

The Pageant of History: A Re-interpretation of the 13th-century Building at King John's House, Romsey, Hampshire

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STRUCTURAL Analysis coupled with archaeological excavation at King John's House, Romsey, has revealed a mid-13th-century chamber block which probably stood within a precinct of adjoining buildings. The discovery and extravagant claims subsequently made for the building illustrate how far interpretation may be conditioned by the circumstances of the time.

The mid-13th-century stone and flint building known as 'King John's House',² Romsey lies about 100 m from the east end of the surviving church of the former Benedictine Nunnery, now known as Romsey Abbey (Fig. 1).

This is not a perfect medieval building, caught in the amber of an a-historical pseudo-Middle Ages. Apart from the architectural changes to doors and windows, and the insertion of fireplaces and cupboards, it contains many features from the different periods of its use, including graffiti, some of which may date from the early 14th century, and the remains of a bone floor, probably dating from the late 17th century. It has been, variously, a high-status, possibly official building, with connections to the Abbey or to royalty; a brewhouse, perhaps a metal workshop; the Town Workhouse; and it housed at least two families in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was for many years hidden, both actually and historically, behind external rendering and internal redecoration; by 1900 it had become a slum, and was in danger of being condemned had its great age not been discovered.

DISCOVERY AND AFTER

There are a number of versions recounting the moment of the rediscovery of the building:

In 1927, a workman repairing the roof of No. 7, Church Court saw decorated stonework and called in Mr. W.J. Andrew, a local antiquarian . . .³

¹ This article is a revised and shortened version of a thesis submitted in 1996 for the M.A. in Regional and Local History and Archaeology, King Alfred's College, Winchester.

² King John's House is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, No. 131 on the County List, and a Grade I Listed Building within the Romsey Conservation Area.

³ R. Moody, *The Story of King John's House Romsey* (Advertiser Office, Romsey, n.d. c. 1946), 10.

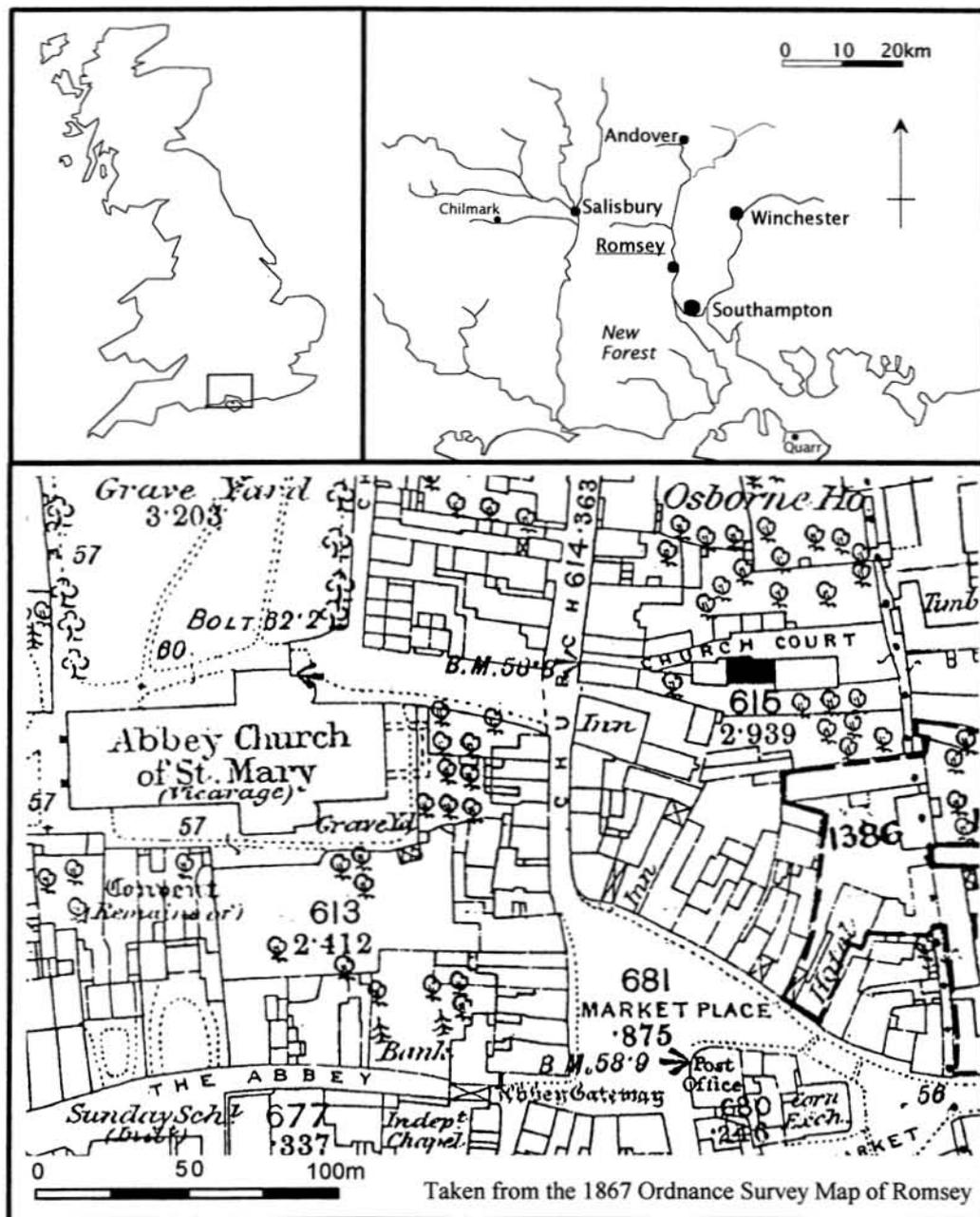


FIG. 1

Location maps for Romsey and King John's House

In 1927 one of Miss M. A. M. Moody's tenants complained of a leak in the roof. Miss Moody herself climbed into the roof space to look, and found the decorative stonework which surrounds the west window. She was advised to contact Walter Andrew. Mr Andrew spent a week in London and returned to tell Miss Moody, 'You have King John's Hunting Box . . .'.⁴

My grandmother, Jane Vanderplank, told Romsey Council that No. 6 Church Court was very old and should be investigated. They said they were not interested and not to make a nuisance of herself, but as soon as they started to take the building down everyone wanted to claim the discovery of it . . .⁵

In 1927, Miss M. A. M. Moody asked a local antiquarian, Mr. W. J. Andrew, to look at the deeds to one of her properties. They had tea in her garden, and Mr. Andrew realised that the south wall of No. 7, Church Court was of medieval construction . . .⁶

In 1927, Mr. W. J. Andrew, a local antiquarian, was standing one day . . . in the blind alley which faces the east end of the Abbey, on casting his eyes upwards over the roof of the Tudor Cottage which faces the entrance he caught sight, in the gable above the roof, of the top of a pointed arch which he at once recognised to be part of an undoubted Early English window . . .⁷

A great many newly discovered medieval buildings in the later 19th and early 20th centuries were freely ascribed a historical 'pedigree' from local documentary references; King John's House was no exception. Histories of Romsey published before 1927 reflected the concerns of their age in pointing up 'the pageant of history' and sometimes amounted to little more than compilations of royal and national connections which could be ascribed to the town. References to 'the Hunting Box which King John caused to be built in 1206', and the later grant of this building by Henry III to the abbess in 1221 set Romsey on the national historical stage.⁸ It is no great surprise therefore that when a building of medieval date was discovered in the town, it should so readily be identified with King John, and the name 'King John's Hunting Box', or 'King John's House', has been attached to the building ever since. The second part of Henry's grant to the abbess, stating that she could move the building wherever she willed, and which surely suggests a wooden building, was either forgotten or explained away by suggesting that, although difficult, it was not unknown for stone buildings to be moved in medieval times.

Once the connection with King John and the Abbey was 'established' further revelations followed. The graffiti discovered incised on the walls of the upper room included heraldry and medieval writing and established a further royal connection, this time to visits by King Edward I in 1275 and 1306. Local historians argued their cases as to which visit provided the more likely opportunity but the prevailing view became that of Walter Andrew,⁹ credited in most accounts with the original rediscovery. Andrew's opinion favoured the later visit on the basis of the identification of a crown shown on the caricatured head of Edward as 'the variety'

⁴ Oral version 'as told by Miss Moody herself' to Dr Rankine.

⁵ Oral version as told by Jane Vanderplank, a tenant of Church Court in the early years of the 20th century, to her granddaughter.

⁶ Test Valley Archaeological Trust (TVAT) Archive: Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) correspondence, W. J. Andrew, letter dated March 1928.

⁷ R. Luce, *Pages from the History of Romsey and its Abbey* (Winchester, 1948), 43.

⁸ H. G. D. Living, *Records of Romsey Abbey* (Winchester, 1912 abridged ed.), 59.

⁹ W. J. Andrew, *King John's House at Romsey: Discovered in 1927* (Romsey 2nd ed., n.d., c. 1950), 4-10.

which 'in the whole series of the crown of England . . . occurred only [on the coins] between the years 1302 and 1310'.¹⁰ His guidebook also suggested that the lords whose shields were shown on the walls were more likely to have been in Edward's retinue on the later occasion than on the first.¹¹ As we shall see later, a re-examination of the data now places these assertions in doubt.

