

The Hall of the Barber Surgeons

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THE SITE OF Barber Surgeons' Hall (Fig. 1) was investigated by Professor Grimes and Audrey Williams in 1958-9 as part of the Roman and Medieval London Excavation Council's work on bomb-damaged sites in the City of London. However, while the discoveries relating to the construction and development of the Roman fort wall and bank sequences were discussed in Grimes' *The Excavation of Roman and Medieval London* (1968), the medieval and post-medieval aspects of the site were not mentioned. This report presents the results of Grimes' excavations relating to the post-Roman development of the site, complemented by fieldwork undertaken in 1996 by students from UCL Institute of Archaeology.

Work by the R.M.L.E.C. at Barber Surgeons' Hall began in August 1958 and continued through the winter until June of the following year. Cuttings A and B, running east from the City wall, were opened first, with Cutting C, to the east of this again, opened by December. The two external cuttings (outside the City wall) were also first opened during December (Fig. 2). Work continued in the external trenches and then in Cutting F during the first six months of 1959. In addition to excavations inside and outside the City wall, the photographs from the site also show that the

R.M.L.E.C. excavated inside Bastion 13. However, there are no notes relating to these excavations and only one drawing.

The Barber Surgeons' Company

The guilds of the Barbers and the Surgeons initially existed as separate entities until the late 15th century. Until this time the Barbers appear to have been the more powerful group; the guild may have come into existence as early as the 13th century, and in 1308 Richard le Barbours was elected to supervise the barbers of the City. The guild was incorporated in 1462 and in 1540 the Company of Barbers and the Guild of Surgeons were joined by an Act of Parliament. "This act partook of a twofold nature, for while it united the two crafts or mysteries as they were called, yet it separated them. The barbers were not to practice surgery other than bleeding or drawing teeth, while the surgeons were not to practice the art of barbbery or shaving."² The companies were again separated in 1745 and in 1752, the new Surgeons' Hall was completed in Newgate. This Company was dissolved in 1797 to be replaced by the Royal College of Surgeons. After World War II, the company based in Monkwell Street again adopted the title of "Barber Surgeons".

The first reference to the existence of a Barbers' hall is found in a list of City Company halls dated

1. V. Hope, C. Birch and G. Torry *The Freedom: The Past and Present of the Livery, Guilds and City of London* (1982) 108.

2. G. Lambert 'The Barbers Company' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 6 (1890) 131.

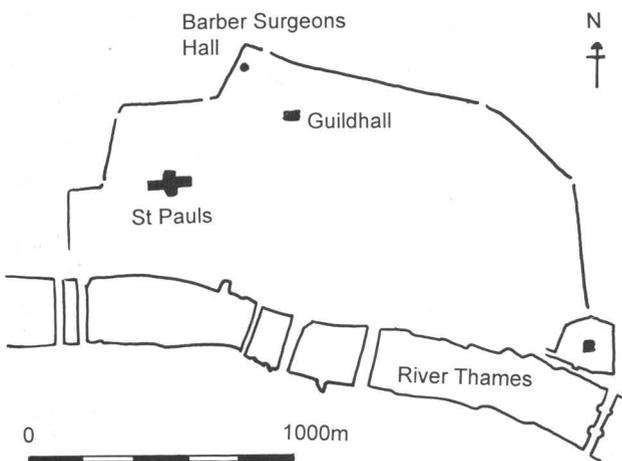


Fig. 1: plan of the City showing the site of Barber Surgeons' Hall in relation to other major medieval features.

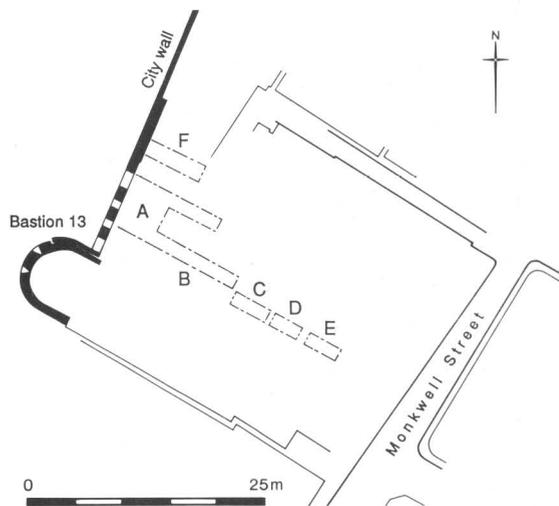


Fig. 2: plan of the R.M.L.E.C. excavations in 1958-9.

