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BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

LANGLEY GATEHOUSE, SHROPSHIRE

A Structural Survey

by  
Iain Ferris

with a note on  
Archaeological Excavations

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B.U.F.A.U.



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## LANGLEY GATEHOUSE

### Survey and Excavation

#### Introduction

The site of Langley Hall (Grid Ref: SJ 540003) in north-west Shropshire lies about one mile south-south-east of Acton Burnell in the parish of Ruckley and Langley (Fig. 1). A derelict gatehouse, imposing but not telling and now adorned in rusted scaffolding, is all that survives of the hall complex. It stands amongst the barns, sheds and buildings of a working farm, next to a fine Victorian stone farmhouse. Traces of a moat that once surrounded the complex are visible in the surrounding fields.

In the summer of 1987 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was contracted by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission to undertake a structural survey of the gatehouse and to test, by limited trenching, the nature of any nearby and associated archaeological deposits in order to assess the implications of the proposed renovation of the building and the provision of services that necessitated below-ground interventions.

The survey is presented as an archive of drawings, photographs, and proforma recording sheets while the present account, based on that archive, acts as an interpretation and focus for discussion, and as a springboard to the eventual publication of the survey results.

#### The Building Survey

##### (i) Methodology (Appendix)

A photogrammetric survey of the building was photographically reduced to produce a series of tracing bases at a scale of 1:50; onto these were drawn details of jointing, coursing and build, and numbers assigned to each separate constructional entity and feature. These were designated as either Structural Elements (SE; numbered in continuous series from SE 1000), that is, each discernible building activity be it a major constructional phase or a bricklayer's or mason's rise, or Architectural Elements (AE; numbered in sequence from AE1), that is, doors, windows, chimneys etc., and a record sheet filled out for each. All measurements are metric, save those for the thickness of bricks.

##### (ii) Description (Figs. 2-7)

The gatehouse, aligned north-south, with its entranceway on the east-west axis, in plan consists, at ground-floor level, of two rooms or chambers separated by a 4-metres-wide passage. The smaller, southern room is approximately 4 metres (north-south) by 3.5 metres (east-west), though its walls do not meet at right angles; it is entered by a door (AE10) in the north wall. The northern room is 5.5 metres (north-south) by 4 metres (east-west), its

eastern wall now being largely open; there is a fireplace (AE26) in the centre of the northern wall.

Between ground- and first-floor level in the south is an intermediate chamber created by the provision here of a mezzanine floor, this room being accessible only by circuitous climbing from outside though once there must surely have been a ladder from below.

At first-floor level the interior accommodation is carried over the top of the entranceway and a third chamber is thus created. The southern room is a little larger, north-south, than its counterparts below since the stone wall does not carry up beyond first-floor level and, in fact, the northern wall of this room is formed by a timber and plaster screen, pierced by a doorway (AE22), offset slightly from the north edge of the levelled top of the stone wall. The central room, approximately 4.5 metres square, is heated by a large stone-built fireplace (AE19) in the northern wall. Both the southern and central rooms have moulded plaster ceilings.

Entry into the third room is through a timber-framed doorway (AE23) and down two stone steps (AE21), the doorway, as with all the other entrances at this level, being alongside the western wall. This northern room is irregularly shaped, consisting of a main chamber 5.5 metres (north-south) by 4.5 metres (east-west), now open to the roof, and is heated by two fireplaces (AE20, AE27), the larger of which (AE20) is set into a sturdy stone-built stack that projects out beyond the line of the northern wall and also services the fireplace in the room below. At the north-west corner of the building is another projection, 1.0 metre (north-south) by 1.20 metres (east-west), forming a garderobe chamber. A timber-framed doorway (AE24) gives access into the garderobe.

In the roof space there is no dividing wall or screen above the southern rooms, rather they form a single unit, but a low timber and plaster screen up to the level of the rafter couples divides them off from the space above the northern first-floor room.

An examination of the internal arrangements suggests a composite structure and this is borne out by a study of the individual elevations (Figs. 4-7). The west or front elevation retains its power to impress and consists of two storeys, built and faced in stone, pierced at ground level towards the southern end of the building by a double-chamfered stone archway (AE1). The roof, of tilestones, is of uniform pitch and is here viewed side-on, though this elevation does present two gables whose position in relation to the arch below spurns the beauty of symmetry. The rooves of the gables, again of tilestones, are pitched at 45 degrees. The lower part of this elevation is constructed, with the exception of the fabric of the arch, of irregular, unfaced sandstone blocks, the upper of well-cut faced and finished ashlar sandstone blocks; the two builds being separated by a chamfered stringcourse (SE1022) that is stepped beneath the northern gable and itself consists of two distinct builds. At the northern end of the elevation the rough stonework is bonded into the breezeblocks of a byre while the wall face to the south side of the arch is obscured by a modern shed or garage whose back wall, the face of the gatehouse, is whitewashed and upon which hangs, high up, a bicycle suspended like a piece of Daliesque furniture, these elements conspiring to prevent an examination of the stonework here in detail. The upper, finer, stonework is pierced by a number of windows. At first-floor level the northern chamber is lit by a large

window (AE2) with chamfered surround, divided into six lights by a chamfered mullion and transoms (four of the lights now being bricked up), and a small single-light window (AE3), again with a chamfered surround. The central and southern chambers at this level are each lit by similar windows (AE6, AE7) of three lights, with mullions and chamfering, one light of window AE6 being bricked-up. The roof or attic space is lit by two windows (AE4, AE5), positioned one towards the centre of each gable. Each has two lights, now either wholly or partially bricked-up, and in the same style and finish as the other openings below.

The back or east elevation presents a complete contrast to the front in terms of both appearance and construction. Here the entrance passage is not framed by an elaborate arch; rather the opening is rectangular with a horizontal wooden lintel supported by two angled struts. To either side of the opening is a stone buttress built to first-floor level, that to the south (AE17) being different in style to its northern counterpart (AE18) though each is bonded into the stonework that forms the side walls of the entranceway. This elevation, presenting two gables as does the front, is built of timber framing, studding and strutting, the panels between the timbers being infilled with lathes, daub and plasterwork or, in places, with brick nogging. There is a predominance of diagonal strutting to the north end of the building, in contrast to the vertical struts employed in the south; this difference may be more than simply a case of aesthetics. A certain amount of timber and panneling can be assumed to have been removed to the north of the entranceway at ground-floor level for the face here is now largely open; it can be presumed that evidence for a doorway here, as there must once have been, was at the same time destroyed.

The side elevation to the south is largely uninteresting, consisting as it does of a lower build of sandstone in rough blocks up to first-floor level, and mostly of obviously recent work, topped by a timber framing whose panels are now largely infilled with brick. The stonework is pierced at ground-floor level by a small, square window (AE13) with a brick-arched head, again relatively recent. Further up the face are three, variously sized openings (AE14, AE15, AE16), the largest of these (AE 15) perhaps marking the position of a former doorway giving access into the now-demolished cross-wing (see below).

The northern side elevation is dominated by a large external chimney stack (AE9) that projects out 1 metre from the main wall face at its base, the stack being built of well-cut and faced sandstone (SE1035), the chimneys, arranged in twin shafts with a star-shaped plan, of moulded brick (SE1003). To the east of the stack the main wall face is again timber framed with diagonal strutting, with much of the lower panneling infilled with brick nogging. At first-floor level is the projecting garderobe chamber, with a straight joint where it and the stack construction meet, built of sandstone with some brickwork and a tilestone roof. A number of the stones in the stack bear signs of damage that would be consistent with the effect of cannon shot but it is not known if any Civil War action took place here, though Sir Richard Lee, the owner of the house at the time, was a staunch Royalist.

The roofing of the building is uniform, and forms one of its most pleasing aspects, the roofing medium being limestone slates or, more properly perhaps, tilestones (Ashurst 1987), graded in size and held in place by iron nails. Such tilestones are also employed atop the two gables and the garderobe.

Above the centre of the main roof rises an octagonal stone-built chimney, some of the sandstone blocks in the build being obvious replacements, which services the fireplaces in the central and northern rooms at first-floor level.