From soon after the discovery until 1939, the building was opened to the public 'as a museum'. As if to add weight to the documentary and architectural dating evidence, the render on the N. face of the building was removed, exposing earlier features. The Misses Moody, who ran a teashop in Tudor Cottage, used also to show people round the older property. Their version of the guidebook to the building is, as one might expect, highly personalized, and figures the royal and ecclesiastical connection prominently as well as 'happy jolly soldier-men proudly scratching their shields on the walls . . .'.¹²

Not long afterwards the National Trust and the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings were approached with a view to sale at an asking price of £5,000.¹³ Having failed to sell the whole property, and in order to raise money for the restoration of the stone building, by this time firmly named 'King John's Hunting Box', Miss Moody then offered the timber-framed 'Tudor Cottage', but not the land on which it stood, for sale for £600 — the intention being for it to be removed and re-erected elsewhere in order to open up the approach to 'King John's House'.¹⁴ There was some disquiet at this, not least from T. D. Atkinson, the architectural consultant to Winchester Cathedral, who had taken an interest in King John's House from the time of its rediscovery and contributed to the first guidebook, since this would mean the complex being broken up, and any historical value of the timber-framed part lost.¹⁵ Atkinson appreciated the importance of the whole agglomeration of development to the history of the site and its place in the town; Miss Moody and Walter Andrew were more concerned to isolate the oldest part of the complex and strip it back to its 'pure' medieval state. In the event, it was the most recent part of the complex, 'Queen Anne Cottages', which was condemned, and demolished in 1938.

After the wartime closure of the tea-rooms and 'King John's Hunting Box' a trust was set up to run the property. In 1963 this was wound up, and the property reverted to Miss Moody. In 1969, just before her death, Miss Moody gave the stone block that is now known as 'King John's House', but none of the surrounding land, to the Town. 'Tudor Cottage' has since been compulsorily purchased, and more recently the land originally belonging to the Moody family has been bought by the local authority and leased to a committee of trustees. Major repairs, including the replacement of some roof-timbers with 'fence-posts', were undertaken in the late

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹² Moody, *op. cit.* in note 3, 6.

¹³ TVAT archive: SPAB correspondence. Ralph Pay & Taylor, Land Agents, *King John's House and Tudor Cottage Tearooms, Romsey, Hants* (Estate Agents' Particulars, ca. 1935).

¹⁴ TVAT archive: SPAB correspondence.

¹⁵ T. D. Atkinson, 'King John's House, Romsey', *Papers Proc. Hampshire Field Club*, xiv (Winchester, 1940), 273.

1970s and King John's House is now open to the public and used as a meeting-place and venue for social events.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first recorded owner of 'King John's House' is John Foster, the last Steward of Romsey Abbey. In common with the better-known Jack Horner, this Abbey steward pulled out the plum of a monastic manor, in this case Romsey Infra. He went one better than Horner, since the Abbey was a nunnery, by marrying one of the former nuns, Jane Wadham, a niece of Sir Thomas Seymour.¹⁶

At the Dissolution, John Foster was one of four joint grantees for the majority of the Abbey land in and around Romsey. The grantees then proceeded to consolidate their respective holdings by means of sales and exchanges, Foster concentrating on the Baddesley and Nursling area.¹⁷ The land on which King John's House stands is stated in the deed of 1571 to have belonged to Foster, and was shown as tithe-free on both the 1807 enclosure award and the 1845 tithe map; all that can be said with any confidence, therefore, is that it belonged to the Abbey just prior to the Dissolution.

The 1571 deed states that the vendor's father had bought 'the message . . . from John Foster, gent. of Baddesley'.¹⁸ The boundaries are given, but these are difficult to trace on the ground at the north and south, as those abutment clauses list other owners or tenants rather than physical features. The eastern boundary, being the stream, and the western, being the street, are more easily established, allowing for the fact that the frontage of Church Street was altered in the 19th century and that the Holbrook, being an artificial leat, could conceivably have changed its alignment. At this stage the property consisted of 'two messages or tenements, two gardens and all houses, buildings, shops land and ground with appurtenances'.¹⁹

¹⁶ Living, *op. cit.* in note 8, 255.

¹⁷ Victoria History of the County of Hampshire (VCH), iv, (1973), 453, quoting Pat. 36 Hen VIII pt vi m33 (1544 grant of Manor of Romsey Infra to John Foster and Richard Marden) and LTR Memo RHil 37 Hen VIII rot 35 (Marden's 1545 grant of his share to Foster) and Pat 38 Hen VIII pt ii m 16 (1546 grant of various Abbey lands in Romsey to John Bellowe and Robert Bigott).

¹⁸ Deed 1/ix. The earliest deed is on show in King John's House itself. The following information with respect to the deeds is taken from the abstracts of the deeds made by Sir Richard Luce in 1941. There are two versions of this, TVAT archive: R. Luce (1941); HRO: Luce Papers 215M85/43/3 (six notebooks). The numbering of the deeds is the same in both, but some are missing from the second version. When the second version is cited, the deed number has an additional 'x'.

¹⁹ Deed ix. The records of the Dean and Canons of Windsor, who were named as the owners of the land bounding 'on the North', have not been as useful as was hoped in establishing the pre-Dissolution ownership or tenancy, or indeed any early name or function, of the property under consideration here. These archives contain a number of terriers and surveys (xvii.4.5; xvi.9.16; 118882) for their Manor of South Wells in Romsey, but on the occasion of the author's visit in 1995, the map made for 'Mr Webb's Survey' of 1808 and mentioned in 'Mr Wilson's Book' of 1896, was no longer listed in their index, and so was not available for consultation. The only information of interest identified was that in 1559/60 [2:Eliz] the tenement 'to the South' of the Windsor tenements was occupied by a Nicholas Hamond, who could have been related to the Andrew Hamon shown as holding the corresponding tenement 'on the West' of King John's House in the deed of 1571. The ownership of the tenement to the south, the medieval Falcon Inn, was also complicated. Winchester College owned an irregular plot of land there, but its records cannot be traced. This inn was renamed the Market Inn by the time of the first Ordnance Survey Map, and was demolished in the 1880s to widen Church Street. Although the current Abbey Hotel, which is on approximately the same site, may have medieval cellars, there are no points of comparison to be made above ground.

The first occupants mentioned in the deeds can be seen as being of fairly high status, reflecting the status of Church Street as a whole in the Middle Ages, with its proximity to Abbey and market place, and the consequent likelihood of other ecclesiastical landowners and well-to-do merchants living or owning property there. Of the names mentioned in the first deed, only 'widow Reynoldes', presumably Ann Raynold, mother of the vendor in Deed 1, appears in the Romsey Lay Subsidy return of 1586, in the 'Lands' section. Families such as the Gasses, the Clarkes and the 'Mowdys', subsequent generations of whom occur in the later deeds, are represented in the 'Goods' section of the 1586 list.²⁰

The families shown in the early deeds, the Raynolds and the Cuffleys, probably lived in the property, or at least occupied it directly themselves. John Cuffley and Thomas Cuffley senior are thought to have carried on their brewing business there; it is identified in the deed of 1673 as 'the property known as the brew house'.²¹ However, by the time it passed to the Woodfords, who lived in Southampton, it was almost certainly let out. At this stage Church Court continued to be of equal social status with the rest of the Church Street area: a fairly prosperous trading and manufacturing site.

The mortgagee of 1673, John Kent, was a wealthy man who was probably used to acting in a banking capacity for his neighbours. However, there was a downward trend in the status of Church Court in the 18th century which continued throughout the 19th, and is further confirmed by the lack of entries for any Church Court addresses in the directories of the early 20th century. This is in contrast with Church Street itself, occupied by fairly prosperous traders, and gentrified during the 19th century, though becoming less residential in the early 20th century. The proximity of water from the Holbrook would have helped keep industrial activity going, off the main street, for a while, and the Moodys, plumbers and cutlers, whose shop was on the Church Street frontage, would have found this aspect useful to their operations, as well as gaining income from the rents on the properties after 1918, when they bought the freehold.

Church Court on the first OS map of 1867 (Fig. 1) is a higgledy-piggledy collection of cottages in two rows. The three major elements of the site on which this study is based, 'Tudor Cottage', 'King John's House', and 'Queen Anne Cottages', can be seen as separate blocks, with Moody's shop on the Street frontage to the west, and a row of cottages to the north, on land which has been occupied by the Post Office since the 1960s.

In 1928 Church Court was considered a slum, 'divided into fifteen residences, mostly of two small rooms' and 'containing a population of seventy-five persons'.²² A photograph (Fig. 2) of the north side taken at about the turn of the century shows

²⁰ C. R. Davey, (ed.), *The Hampshire Lay Subsidy Rolls, 1586* (Winchester, 1981), 35.

²¹ Deed 3/3x.

²² TVAT archive: SPAB correspondence, W. J. Andrew in report to SPAB (March 1928).