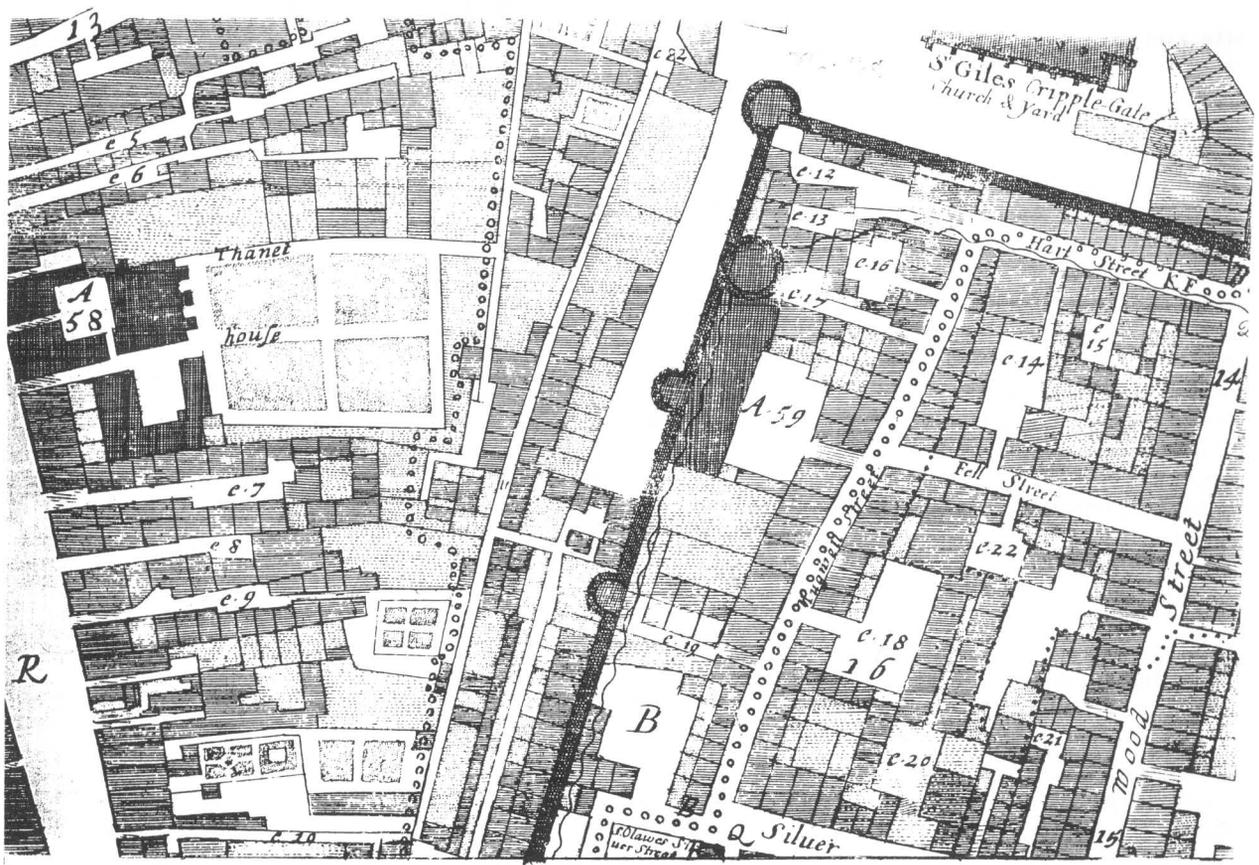


Fig. 3: the Ogilby and Morgan map of 1676, showing the extent of the destruction caused by Great Fire in the north-west corner of the City.