Attention was also given to the timberwork and carpentry in the building, but because of the parlous nature of the floors and joists inside the building and the unsatisfactory state of the in situ scaffolding it was not possible to examine or record the roof timbers; until such an examination has been made it will not be possible to express full confidence in the phasing of the fabric below. However, the in situ floor joists, a number of which bear carpenters' marks were looked at and all such marks drawn and photographed. The basic arrangements of the joists at first-floor level differ from one end of the building to the other: those in the southern and central rooms being aligned east-west and those in the northern room being mainly set north-south with a void doubtless marking the position where a wooden staircase had been sited. The joists in the two southern rooms are exposed at their ends in a number of places, especially alongside the east wall of the building, and here visible is a consecutively-numbered series of carpenters' marks (Figs. 8,9) running from ... (on joist no.22) to .... (on joist no. 2). The sequence of marked joists in the western part of the southern room is less satisfactory (joists no. 9-16). No direct access from the first floor into the roof space or attic area now exists and while it may simply have been by ladder it is more likely to have been via the continuance of the stair in the northernmost room or from one of the rooms in the demolished cross-wing.

### (iii) Phasing and Dating

In proposing a phasing for different periods of construction represented in Langely Gatehouse, account must first be taken of the opinions of previous authorities. The most detailed examination of the building, prior to the present survey, was undertaken in 1968 by the Shrewsbury Old Houses Research Group and published by Moran; this survey concluded that the rough stonework and the double-chamfered arch seen in the west elevation were part of the earliest, possibly mid 15th century phase, that the upper stonework and garderobe were later probably c.1620 and that the now demolished cross-wing was probably early 17th century (Moran 1970). Pevsner offered no date or interpretation (Pevsner 1958, 163) while the account in the Victoria County History merely distinguishes between 'the medieval origin [of] some of the lower masonry, including a pointed arch' and 'most of the structure [which] probably dates ... from the later 16th century' (VCH 1968, 143).

The picture that emerges from the recent survey is altogether more complicated. There is no doubt that the rough, irregular and unfinished sandstone blocks employed in the lower build at the west front constitute the earliest building activity but within that construction further individual builds are discernible. It is unfortunate that the photogrammetric tracing of this face does not include details of this area, but the general outlines of the different elements can be seen on Fig. 4. The lowest part of the wall is built of irregularly shaped and irregularly laid sandstone blocks (SE1017), some of which are enormous, green-orange or orange-grey in colour and all unfaced and unfinished. Though only surviving to a height of five or six courses, this build can be seen to continue northwards beyond the line of the north wall of

the gatehouse, but cannot be traced southwards beyond the archway and indeed it appears to have been truncated here by the arch fabric. Two especially large blocks, though perhaps boulders is a more appropriate word, (SE1025), may represent the infilling of an opening in the wall here. Overlying SE1017 is another construction of rough sandstone (SE1016) with a noticeable variation in the colour of the blocks employed, and in their size which is smaller in general than those of SE1017. Again, some attempt at regular coursing has been made and the build can be traced on both sides of the archway below the chamfered string-course. It is possible that builds SE1016 and SE1017 are broadly contemporary, and that they simply represent different components of the same build, i.e. foundation and upper build, but the fact that the upper coursing of SE1017 is so uneven perhaps argues against this; all other constructional activity because it either overlies, abutts or cuts SE1017/SE1016 represents later phases. Thus whether of two distinct periods, or of two phases of the same period, the wall SE1017/SE1016 is a separate entity and represents a defensive or curtain wall. A watercolour showing the front of the gatehouse (Fig. 10), and dating from 1789, shows a long stretch of crenellated walling running northwards from the gatehouse and joined to it; this walling was extant until 1961 when it was sleighted (VCH 1968, 143). It is possible that such an arrangement continued along the top of SE1017/SE1016 before having the merlons removed to enable further building to take place. The dating of a rough stone curtain wall without the help of documentary or archaeological evidence is, of course, impossible but Baker has argued that in the midland counties the general phenomenon of rebuilding and refortification in stone at moated and manorial sites is of the later 13th or early 14th century (Baker 1983, 85) and there is no especial reason to suppose that such rebuilding took place in Shropshire at a different time.

Subsequently, accommodation was built up against the curtain wall, though whether at an already existing entranceway is uncertain. This accommodation took the form of a half-timbered structure but because of later extensive alterations to the fabric it is difficult to be certain of its size or plan. It has already been stated above that the largely extant, though damaged, timber framing visible at the rear of the gatehouse is of two distinct styles with vertical strutting employed in the south and diagonal strutting to the north, each representing a different phase of construction. Moran has suggested that the southern build is the earlier (Moran 1970, 2) and this would certainly make sense with the ground floor room to the south being the gatekeeper's accommodation or porter's lodge to one side of the entrance (this room having no fireplace) and the ground- and first-floor rooms to the north, with their now rebuilt fireplaces, being guest accommodation. The entranceway both at front and back would have been a rectangular opening, giving an appearance not unlike the gatehouse at Stokesay Castle. As to the date of this period of building, little can be said with confidence; the cusped wooden brace, the only one, in the southern room is unlikely to provide a close date for, as can be seen at Llwyd Mansion, Oswestry, these can be as late as the early 17th century and though the largely original stone octagonal chimney that appears to be of this phase 'was the familiar type of 15th-century chimney' (Wood 1965, 288) it may well represent a deliberate archaicism. The problems of applying the date-ranges of framing techniques as described by Mercer (Mercer 1975, 113-126) are great, in that the broadness of the dating little advances the argument that the first timber-framed gatehouse at Langley could be as early as the mid-15th century. Whatever, this basic unit was added to by the construction of a further timber-framed section to the north which more or less doubled the size of the building. At the front the only hint of this is given by a straight

joint (SE1036) below the point of the change in level of stone string-coursing, itself a phenomenon difficult to explain.

The next major alteration to the building involved no enlargement of the accommodation but rather it was motivated by the dictates of fashion. A gatehouse acted as a fillip to a manor house; to a visitor the first introduction to the wealth and status of the occupant or to the wealth and status to which he aspired. The front elevation of the building was all-important, the rear generally unseen; therefore the timber framing, of two periods, of the west face, above the stone-chamfered course, was removed and replaced by a facade of sandstone ashlar (SE1005). A general internal refit, the provision of the moulded ceilings etc. probably now took place and it is likely that also now were added the arched entry, the major chimney stack against the north wall and the internal stone fireplaces (though the original stack and chimney shaft were retained), and one if not both of the stone buttresses at the rear of the building, though the difference between them in build and the positioning of the northern buttress at a presumed weakpoint where the two timber framing elements meet perhaps suggests that this particular buttress predates this period of work. The garderobe chamber is almost certainly part of the timber-framed building.

A fairly confident date can be assigned to this building activity both by the style of the newly provided windows, a late 16th to mid 17th century type (Lloyd 1931, 336), by the moulded brickwork of the elaborate chimney that is Jacobean in style (Whiffen 1952), and by the rise in social standing of Sir Humphrey Lee, the owner of the Hall, attending his creation as a Baronet in 1620, that would surely have acted as a spur to build at that date or shortly afterwards.

This building continued in use long after the leasing of the Hall as a farmhouse in 1717 (VCH 1968, 143) and indeed its front is shown in a watercolour of 1789 with the facade well kept, windows glazed, and occupants in residence as evinced by curls of smoke rising out of the north chimney stacks. The great wooden door was then still in position with a wicket cut into the larger door to allow easy access to foot passengers. Most interestingly a timber-framed cross-wing at the south end of the gatehouse is visible but no trace of this now remains and it was presumably demolished with the rest of the Hall in the 19th century; it is possible that this cross-wing was added to the gatehouse at the same time as its extension was built to the north. The rear of the building was not rendered by the watercolourist though he also depicted the main Hall buildings (Fig. 11)., and so it is difficult to imagine the state of repair of the timber and plasterwork. Measurement of the size of the bricks used in the nogging here, to 'replace earlier wattlework' (McCann 1987, 106) as was standard practice, indicate that there are two periods of such repair, one utilising bricks of 2 inches in thickness and another using larger 2.3/4 - 3.1/4 inch bricks. Because 2 inch bricks were also used to block the windows at the front (obviously at some period post 1789) and are thus undoubtedly reused, the dating guidelines set down by Lloyd with regard to brick thickness cannot here be used with any confidence (Lloyd 1925, 11).