FIG. 2

Photograph taken c. 1900:
north side of stone building, showing render (Abbey church faintly visible in Background)

the render which hid the true character of the building for so many years.²³ Hence a building which, in the 13th century, was constructed in stone to the latest fashion and the highest contemporary specification, declined so far that it was in danger of demolition as a slum, had not the 'chance' discovery of its extreme age occurred.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

The site was first excavated in 1939, although the published report of these excavations was limited to a drawn plan of the area excavated, and two short accompanying papers.²⁴ In 1977 an area within the building was excavated, which examined the bone floor and in addition found two pits with evidence for bronze casting. More recently two excavations were undertaken to the east of 'King John's House' on ground purchased by the Test Valley Borough Council, in advance of gardens being laid out. The first, in 1992, looked at areas of possible interest shown by a resistivity survey; the second, in 1993, investigated some of these contexts

²³ Render of some kind may have been applied to the flint rubble surfaces of the building when it was first erected, as was common with such constructions, and this would have been renewed at various times. The N. wall faced the 'public' area of Church Court and the E. and W. ends were covered by the adjoining buildings. The S. wall, which may well have been rendered at some earlier date, faced the private garden of the Moody family property, and was not rendered at the time of Walter Andrew's visit to Miss Moody on which, according to one version of the 'rediscovery myth', he recognized the building as medieval.

²⁴ Atkinson, *op. cit.* in note 15, 273; H. de S. Shortt, 'Bronze Founder's Moulds from Romsey', *Papers Proc. Hampshire Field Club*, 17 (Winchester, 1949), Part 1, 72-76.

further, in the light of the previous year's work. The resulting reports also include a survey of the previous archaeological information for the site, from the 1939 excavations in part of the same area, and those within the building in 1977.²⁵ The 1990s excavator found the earlier plan to be inaccurate, in that the 1939 trench was not as regularly cut as indicated, nor was it exactly where plotted. In addition, the trench had destroyed the stratigraphy between hearths and other features, and may have backfilled areas without properly recording the fact.

The main findings of the 1992 and 1993 excavations were post-medieval, and related to the bronze-working hearths. They prove conclusively that the area was used as an industrial site in the early modern period. Remains of trench features underneath the compacted earth which made the 'floor' of a possible lean-to lodge used for foundry work suggest that the preparations for these industrial hearths truncated the slots which were used for the footings of timber-framed buildings over a large part of the site. It remains to be seen whether these can be traced by other non-invasive techniques in the future but to ensure the preservation of archaeological deposits and discourage gardening work the area has been paved with stone flags.

The 1994 site evaluation and survey,²⁶ although it revealed little that was not previously known, gathered together the information then to hand, and produced several new interpretations.

DESCRIPTION

Exterior The main block measures 11 m by 6 m externally, with side walls some 5 m high. The construction is of flint, with ashlar stone quoins of Quarr limestone and stone window dressings of Chilmark stone.²⁷ Alterations to the doorways, windows and chimneys show clearly, particularly on the N. wall (Fig. 3) where the outer moulding of the western jamb, and part of the sill, of the NW. window of the upper floor can clearly be seen, together with its stone ashlar. Also visible towards the western end of this wall is the head of an 18th-century window to the cellar.

The NE. corner has no external stone quoins: there is currently a brick-built corner. This, together with the diagonal line of freestone showing towards the eastern end of the N. wall, provide evidence that another building once adjoined at this corner. Internally there are stone quoins at this corner. It cannot therefore have been the site of a spiral stair.²⁸

²⁵ V. Crosby, *Excavations in King John's House Gardens, Romsey, 1992* (TVAT Report 20/92, Test Valley Archaeological Trust, 1992); *Summary of the excavation information from 1939* (TVAT, 1993); *Excavations in King John's House Gardens, Romsey Hampshire (A1992.24) Interim Report* (TVAT Report 20/93, Test Valley Archaeological Trust, 1993), both in the Hampshire SMR.

²⁶ F. J. Green, *King John's House, Romsey, Hampshire 9603.3 Site Evaluation and Survey* (unpublished essay, 1994). In 1994, as part of the course work for an MSc in Heritage Conservation at Oxford Brookes University, F. J. Green produced a site evaluation and survey of King John's House. It discovered no new information, although close examination of the building allowed Green to make some new interpretations. This survey has proved invaluable for the measured plans and elevation drawings it contains, though the present author has re-measured on site, and drawn on to the computer screen such elevations and plans that appear within the current study.

²⁷ Green, *op. cit.* in note 26, 10.

²⁸ H. Braun, *English Medieval Architecture* (London, 1985), 176; see also Fig. 20.

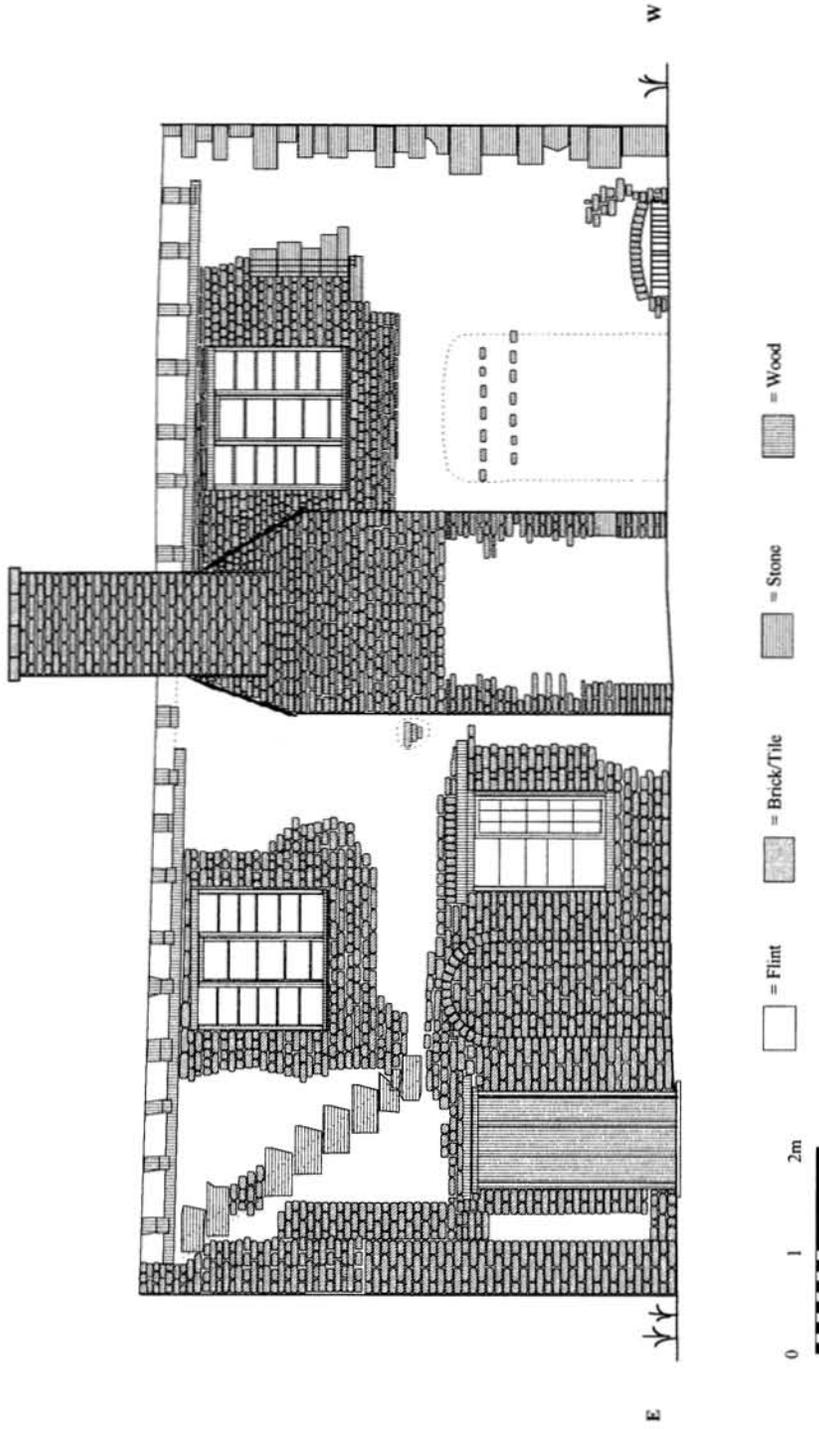


FIG. 3
King John's House: north elevation

At the eastern end of the N. wall, the line of ashlar, presumably the string course to a pentice roof, shows clearly against the flint. This roof could have been that of a covered 'cloister' walk, along the eastern side of a putative courtyard. More likely, however, whether or not there was a true courtyard here, is that a timber-framed building, possibly an aisled hall, adjoined the stone building. An original medieval doorway, which has been re-opened this century, would have led into the aisle section of this hall, or into the covered walk. Traces of such a building might well have escaped the notice of the excavators of the 1930s. The 1992 excavations found some truncated trench features which could have been part of the footings of a timber-framed building, but these were not sufficiently clear, nor was a large enough area excavated to produce even a tentative floor-plan.