to 1381³, however it has been proved that this list refers to Company halls in existence in the reign of Richard III (1483-85), not Richard II (1377-99) as previously thought⁴. The records of the Brewers, based in nearby Addle Street, make reference to leasing their hall to the Barbers nine times in 1422-3⁵. The Barbers first built a hall of their own in the 15th century, after acquiring land from Sir William Oldhall and John Lavenham⁶. Very little is known about the plan and development of this building, however it is likely that it lay further to the east than the post-medieval buildings that succeeded it, because of the regulations concerning the City wall and the defensive area that was maintained immediately behind it. For example, the City Letter Books for October 5, 1434 state: "whereas every tenement situated near the walls or gates of the City should be distant from them 16ft at least,

according to the laws and customs of the City, the said intermediate space being the common soil of the City"⁷. As the need to maintain this defensive strip lessened, the land was let to tenants owning adjoining properties. The land behind Barber Surgeons' Hall (including Bastion 13) was first let to Lord Windsor, who owned nearby Windsor Court, and in 1605 the lease was bought by the Barber Surgeons, who extended their buildings up to the City wall⁸. In 1636, Inigo Jones designed an anatomical theatre attached to the main Hall buildings. He also designed a Court Room for the Company. The Hall appears to have been badly damaged in the Great Fire of 1666; the Ogilby and Morgan map of 1676, which shows the extent of the fire in this corner of the City, indicates that the fire swept across most of the site, apart from the westernmost section, next to the City wall⁹ (Fig. 3). The roof of

3. P. Norman *Ancient Halls of the City Guilds* (1903) 135.

4. R.T. Beck 'The Halls of the Barbers, Barber-Surgeons and Company of Surgeons' *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons* (1970) 16.

5. G. Unwin *The Guilds and Companies of London* (1966) 181.

6. *Op. cit.* fn 4, 15.

7. T. Dyson *London's City Wall: an assessment of documentary sources* (1993) 7.

8. *Op. cit.* fn 4, 17.

9. R. Hyde, J. Fisher and R. Cline *The A-Z of Restoration London (The City of London 1676)* (1992).

the anatomical theatre caught fire, but the building itself was saved. The rebuilding of the hall after the fire cost £4292. The theatre survived until 1784, when it was demolished and houses built on the site. In 1864, the main hall and kitchen wing, along with three houses belonging to the Company on Monkwell Street were demolished and the land was sold for warehouses. Fig. 4 shows the comparative ground plans of the hall of these two phases. In 1940, the surviving buildings were destroyed by bombs. A new Company Hall was rebuilt to the east of the post-medieval building and opened in 1969.

Development of the site

Limited late Saxon occupation of the area inside the City walls is indicated by the presence of residual late Saxon pottery (Phase I). Early Medieval Sand and Shell ware (1000-1150) was found in seven contexts. Three other types of ceramics dating to 1050-1150 were also found: Early Surrey ware, Early Medieval Shelly ware and Local Grey ware. No structural evidence was found associated with these artefacts. Inside the City walls, ceramics dating from between 1150-1250 (Phase II) were recovered from the north extension of Cutting A. The matrices for these ceramics are variously described as "mixed soil" and "blackish, softish soil" and probably represent the fact that this part of the site was an open area or garden until the extension of the hall in the 17th century. Further evidence for the westernmost extent of the pre-17th century Barbers' Hall was provided by the excavations in Cutting B. Twenty feet (6m) east of the City wall, the remains of a chalk wall with buff mortar were discovered with a later brick wall built on top of this. This wall must represent part of the property boundary of the medieval hall. The wall seals a layer containing pottery dated to 1270-1350 (Phase III). To the east of the wall pottery