The Hall at Langley was demolished in 1868 (VCH 1986, 143) either because of the parlous state of the buildings, but this is unlikely since the gatehouse was retained, or for reasons of economy associated with the great agricultural depression which 'had a profound effect on the abilities of landowners to maintain their several great estates' and which led to large scale demolition of manor houses and halls (Harris 1975, 15). When visited by Hare in 1898 the gatehouse was seemingly unoccupied though in a good state of repair (Hare 1898,

100) and with its use as a farm store or barn this century and the removal of part of the timbering at the rear decay has been rapid and merciless.

### Summary

To a possibly two-phase sandstone curtain wall of the late 13th or early 14th century was added a timber-framed gatehouse or keeper's lodge in or after the mid 15th century. This basic structure was enlarged to provide accommodation and a cross-wing added (at the same time?) later that century or in the early 16th. Soon after 1620 the building was upgraded and a fine stone facade erected to replace the timbering at the front, and a stone arch erected at the entranceway. This work was accompanied by internal changes. The gatehouse was lived in throughout the 18th century, survived the demolition of the rest of the Hall complex in the mid 19th century, and it was only in this century that it was turned over to its present use as a farm store.

### Recommendations

The model proposed for the sequence of building at Langley Gatehouse needs to be tested by further observation in a number of key areas of the building largely unexamined either for safety reasons or for difficulty of access. The most obvious lack is drawings of, and notes on, the construction of the roof, for here surely lies the key to the understanding of the building. It is recommended that, as soon as safety considerations allow, this further work should be undertaken. Likewise the internal stripping of plaster should be carefully monitored, especially in the ground floor room to the north, for here evidence for the enlargement of the building may be expected to be encountered.

### The Archaeological Investigations (by Jon Sterenberg). (Figs. 1, 12-15)

The brief for the below-ground investigations was specific and required the excavation of five trenches, each down to and no deeper than a predetermined level, the depth to which service trenches would penetrate. The conclusions that can be reached from such trenching are limited and no overall picture emerged. The sequence in each trench, labelled A to E, will now be described, the numbers in brackets referring to context numbers (from 1000 onwards) and features (from F1).

### Trenches A, B and E

These trenches, after the removal of the topsoil (1000), revealed the considerable extent of the laid cobble surface (F1) that is best seen beneath the archway in Trench E. The cobbles, 4-10 centimetres in diameter, were bedded in a layer of fine sand and, in a number of places, sandstone blocks set flush with the cobbles and showing considerable signs of wear, formed an integrated part of the surfacing especially along the west edge of Trench E where they formed a kerb-like threshold. There is no reason to question the broad contemporaneity of the three isolated areas of flooring/surfacing

encountered in the three trenches, though they have each been assigned a separate context number (1001/f1 Trenches A and E, 1004/F4 Trench B). On removing the cobbles in Trench A two spreads of rubble or hardcore make-up were revealed, the uppermost (1002) containing brick, tile, mortar, charcoal and occasional pebbles in a sandy mortar matrix, the lower (1008) including coarser rubble and quantities of limestone tilestones like those employed in the roofing of the gatehouse. This trench was bottomed at 80 centimetres below the present ground surface, the full depth of 1008 not having been determined. After their exposure the cobbles in Trench E were cleaned, photographed and drawn but left in situ. In Trench B the cobbles covered only the west end of the trench, having been presumably cut away by a trench (F5) backfilled with brick rubble (1005), a layer of red brown sand (1016) exposed in the side of F5 appearing to run under the cobbling to the west. This trench was excavated at its east end to a depth of 40 centimetres, with the cobbles left in situ to the west, with context 1005 only partially removed.

### Trench C

Under the topsoil (1000) was a compact, probably modern, deposit of hardcore (1006) containing much stone rubble and brick, post-medieval pottery, the skeleton of a dog and quantities of cattle bones, perhaps suggesting that there is a huge backfilled shallow pit here. Some 35 centimetres deep, its removal revealed a surface of sandy clay (1010, 1012) cut by a possible robber trench (F7) whose backfill was a mixed dirty silt clay with much sandstone flecking. No further earth was removed in this trench.

### Trench D

This small sondage, inside the northern room of the gatehouse itself was excavated to a depth of 40 centimetres, this being a single deposit of manure (1001) and no archaeological deposits were encountered.

### Conclusions

It would appear from Trench D that the internal removal of deposits here would involve no disturbance of floor layers. However trenches A and B show how extensive and well preserved is the cobbled yard surfacing, a fact that will make the laying out of service trenches difficult if they are to cause as little damage as possible. Away from the gatehouse in the area of Trench C the ground appears to have been built up considerably in the post-medieval period, though immediately beneath this, at a depth of 40 centimetres, archaeological features are apparent.



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**Appendix: Building Recording Forms**

BUILDING RECORDING FORM

STRUCTURAL ELEMENT NO

TOWN/SITE	BUILDING	WALL NO		FACE	ASPECT	GRID	
-----------	----------	---------	--	------	--------	------	--

RECORD: PLAN NO:

ELEVATION NO:

C SLIDE NO:

M NEG NO:

BUILDING MATERIAL

COURSING/BOND

BRICK/STONE DIMENSIONS

1	RISE	5	RISE	9	RISE
2		6		10	
3		7		11	
4		8		12	

MORTAR	COURSING	MATRIX
--------	----------	--------

RENDER  
POINTING  
CORE

DESCRIPTION;	RELATIONSHIPS OVER UNDER ABUTTS BLOCKS BONDED INTO
	SAMPLES BRICK/TILE STONE MORTAR

RECORDER	DATE	CARD	OF
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BUILDING RECORDING FORM

ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENT NO

TOWN/SITE

BUILDING

WALL NO

FACE

ASPECT

GRID

RECORD:

PLAN NO:

C SLIDE NO:

ELEVATION NO:

M NEG NO:

BUILDING MATERIAL

DESCRIPTION (AND INTERIOR APPEARANCE)