The door at the east end of the upper floor of King John's House might have led either to a solar or gallery at the southern end of the hall building or, more likely, to a garderobe and a stairway down to the dais end of the hall. The rebate in the moulding, and the single hinge-hook which remains, show that the door opened outwards from the surviving stone block. On the E. gable wall, the main area of flint-work is largely undisturbed, and this small door, now a window, is the major feature showing (Fig. 4). This end was covered by Queen Anne Cottages until 1938, and the recess made by the doorway was used as a cupboard. The roof line of the cottages shows clearly against the flint, together with another line. The brick-built NE. corner is visible, and an area of brick at ground-floor level may be seen which was identified as a bricked-up doorway by the 1939 excavators.

The S. wall is again much altered, with later windows inserted in the 18th century (Fig. 5). The eastern ground-floor window has the original stone lintel still *in situ* above the current opening; the original stone sill has also been found, and is now preserved on the more recent windowsill inside. Also visible on this S. wall are the stones, bonded into the fabric, of the earliest chimney. Opinions vary as to whether this chimney, and its accompanying fireplace in the S. wall of the upper room, were original to the building, or later. The lack of smoke-blackening of the roof-timbers, as well as the evident bonding of the chimney stones, indicate that this chimney was part of the original build. This was the wall which, according to one of the legends of the rediscovery, Walter Andrew saw from the garden of Miss Moody's house, and which suggested to him that the building was medieval.

Most of the W. wall is invisible from the outside, being covered by the timber-framed Tudor Cottage, and a 20th-century lobby. However, by combining various fragmentary views the western gable, the W. window (Fig. 6) and the external features of the original western door to the upper floor, which had a semicircular arch, and the line of the porch or stairway roof, can be appreciated.

Interior Currently the main entry to the combined building is through the lobby. From this, the stone building is reached through a 20th-century doorway which has been cut through a medieval window. The southern internal jamb of this, with part of the sill, may still be seen. The ground floor is currently divided into two rooms by a timber-framed wattle and daub partition which incorporates a post that has been variously interpreted as a samson post or a re-used crown post. This

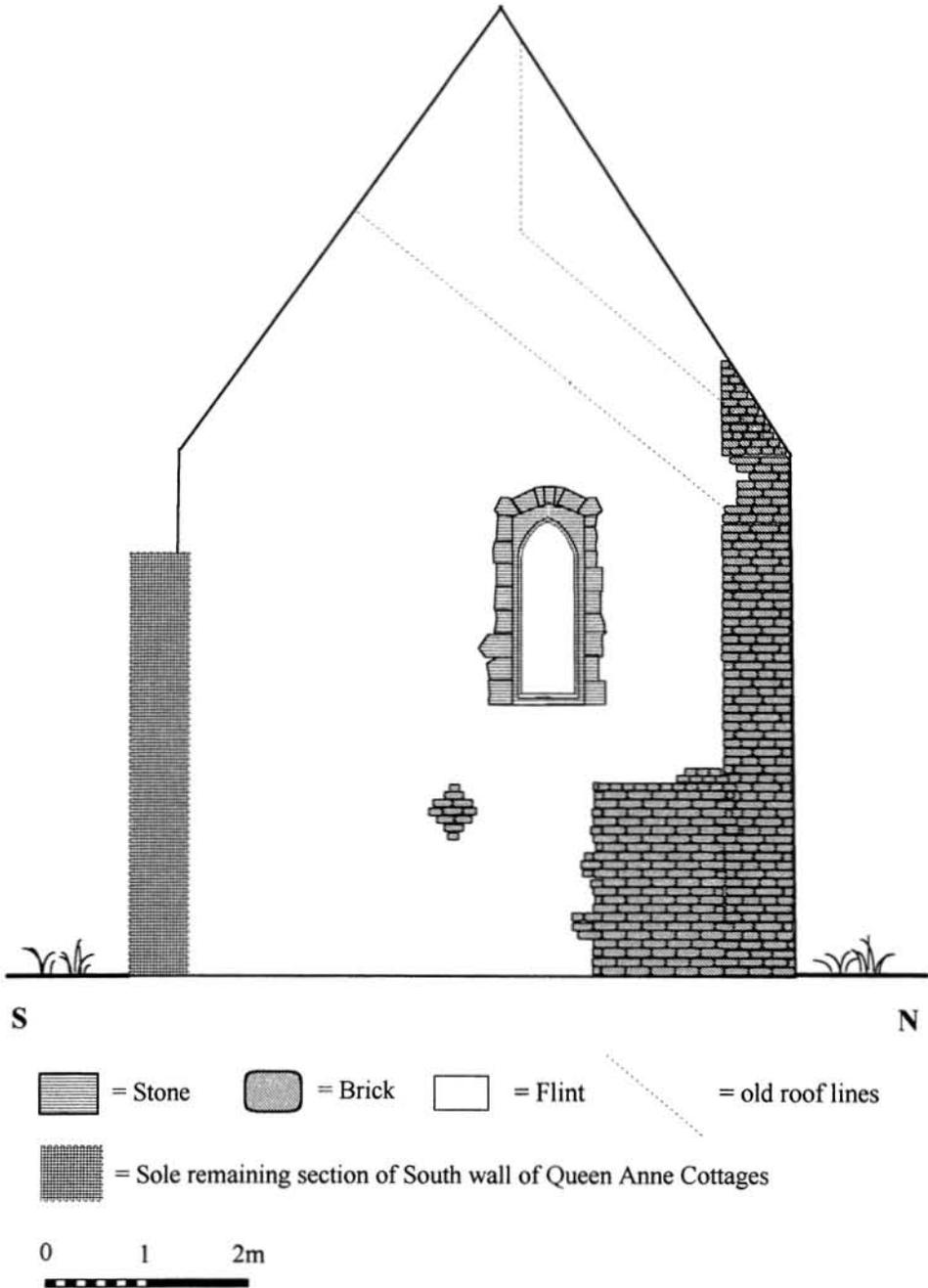


FIG. 4
King John's House: east elevation

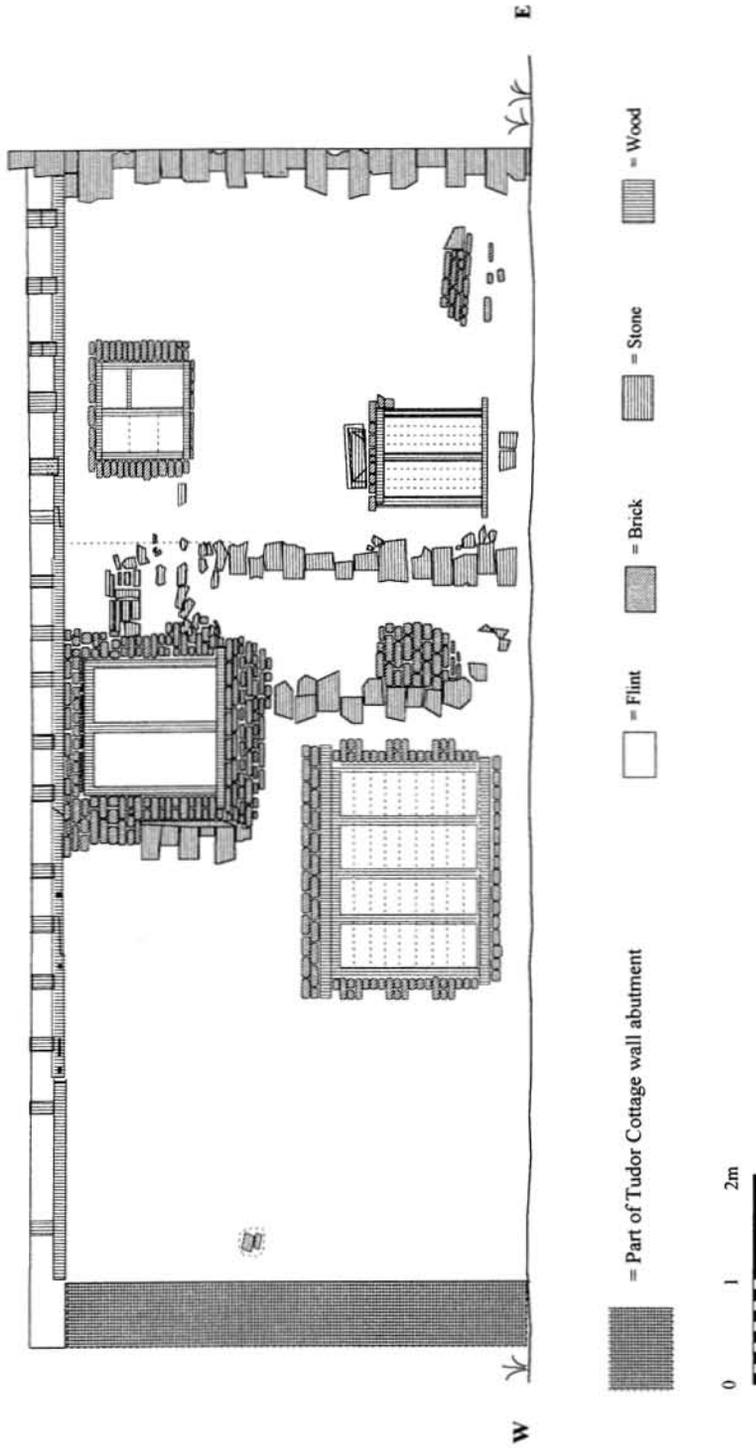


FIG. 5
King John's House: south elevation



FIG. 6

Exterior view of head of west window, between roofs of lobby and Tudor Cottage

post contains no sapwood, nor has it sufficient growth rings for any attempt at dendrochronology to be made. It was originally octagonal, has the remains of a fillet-and-roll capital, and stands on an octagonal stone pad at the earlier floor level, some 6 in. below the present elm floor, which was inserted in 1979. This contains a cut-out area to show the stone base of the post.

