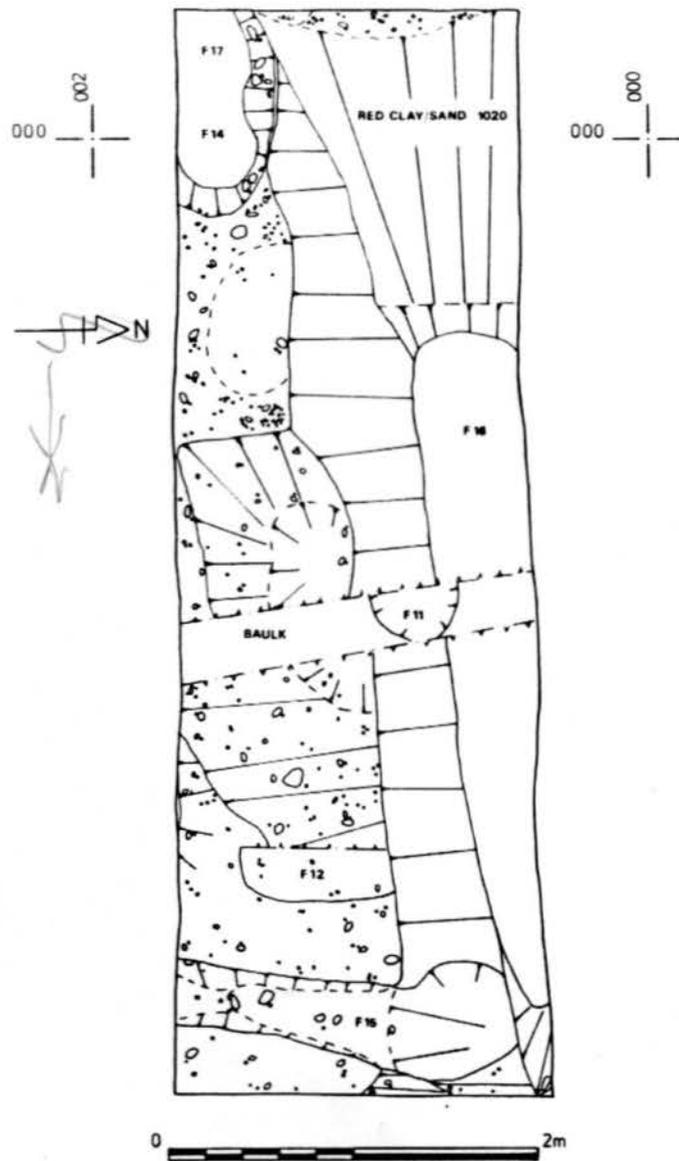


Fig. 5 PLAN OF EARLY MEDIEVAL ?DITCH/PIT

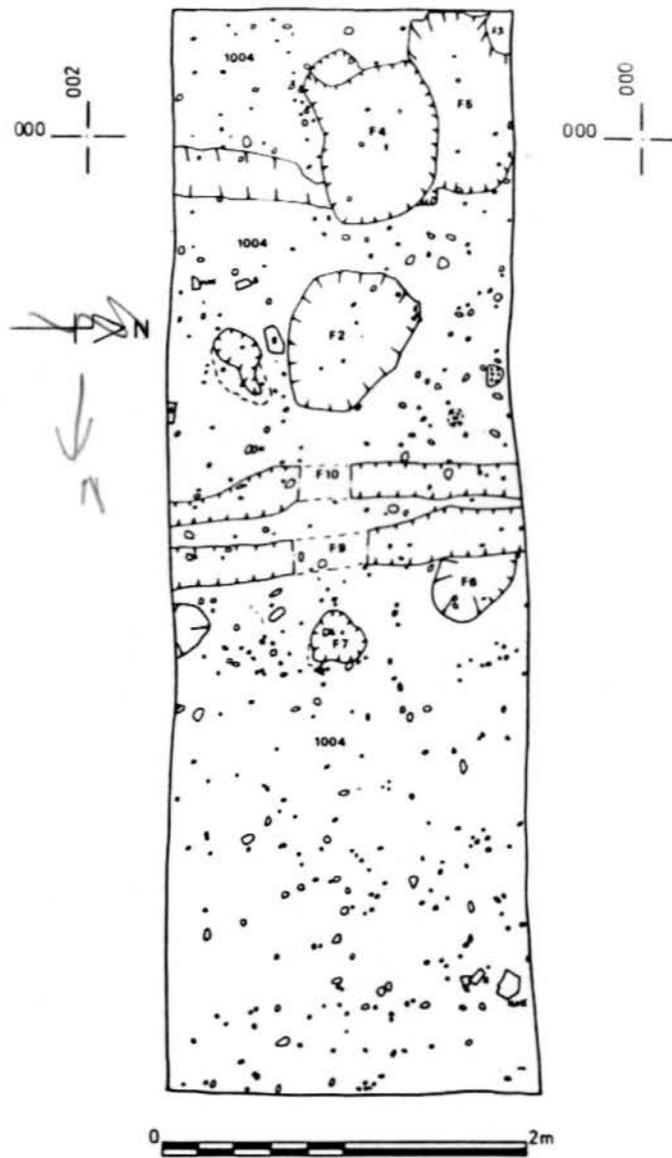


Fig. 6 PLAN OF 18th - 20th CENTURY GARDEN FEATURES