DIMENSIONS

INTERNAL

EXTERNAL

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

MORTAR

DESCRIPTION

MATRIX

SKETCH

RELATIONSHIPS

WITHIN SE NO  
CONTEMPORARY  
SET WITH  
BLOCKED WITH

SAMPLES

BRICK/TILE  
STONE  
MORTAR

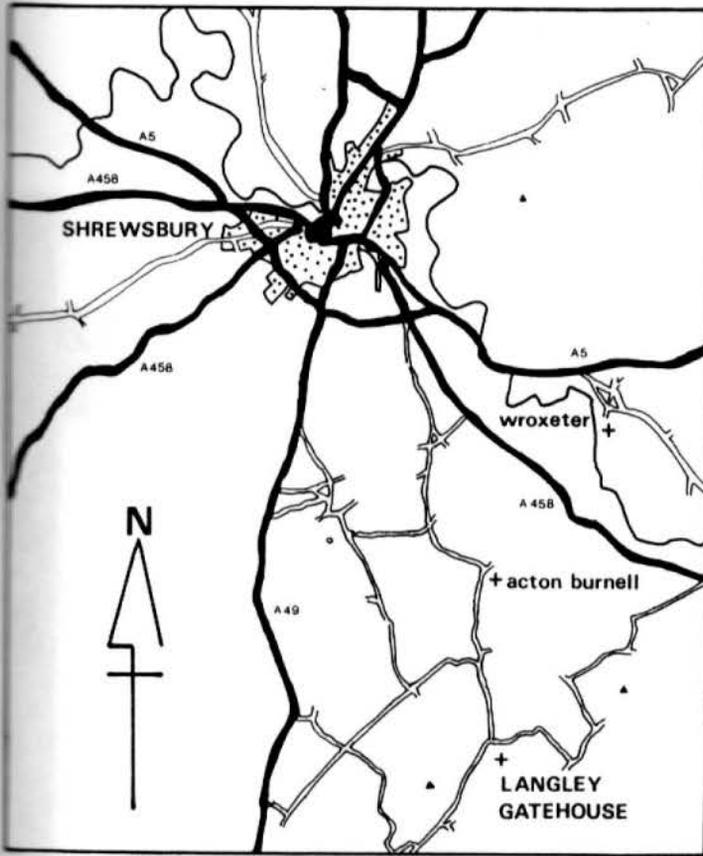
STYLE/DATE

RECORDED

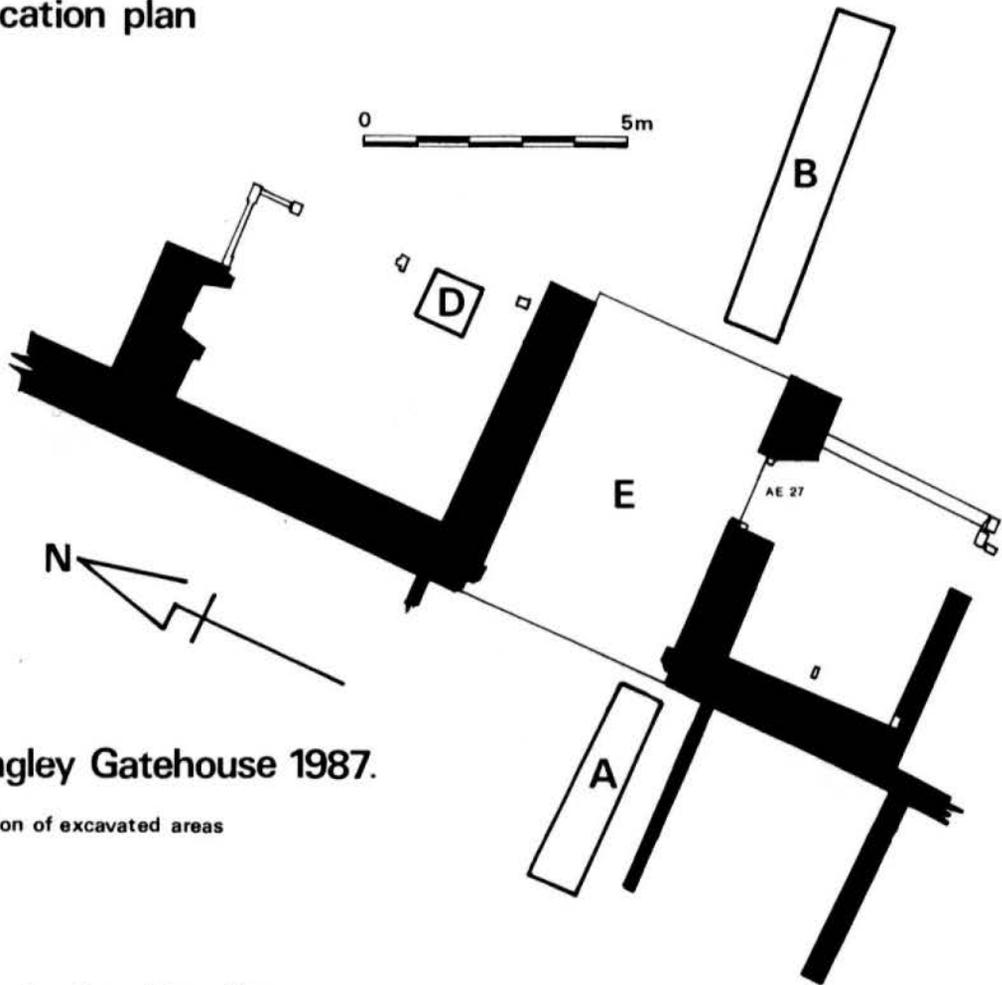
DATE

CARD

OF



Location plan



Langley Gatehouse 1987.

Location of excavated areas

Fig. 1 Location Map

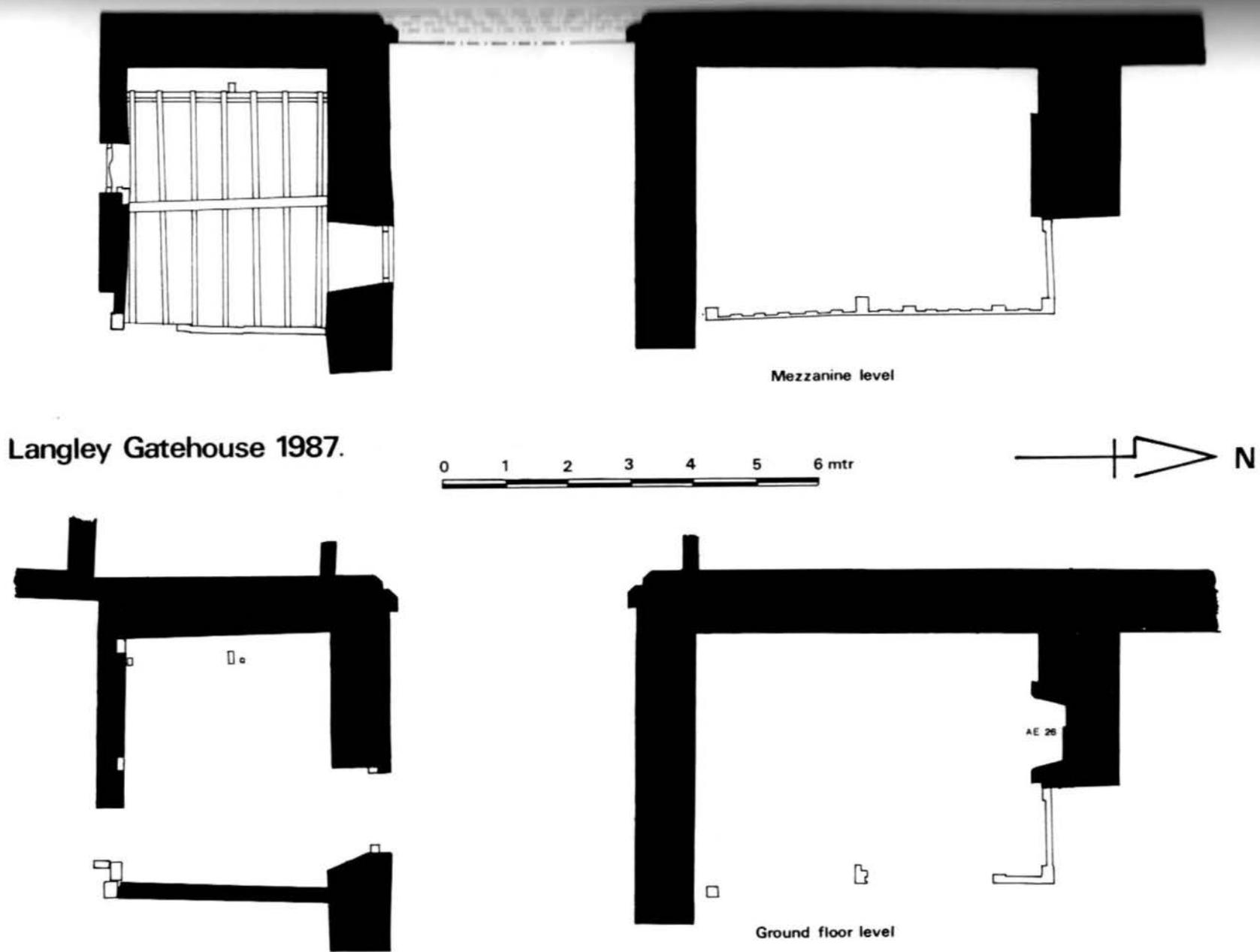


Fig. 2 Plan: Ground Floor and Mezzanine Level.