The western ground-floor room contains, against the N. wall and abutting the partition, a large corner fireplace dating from the 18th century with a bread-proving cupboard incorporated into its internal stack. A recess on the N. wall marks the position of an earlier door. On the W. wall is an 18th-century cupboard with its original curved back and shaped-edge shelves, the doors to which were replaced in the early 20th century. Also in the W. wall, at a low level, is the head of a round-arched doorway; the original entrance to the cellar. In style and dimensions this matches the doorway at the head of the external stair, but there is currently too much brick-lining in the cellar at this point to determine how early the doorway itself might be. Figure 7 shows that the long walls are stepped at each floor level to support joists. The cellar itself is constructed of stone-dressed flint, and has ashlar recesses in three of its walls. Taken together, these features suggest that some form of cellar is original to the building. The present concrete floor would need to be removed in order to uncover earlier floor levels and test the cellar's original depth.

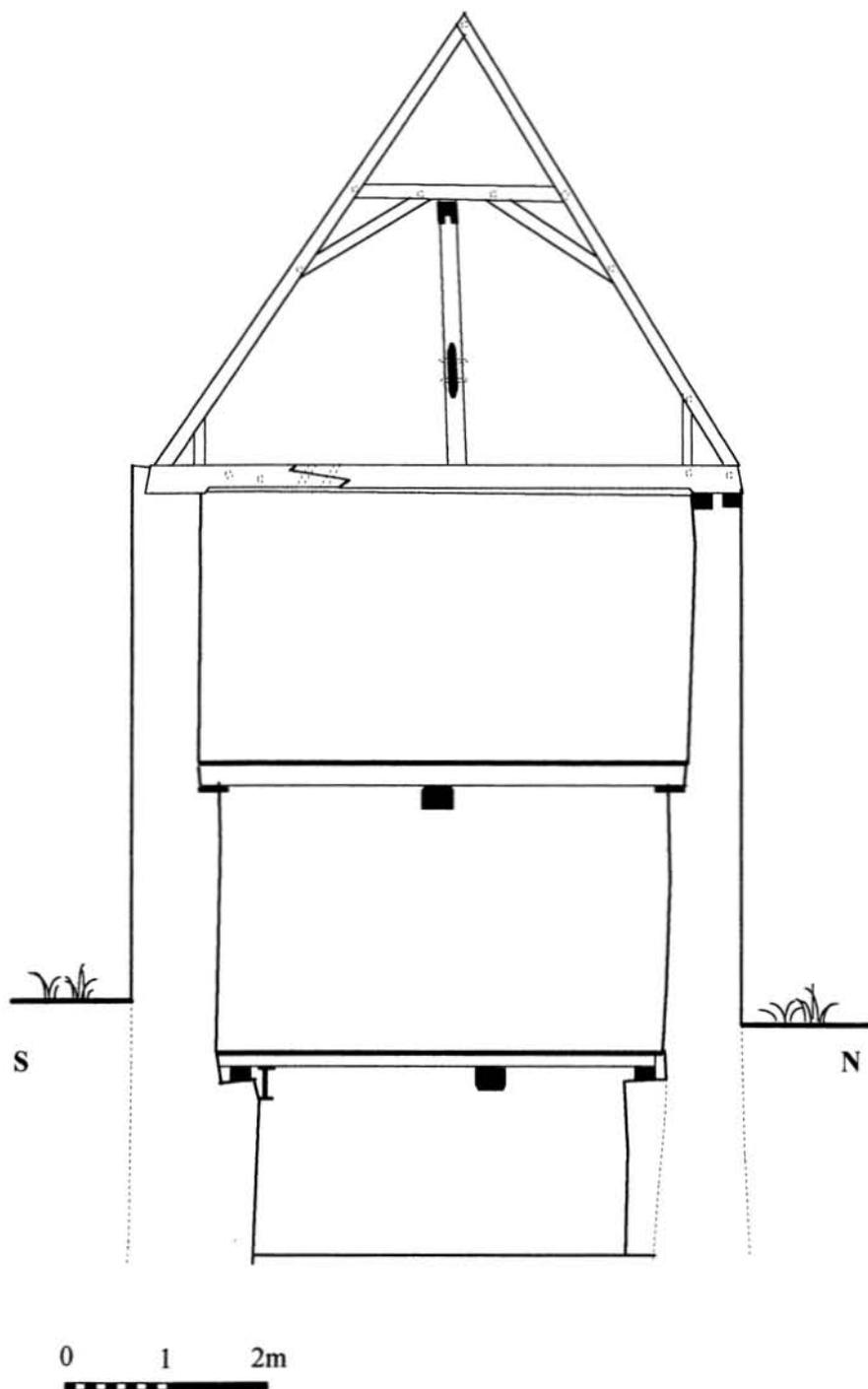


FIG. 7
Cross-section at Truss 16

In the eastern ground floor room are the remains of a bone floor, suggesting that at some stage there was industrial use on this lower floor of the building. The floor was formed of cattle bones inserted into a composite of clay and earth with their knuckle-ends upwards. The small spaces between them were then filled with sheep bones similarly positioned.²⁹ The hard-wearing, non-slip, but free-draining surface this produces would have been suitable for the industrial uses to which the building was put in the 17th and early 18th centuries. This room has, at the eastern end of its N. wall, the medieval doorway which led to the putative adjacent building. The sill of the medieval S. window is displayed on the modern windowsill. In the SE. corner of this room, the stairway to the first floor is of modern oak, inserted in the late 1940s.

The first floor is now seen as a single room, its presumed original state, but was for many years partitioned when the building was divided into residential apartments. These partitions were cleared out in the immediate aftermath of the rediscovery of the age of the building, between 1927 and 1929, and it is probable that there were at least three rooms here.³⁰ The jamb of an early, perhaps original, fireplace opening can be seen in the S. wall, and its position corresponds with the stone quoins bonded into the external fabric. The present fireplace is in the N. wall and has a four-centred Tudor arch as its opening.

The internal ashlar of the round-headed western doorway are unobstructed and clearly visible, and the first step down of the outer stairway may be seen before the rubble which blocks the external arch. The medieval eastern doorway, now a window, is an extremely plain two-centred arch, with a stone doorsill.

The 'Great West Window' has been much mutilated, and an 18th-century doorway into the landing of Tudor Cottage cuts through its sill. However, sufficient is still in place to show that the opening had some form of shutter or even a glazed lattice, as there are fixing brackets in the southern jamb. The three orders of the window form a two-centred arch with keeled mouldings. The string course is decorated with dog-tooth carving and finished with corbel heads (Fig. 8). The stone jambs of this W. window show particularly clear signs of the parallel vertical bolster marks which, according to Braun, characterize 13th-century stoneworking.³¹

The western jambs of medieval windows in the N. and S. walls are visible. That on the N. wall has some decorative similarities to the W. window, in particular the three orders of keeled mouldings (Fig. 9).³² The remains of the window in the

²⁹ Bone floors of this type are not common survivals. Some surviving floors are claimed as cockfighting surfaces, as for instance at 'The Fighting Cocks' public house, St Albans, Herts., but there would have been no space at King John's House for the audience usual at this activity. Otherwise there are late 18th- and early 19th-century examples in summerhouses and follies, such as the 'Bear's Hut' at Killerton House (National Trust) in Devon, which uses the knuckle bones of deer.

³⁰ Atkinson, in Andrew, *op. cit.* in note 9, 14.

³¹ Braun, *op. cit.* in note 28, 65 and illus. 18 on 48.

³² This has given rise to some speculation, since it has been suggested that the arch, if complete, would break the wallplate, or at least come too close to the top of the wall to be structurally viable. This would bring into question whether the wallplate, and hence the roof, was in its original position, or whether at some stage the long walls had been lowered. However, careful calculation shows that there would be a minimum clearance of 70 mm between the apex and the wallplate. Hence it is possible for the walls at their present height, the W. and NW. windows, and the roof, all to be contemporary.



FIG. 8

Interior of west window, showing stilted arch, keeled mouldings and dog-tooth decoration

S. wall show that it was undecorated. The four square windows, two in each of the N. and S. walls, are 18th-century insertions.