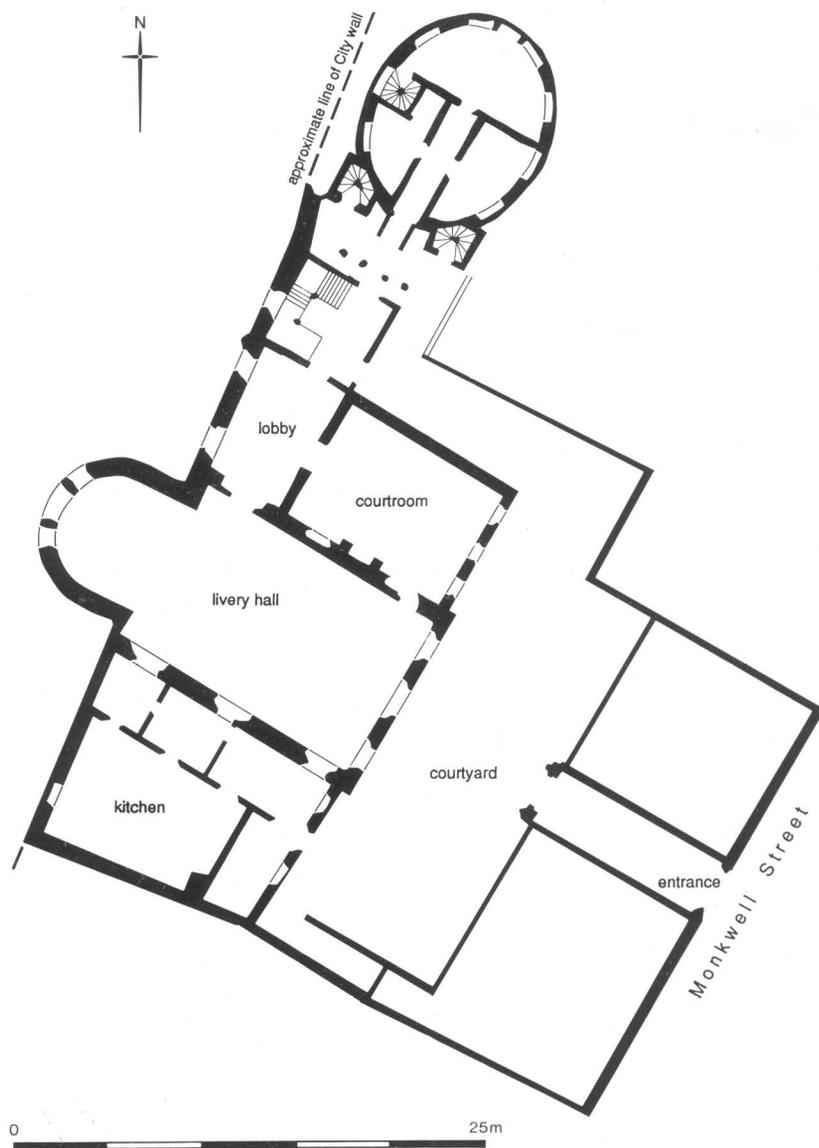
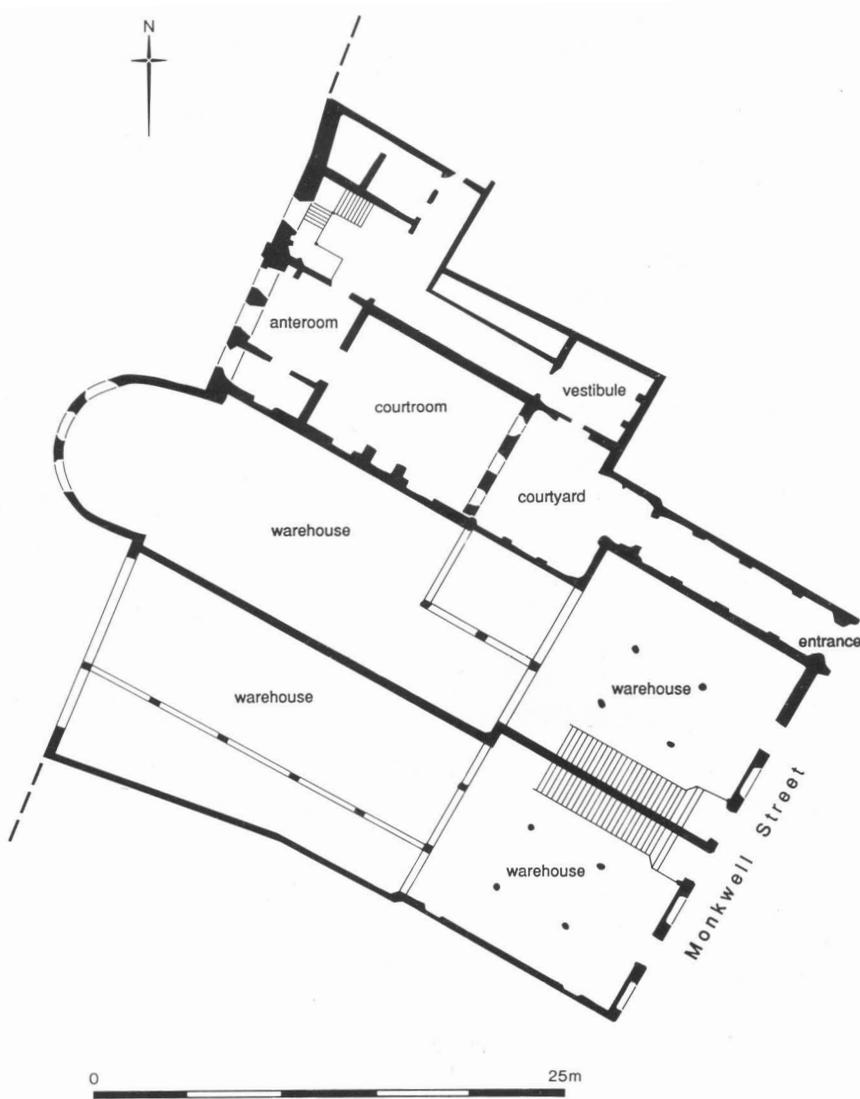