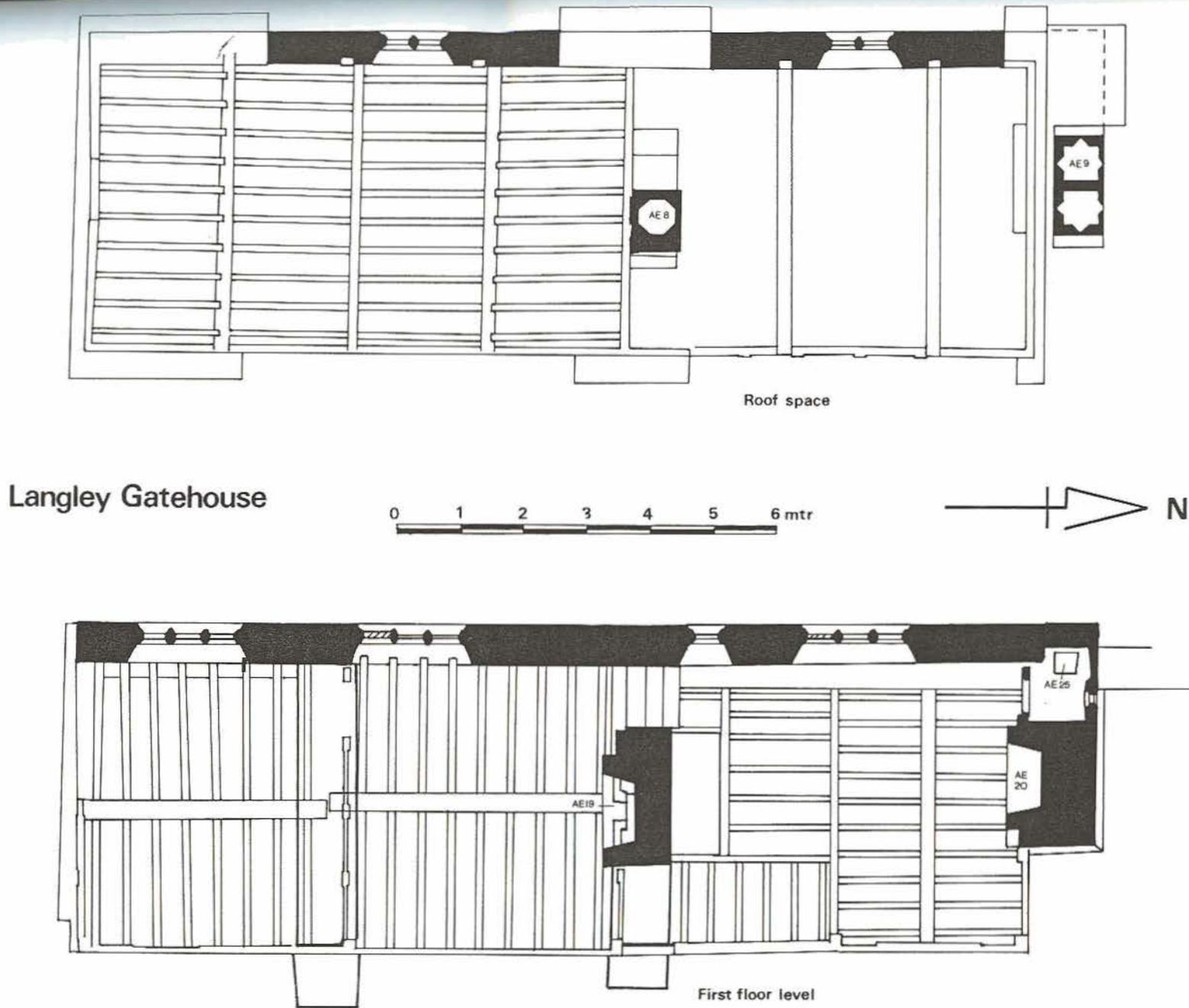


Fig. 3 Plan: First Floor and Roof Space



**Langley Gatehouse, Salop 1987**

West elevation

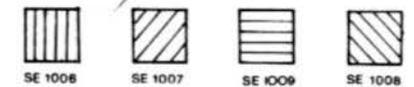


Fig. 4 West Elevation



**Langley Gatehouse 1987.**  
East elevation

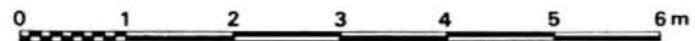