Decoration The walls of this room have signs of medieval paintwork, including a flower pattern and the red-lined brick effect so fashionable at the end of the 13th century. An area near the eastern door, currently behind a perspex panel, has traces of five-petalled flowers (Fig. 20), each about 5 cm across, arranged in a pattern. It seems that these, though now showing as a grey shadow, were originally black on a yellow background.

There are two sequences of red-line false masonry decorations. The phase which shows most clearly produces a brick effect, the horizontal lines being some 10 cm apart, and the vertical lines 25 cm apart. On the W. gable wall, this pattern stops at about 2 m from the floor. This was in the past taken as evidence that the gable had fallen out at some point, and been rebuilt, at which time the red-lining had not been repainted, but the top 'course' on this wall has no vertical lines, and is 11 cm deep. This would have given the effect of a frieze to finish off the pattern at the top, so it is unlikely that the lines from this phase were ever continued above the height at which they are now visible.



FIG. 9

Interior of north-west window (scale rod is 1 m)

The roof

The earliest phase of the existing roof appears to have been of nineteen pairs of collared coupled rafters, with tenoned collars, tenoned soulace-braces, sole-pieces and ashlaring, and three tiebeams.³³ All the joints are pegged. The wallplates are double, and the sole-pieces, and the tiebeams at trusses four and ten are lapped into them. The 'rafter-holes', holes which were used at the pre-assembly stage to raise the roof trusses, are in the sole pieces rather than in the rafters themselves. Later stages added the collar-plate, and the crown-post assemblages at trusses four, ten and sixteen. Further tiebeams have been inserted, of re-used timber, probably in the 17th century. One of these has the mullion-post holes from a timber-framed building, but there is no way of telling whether it is from another building on the

³³ In the late 1970s, restoration work was carried out which included taking the load off the early timbers, and putting a false outer roof on to the building. In the process, several of the timbers which had become too badly damaged to retain were replaced by fence-posts. This is not aesthetically pleasing, but does at least indicate clearly which of the timbers are modern insertions.

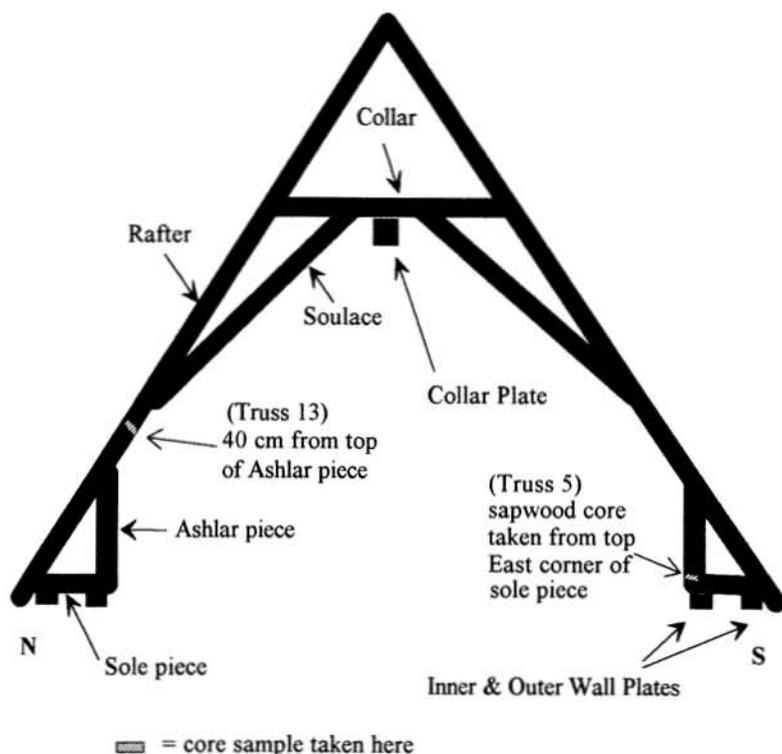


FIG. 10
Standard roof truss

original site here, or brought in from elsewhere. Figures 10–13 show the variant truss structures.

Most of the original members of the major phase of the roof are numbered with Roman numerals. These run from I to VII; then O, VIII, AIII, and X to XVII. Unnumbered timbers can usually be seen either to be re-used wood, or to be part of the 1970s restoration. The tiebeams at trusses ten and sixteen have metal straps used variously to attach the crown-post, to strengthen the beam where it looked liable to split, both features of the tiebeam at truss ten, or as strengthening for a scarfed joint, as in the tiebeam at truss sixteen. The southern ashlar piece at truss ten has been reversed, probably when the fence-timber was inserted at the lower end of its rafter.

The timbers for the ashlar pieces, sole-pieces and rafters seem to have come from relatively young, fast-growing trees. A core taken from the tiebeam of truss ten has produced a felling date of spring 1256.³⁴ Complete sapwood is present, in

³⁴ Samples of the roof timbers were taken for dendro-dating in November 1995. Sampling and dating by Dan Miles of Mapledurham. The data also went to Sheffield University Tree-Ring Laboratory on two occasions for further checking, but they too were unable to determine dates for the other timbers, though they agreed with the original result of 1255/6 for the tiebeam. The ends of some sole-piece timbers unsuitable for drilling were photographed but the growth rings themselves were not sufficiently differentiated to allow an identifiable sequence.

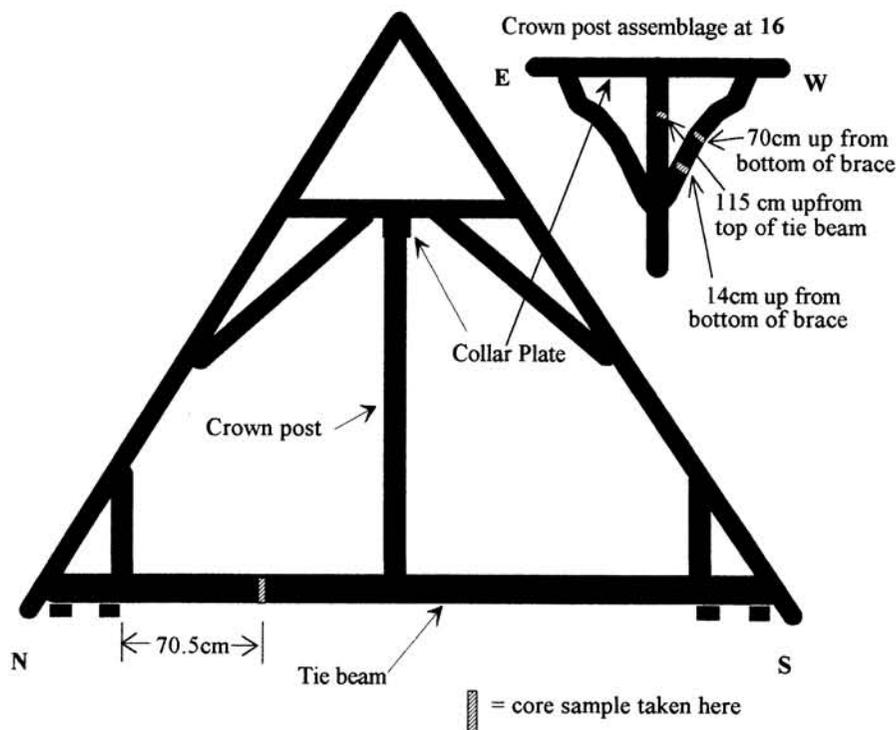


FIG. 11
Trusses 4 and 16

addition to the sequence of rings indicating 1255. Ironically this, the one timber which produced a positive date, has no visible markings. The northern end of the tiebeam has been hidden by the Tudor fireplace, so there may be a mark which cannot now be seen. This is the corresponding position for marks on other timbers. The southern end has suffered worming or rot and is missing the surface at this point on its west face. However, other original parts of the truss bear the appropriate number, AIIII, and constructional evidence would suggest that the tiebeam is part of the same build as the main rafter-and-collar assemblage.

The collar-plate is not attached at either end, and there are blocks or wedges between the collar-plate and some of the collars. Several collars are not attached to the collar-plate, except where wedged, suggesting this is a later assemblage than the collar-rafter phase. Presumably the whole collar-plate assemblage was put together and slid into position; this would explain the lack of jointing, and the wedges, between the collars and the plate. At that stage, the tops of the crown-posts would have been shortened to accommodate the collar-plate. The crown-posts do not come directly under their collars except at truss four. The crown-post at truss four is not, however, original as it is of smaller section than the other crown-posts, and has nail-holes on one side. Probably, therefore, it is a re-used rafter; certainly in scantling it resembles the rafters.