Fig. 4: comparative plans of the Barber Surgeons' Hall after the Great Fire and after the reconstruction work of the mid-19th century. (Susan Banks, MOLAS)

dating from 1350-1500 (Phase IV) was recovered from immediately beneath a burnt brick layer, which may represent rubble from the destruction of the hall in the Great Fire. In Cutting C, to the east again of Cuttings A and B, the excavator notes the presence of medieval pits, but they were not excavated. The discovery of these pits further supports the notion that the original Barbers' Hall was built some distance away from the City wall, possibly fronting on to Monkwell Street. Maps of London produced in the mid-16th century, such as the 'Agas' woodcut (Fig. 5) and Braun and Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* also show a large garden in this area, with Bastion 13 and the City wall unencumbered by buildings¹⁰.

10. S. Powys Marks *The Map of Mid Sixteenth Century London: an investigation into the relationship between a copper-engraved map and its derivatives* (1964).



The trenches dug outside the City wall produced largely post-medieval pottery, (17th to 20th centuries) with two of the lower layers producing medieval pottery, dating to the 14th century at the latest. The medieval pottery may be associated with the ditches constructed outside the wall, prior to the use of the area as a graveyard for the nearby church of St Giles Cripplegate.

The post-medieval building sequence of Barbers Surgeons' Hall can be interpreted from documentary sources and from the surviving fabric. It is known that once the Barbers leased the land behind their Hall from the City in the early 17th century, they extended their buildings up to the City wall, (Fig. 5) using Bastion 13 as the dais for the Livery Hall (Phase V). Photographs of the excava-

tions in Bastion 13 show that the foundations of the bastion were revealed, as were the remains of a substantial stone foundation, which may be a part of the extension into this area in the early 17th century. The photographs also show a stone-lined well which may predate the construction of the hall. It is suggested here that parts of Inigo Jones' work on Barber Surgeons' Hall are still visible today. The fact that the anatomical theatre just to the north of the hall complex survived the Great Fire, and the demarcation line of the fire destruction shown on the 1676 map, lend weight to the hypothesis that parts of the hall buildings nearest to the City wall remained standing after the fire, and thus were able to be reused during rebuilding. (Phase VI). Also, the amount of money spent on the rebuilding suggests that some reuse of standing remains was possible; the Barber Surgeons spent only £4292 in comparison with the £5827 spent by the Brewers during their rebuilding. Jones' Court Room annexe used the City wall as its west wall and the surviving windows from this period have been preserved, along with a later window inserted during the 19th century reorganisation of the complex (Fig. 6 (upper and middle)). The distinctive

red brickwork of Jones' windows survives to a height of 3.2m externally and 4.0m internally. In addition to the brickwork, an original Portland stone window dressing survives on the external face. The door which led into the Hall from the Court Room annexe is also still visible, with the red brickwork surviving to a height of 5.0m. The stone threshold of the door is visible on both sides of the wall and the entrance has been blocked by yellow stock bricks (Fig. 6 (lower)), which must date from the 19th-century alterations (Phase VII).