Fig. 5 East Elevation

# Langley Gatehouse

1987

North elevation

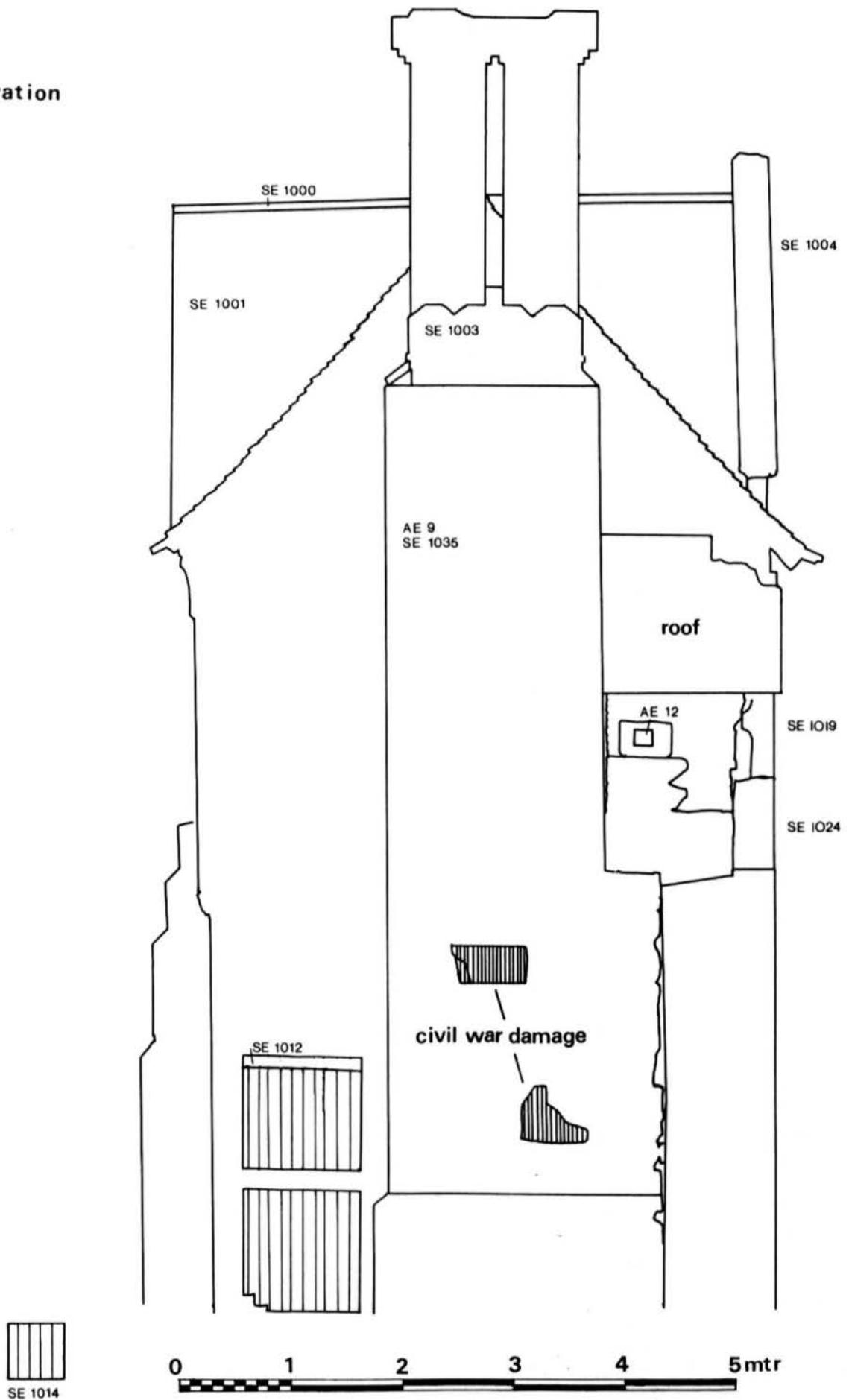


Fig. 6 North Elevation

# Langley Gatehouse 1987

South elevation

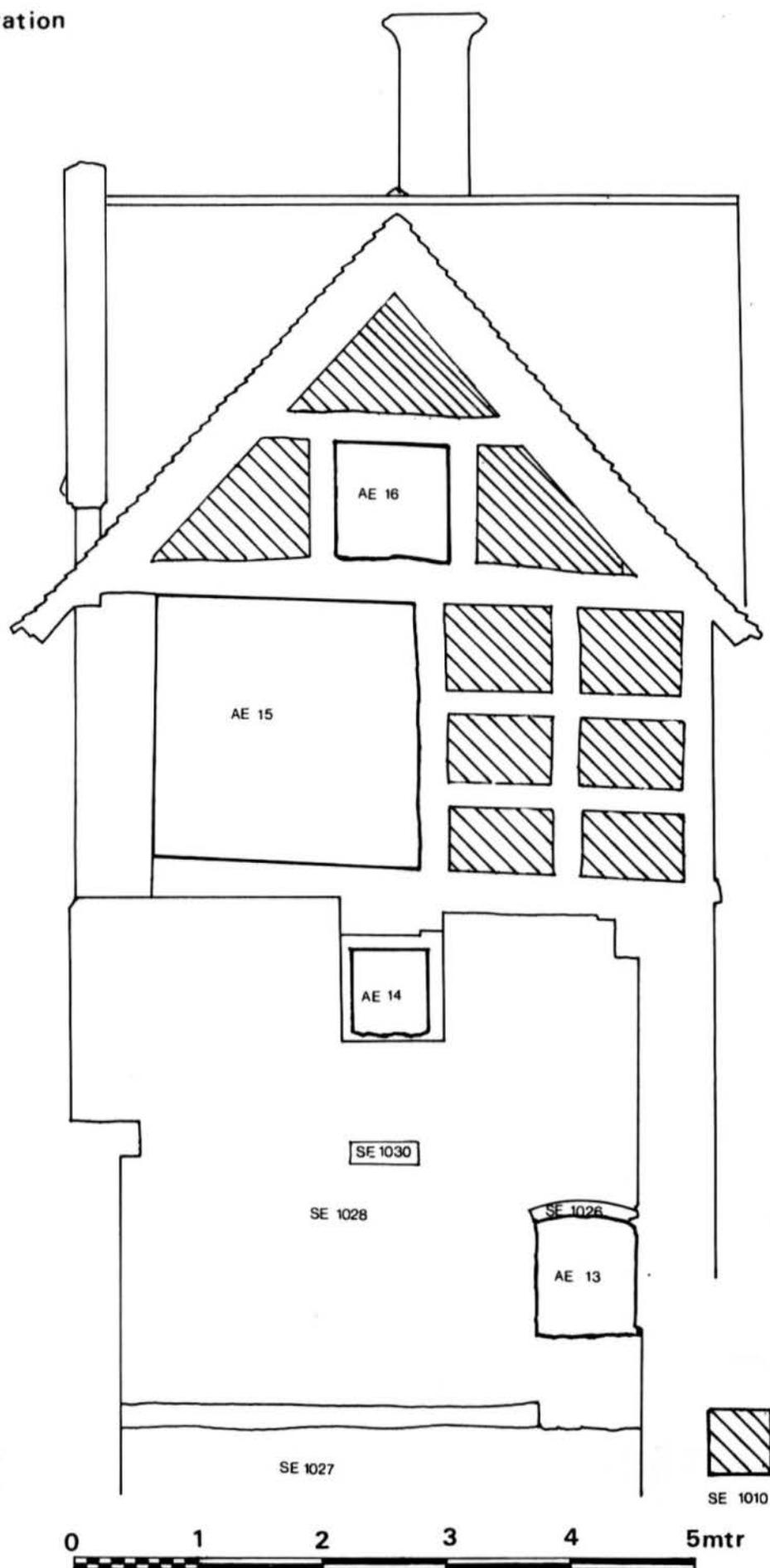
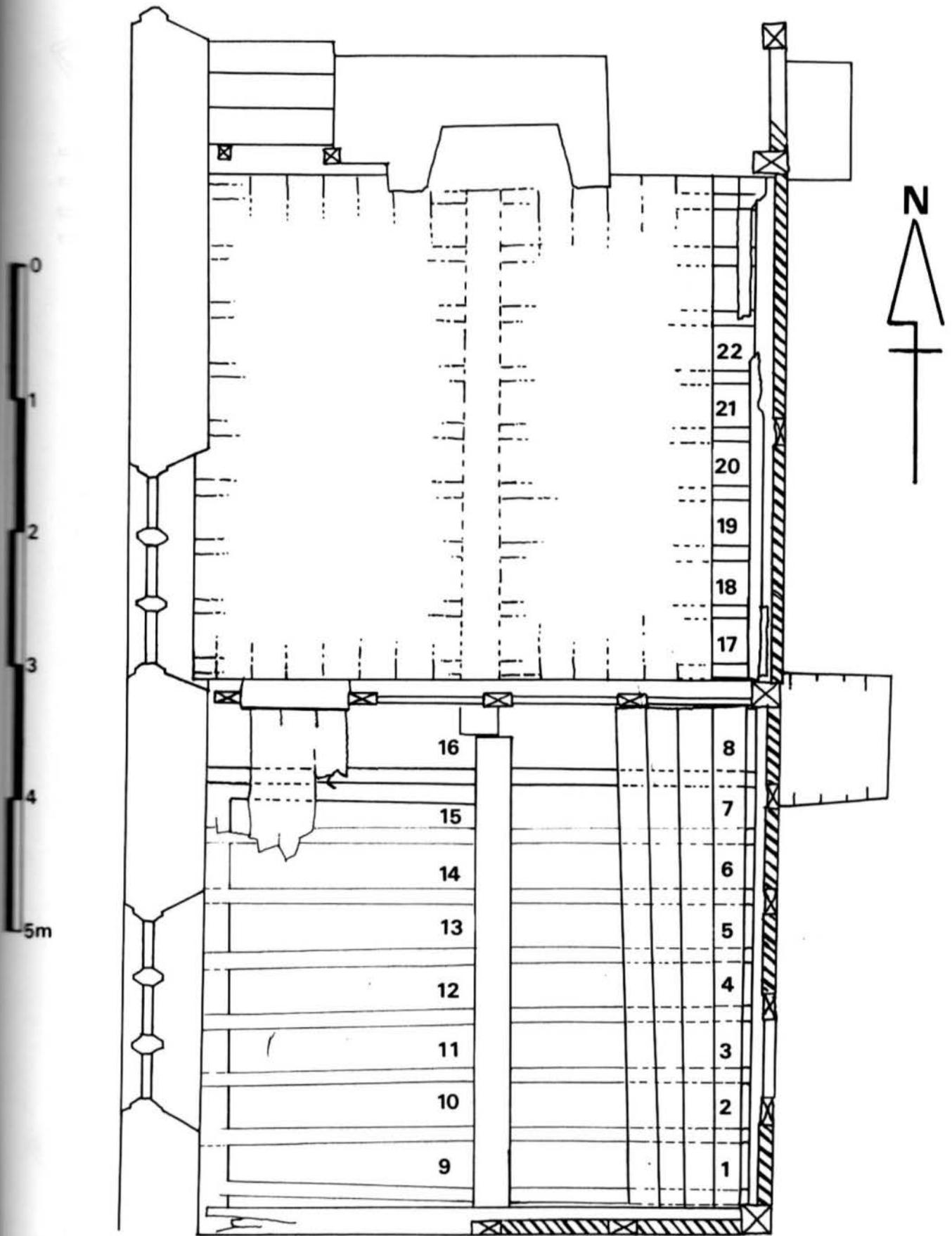