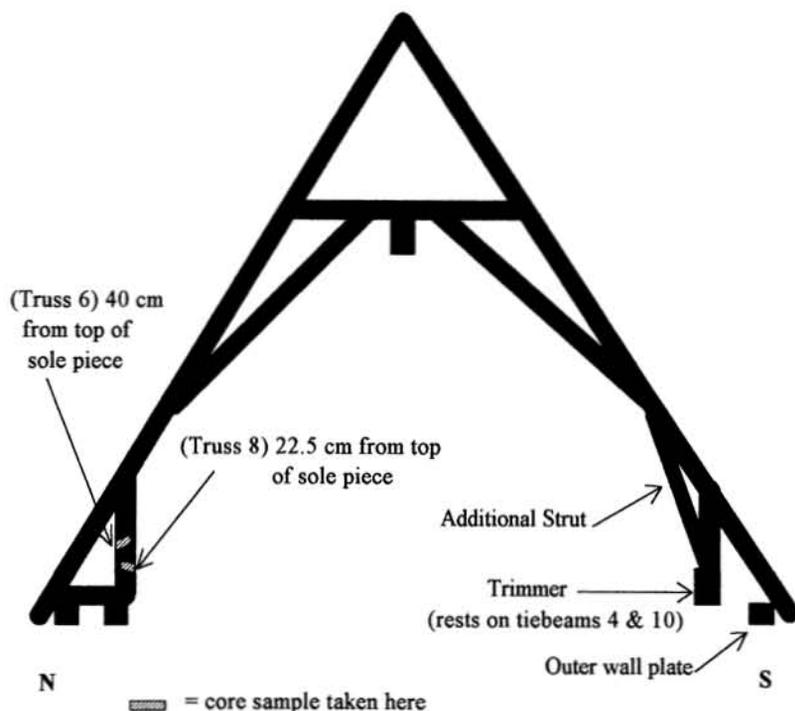


FIG. 12
Trusses 6, (7), 8 and 9

The collar at truss ten has a squared mortise socket on the underside, directly above a filled mortise on the tiebeam.³⁵ The filling of this mortise is grain-end uppermost and flush with the surface of the tiebeam: this may be the sawn-off tenon *in situ*. These mortises are central to their timbers whereas the current position of the crown-post is slightly to the N. of them. The original tenon was probably sawn through at the base of the crown-post when the alterations were made to the crown-post assemblage which introduced the extra struts and braces. The crown-post was repositioned, and the metal straps then used to attach it to the tiebeam.

There is a trimmer at the S. ends of trusses four to ten, where there was a fireplace; trusses six to nine lack sole-pieces here, but have instead struts; their ashlar pieces rest on the trimmer. The N. soulaces at trusses six and seven, although marked VI and VII, look to be re-used timbers, as there are drilled-out mortises and part-cylindrical drill holes which have been cut through. The tiebeam at truss sixteen is scarf-jointed and has an iron plate or bar set into its S. end reaching

³⁵ The use of mortise-and-tenons at this early date has been said to be unusual; notched-lap joints are more common in 13th-century roofs. The Wheat Barn at Cressing Temple in Essex, which has a similar dendro-date to King John's House for its original phase, uses both open and secret notched-lap joints, but Stenning does not record mortise-and-tenon joints for it. With the results of the dendrochronology, however, it is now at least possible to say with confidence that the main part of the present roof of King John's House was put up in the mid-13th century.

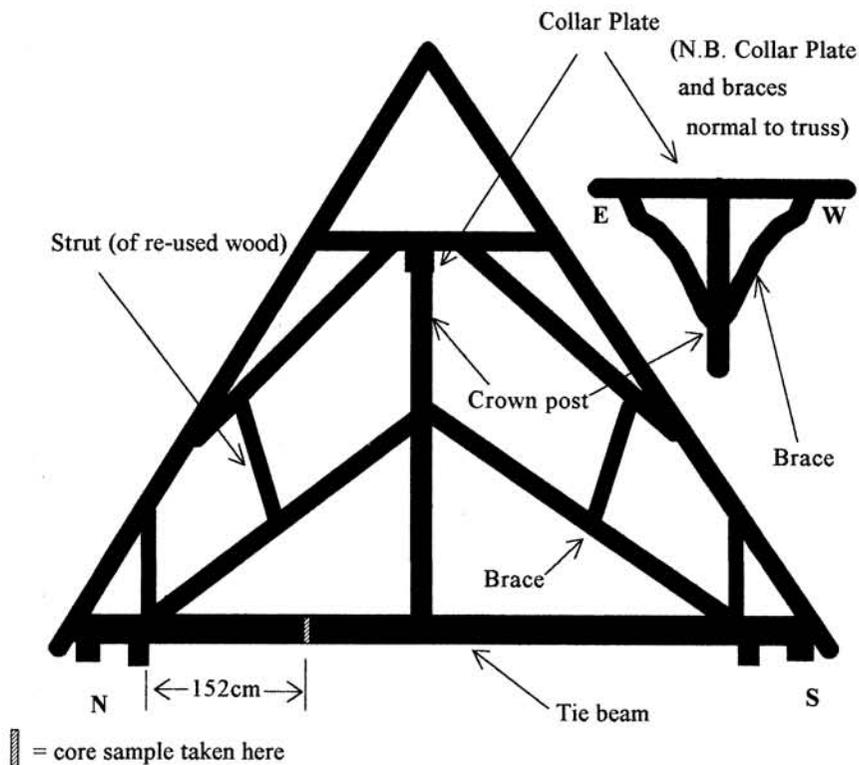


FIG. 13
Truss 10

about two-fifths of its length and including the part above the joint. Here the wall-plate has been cut to accommodate the tiebeam.

Graffiti

The walls of the upper room have a number of graffiti incised into the plaster. Over 25 are heraldic shields; there are two human heads, and several heraldic 'beasts'. The schematic wall-plan (Fig. 14), shows at approximately 1:60 scale the positions of the architectural features, and the positions of the panels behind which the majority of the graffiti are protected. On this diagram the walls are shown from the inside of the room, starting at the head of the stair with the E. end of the S. wall, and moving clockwise round the room to finish with the S. end of the E. wall. The panels are numbered I–VI, and areas A and B have been so designated, purely for the purpose of this study (Figs. 15–21).³⁶

³⁶ It was not possible to gain permission to remove the panels to make rubbings. A selection of graffiti behind the panels has been drawn at 1:1 with the aid of a 2 cm grid affixed to the perspex, and a similar grid beneath tracing paper on the drawing board. Rubbings of marks incised in the stone jamb of the south window have, with permission, been taken, together with tracings above the fireplace and above the stairwell (areas shown as A and B).