Ironically, it is possible that the medieval Barber Surgeons' Hall may have been destroyed by the mid-20th century rebuilding (Phase VIII). The present-day building is much larger than the post-Fire building, standing around 8m from the City

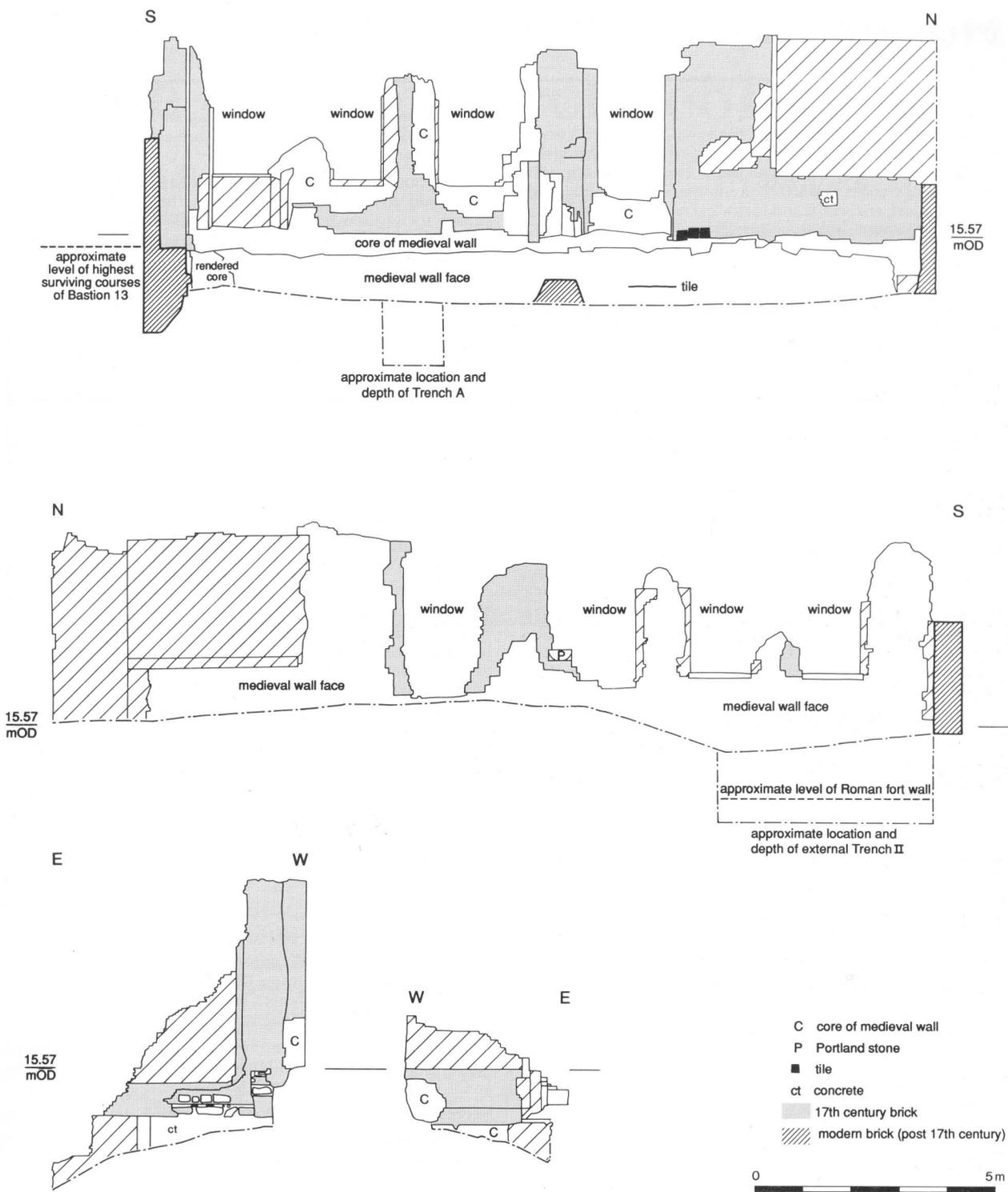


Fig. 6: (upper) external elevation (west-facing) of Barber Surgeons' Hall.
 (middle) internal elevation (east-facing) of Barber Surgeons' Hall.
 (lower) internal elevations (north- and south-facing) elevation of Barber Surgeons' Hall. (Susan Banks, MOLAS)