Fig. 7 South Elevation

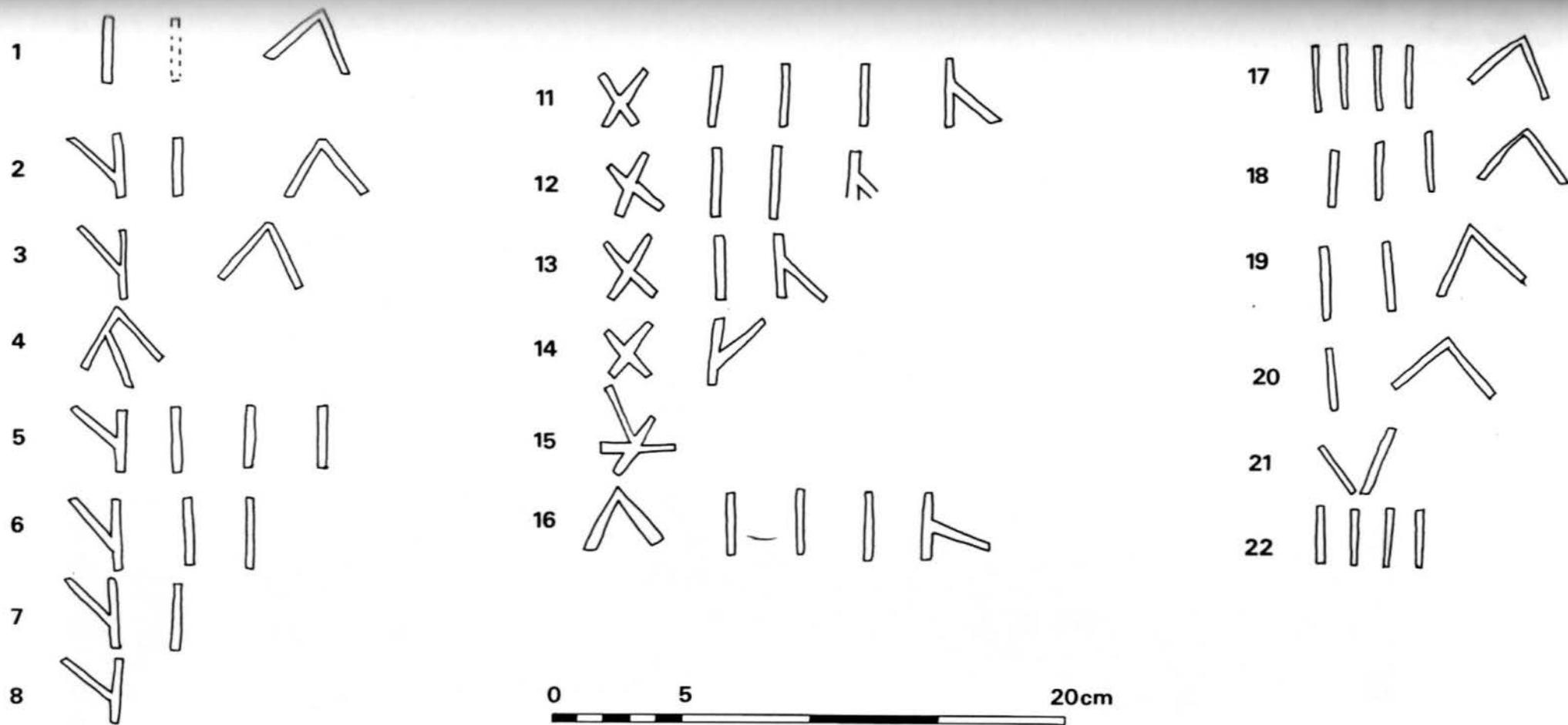


## Langley Gatehouse, Salop 1987.

Location of numbered floor joists.

J.M-Press

Fig. 8 Plan Locating Numbered Joists



## Langley Gatehouse 1987.

Carpenters marks

Fig. 9 Carpenters' Marks

*John May*  
*To the Old House*  
*at Langley*  
*August 28<sup>th</sup>*  
*1789*



BREWSBURY  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY.

Fig. 10 The Gatehouse in 1789

Old House at Woking

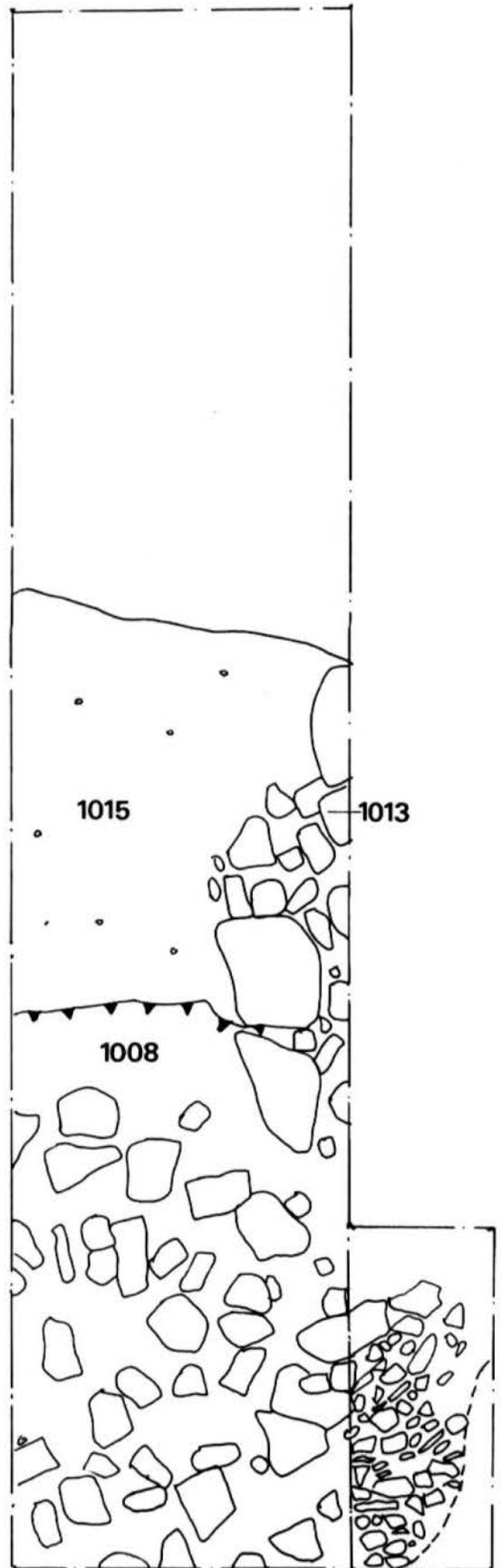
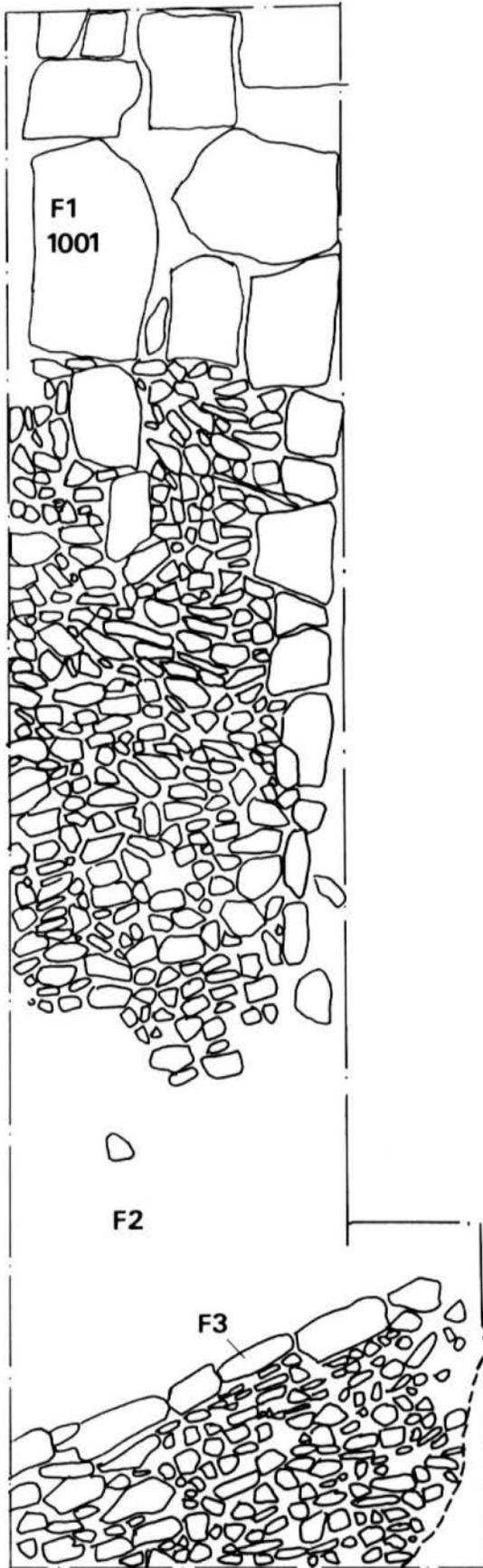
Sept 10<sup>th</sup> 1704

119



SHREWSBURY  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY.

Fig. 11 The Hall in 1789

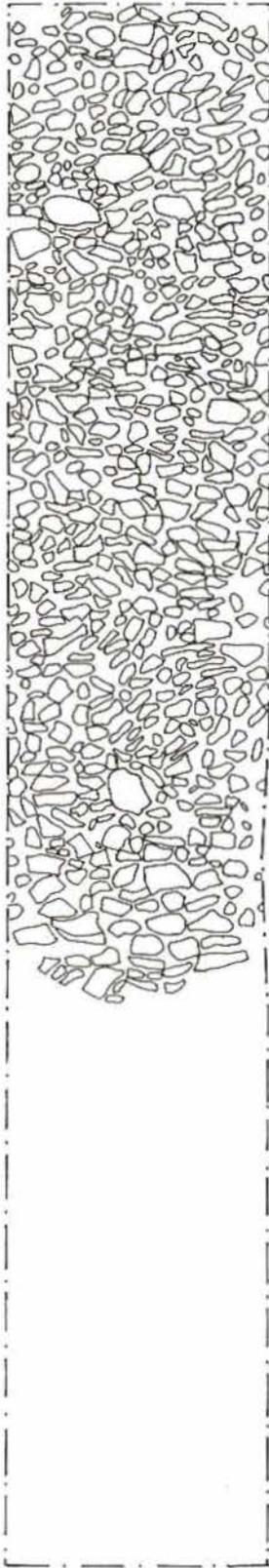


# Langley Gatehouse

Trench A



Fig. 12 Plan of Trench A



F4 1004

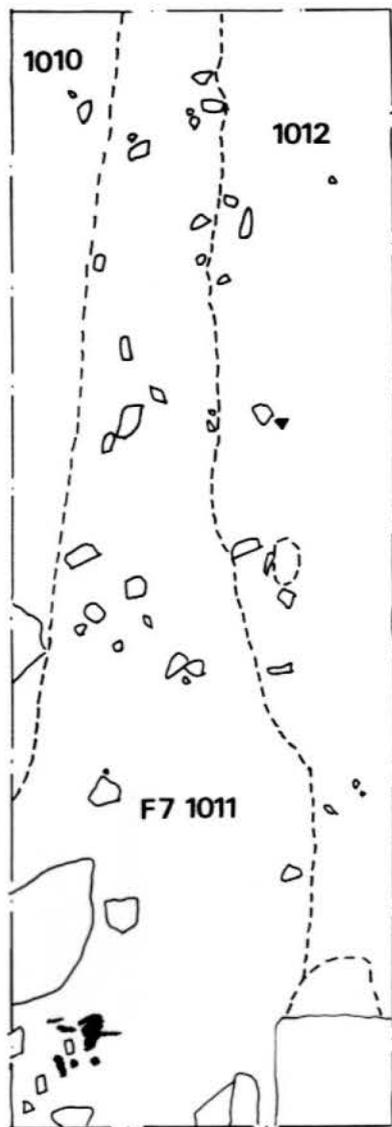


### Langley Gatehouse

Trench B



Fig. 13 Plan of Trench B

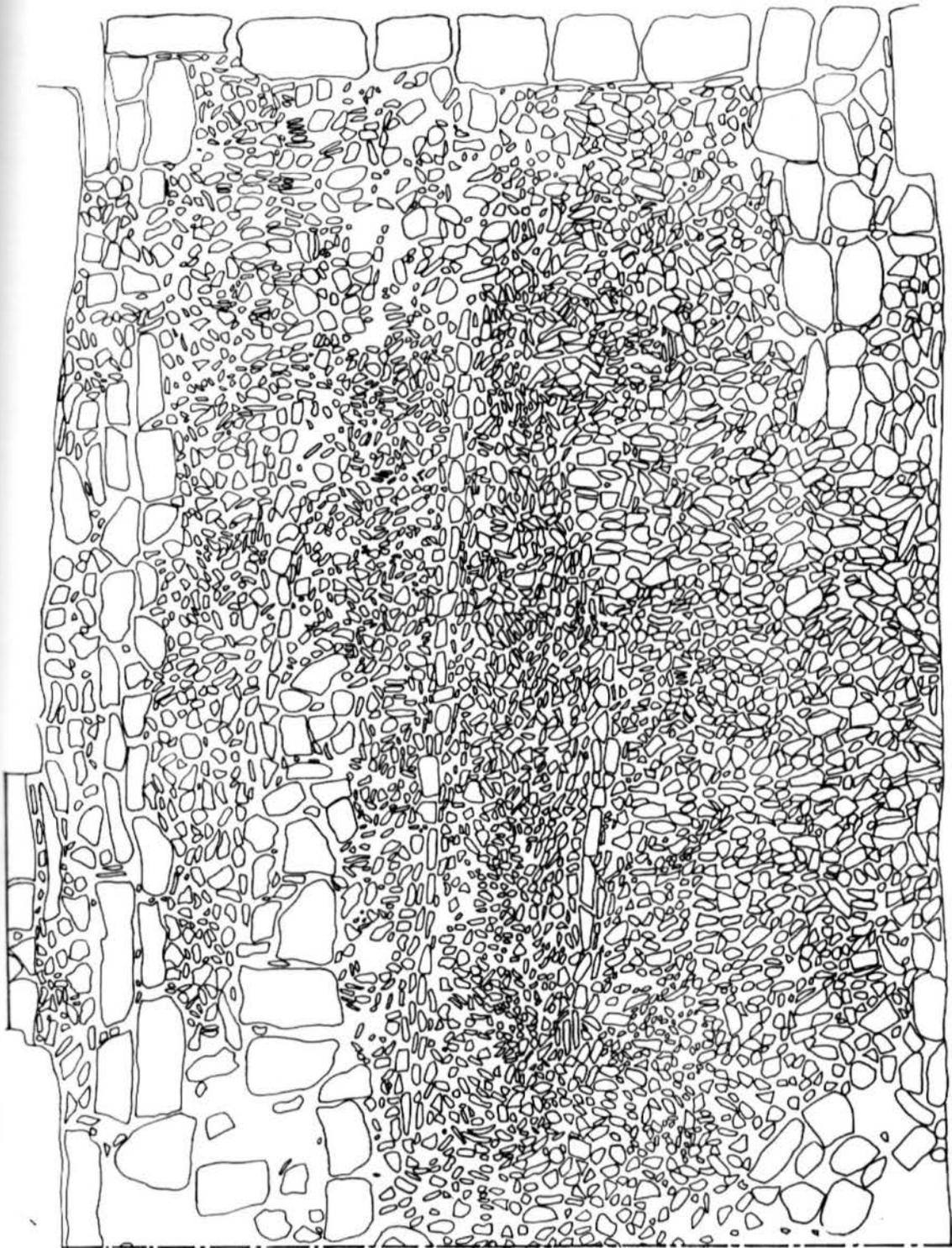


# Langley Gatehouse

Trench C



Fig. 14 Plan of Trench C



0 1 2 3 4m

**Langley Gatehouse, Salop 1987.**

Plan of cobbled passage Trench E

1:20 L.R.Jones J.Cutting

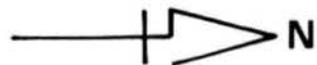


Fig. 15 Plan of Trench E