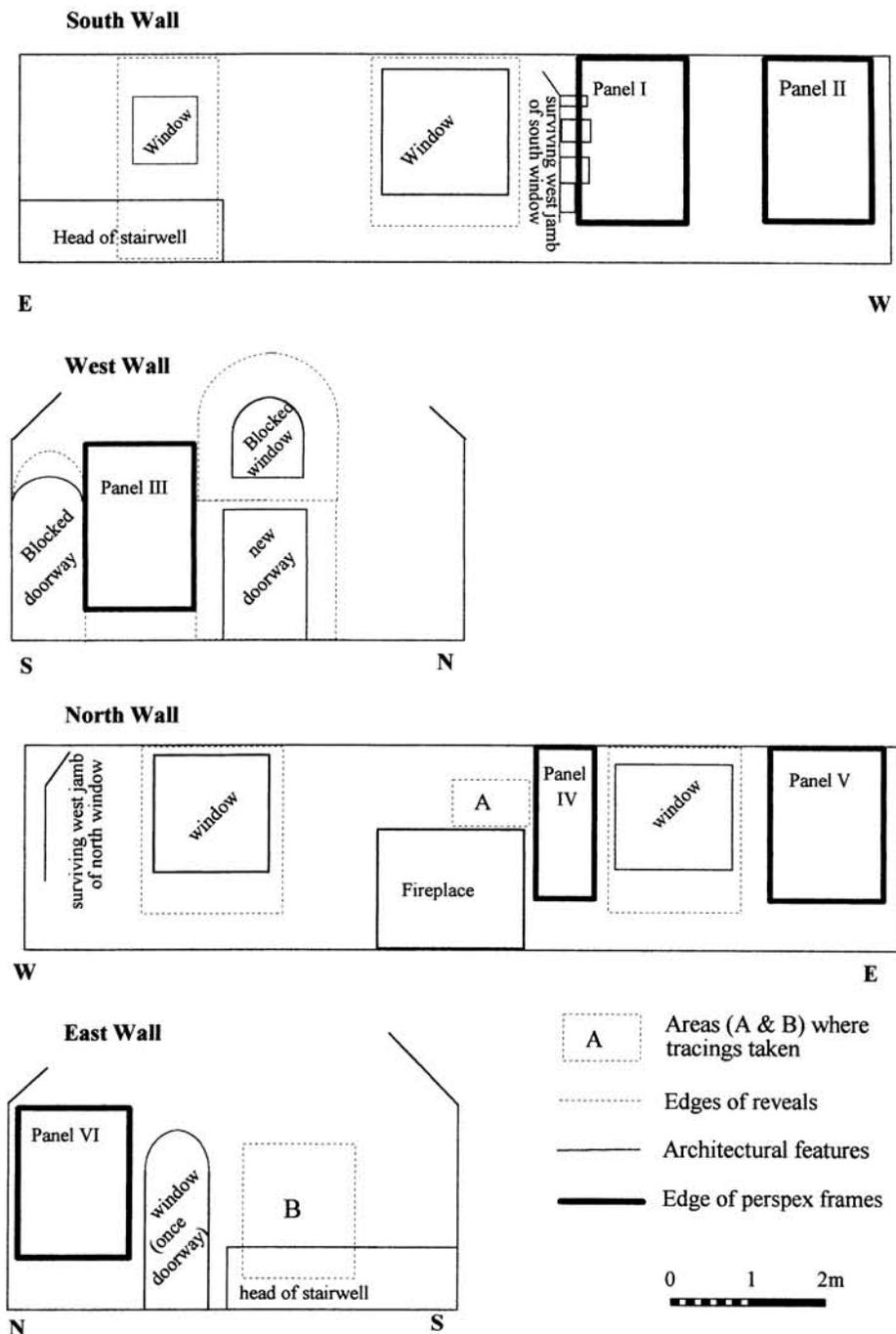


FIG. 14

Diagram of graffiti: positions of panels on the walls

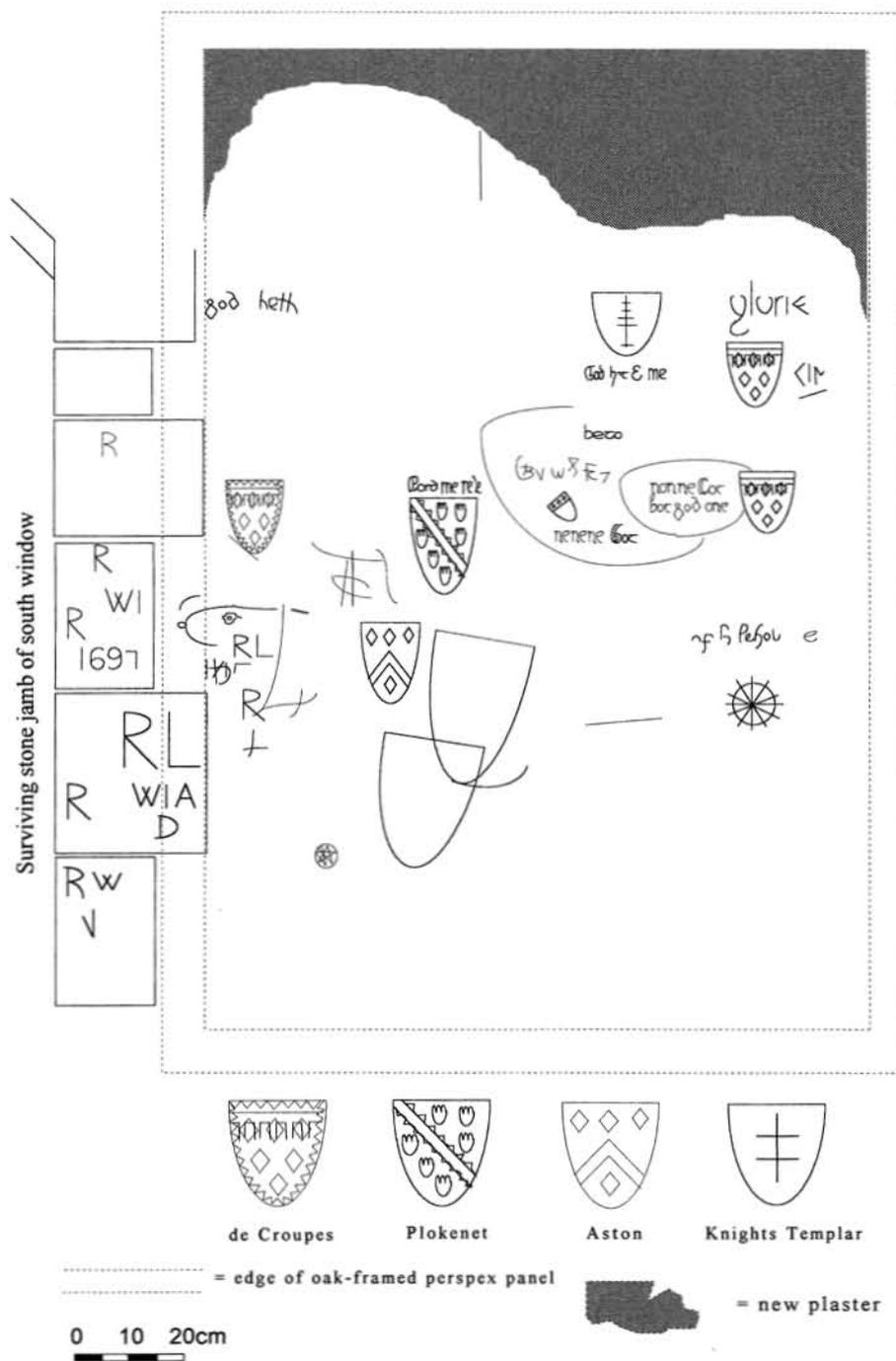


FIG. 15
Sketch of graffiti: south wall, panel I

There are shields incised on all four walls.³⁷ The enlargement of the windows, as well as the installation of the fireplace on the north wall probably means that other graffiti have been destroyed. No coloration is visible in any of the incisions, so there can be no distinction between one family and another where the charge is the same. A scientific examination of the plaster would be needed to attempt the detection of traces of pigment. The only clue to date is that the incised graffiti lines cut through the 'red lining' on all the walls, and must therefore post-date the late 13th century when this sort of paintwork was popular.

The two graffiti profiles of human heads (Fig. 16) are curious. One is a crowned head, facing to the right; its popular identification with Edward I is discussed below. The other head faces left, has a goatee beard, a wing of hair high towards the back of the head, implying baldness elsewhere, and appears to be wearing spectacles. All other representations of eyes in the figures on the walls have at least some form of pupil and iris: only with this head is there a blank 'lens'.

The technology of lenses is extremely old, and there are reports of the Emperor Nero looking through precious stones, though this may refer to using a flat emerald as a mirror, rather than to using one as a lens.³⁸ Roger Bacon mentions magnifying glasses in the 1260s, and there is a brief reference to 'the earliest medical mention of spectacles' in 1303.³⁹ Thus it would appear at least possible that here is one of the earliest pictorial representations of someone wearing glasses.

One of the main arguments against this is that the rigid sidepieces which we now associate with glasses did not appear until much later, and were not common until the 18th century. In addition, the letters 'W A' are incised on the wall not far from these heads. This juxtaposition, and the resemblance of the head to a 20th-century Edwardian, rather than a 14th-century gentleman, suggested that it would be worth trying to find a photograph of Walter Andrew himself. This proved not to

³⁷ The shields are labelled on the perspex panels with the names taken from W. J. Andrew's guidebook, and these identifications have been used against the rows of shields under the panels in figures 15–17 although it has not proved possible to verify them. Andrew's guidebook (op. cit. in note 9) describes the shields on the E., S. and W. walls in great detail, but omits to mention those on the N. (fireplace) wall. The shield above the fireplace on this wall is either blank or has a pale, but is otherwise uncharged. Further east on the same wall is a larger shape, which may be a shield, with a series of vertical lines in chief and a circle within its area, but no other charge. There is also the remains of a shield which seems to be charged crusily, or the marks may be intended for ermine. It is low and near the Tudor fireplace, half-hidden by the frame of the perspex screen. An area of new plaster obscures nearly half of the section of wall covered by this panel, so the graffiti here cannot easily be distinguished. For heraldry Papworth's *Ordinary of Arms* and Burke's *General Armory* were consulted. These, in conjunction with a list of the fees and rolls payments of the Household knights of Edward I, kindly provided by Ruth Ingamells from her unpublished Ph.D. thesis (R. L. Ingamells, *The Household Knights of Edward I*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Durham, 1992, pp. 178–83) have enabled the present author to reconstruct the arms of most of the knights in the Household in 1277 and 1306. There are very few cases of correspondence, two or three at the most, between the arms of those listed for 1306, the date Walter Andrew reckoned to have 'proved' by the crown on Edward I's head (see note 43). In addition, Andrew had received a letter from Ralph Griffin, secretary to the Society of Antiquaries, (HRO 215 M85/13 King John's House Folder) which was extremely cautious about identifying the shields, in particular because of the lack of colour on the walls. Although Griffin is quoted in the guidebook, this letter shows him to have been even more circumspect than the published account suggests. The shields of the Household knights at the earliest date which Ingamells lists, 1277, were also checked, this being the nearest available information to 1275, the other occasion when Edward I is known to have visited Romsey. These show even less similarity to any of the shields depicted. The knights and lords who were suggested by Andrew and Griffin as bearers of the shields on the walls are not listed at all by Ingamells.

³⁸ R. Corson, *Fashions in Eyeglasses from the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1967), 17.

³⁹ J. Paxton and S. Fairfield, *Calendar of Creative Man* (London, 1980), 115.

be possible, although a copy of a Christmas card containing a self-portrait of Andrew, drawn in 1900, was discovered by the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. The letters 'W' and 'A' on this card are of the same proportions as those on the wall. It is almost certain that the initials on the wall are of Andrew's incising, as they are also of similar proportions to his initials in notes within papers held at the Hampshire Record Office. Andrew's profile on the Christmas card shows some similarities to the bespectacled head on the wall, raising the suggestion that at least one of the heads may have been incised by Walter Andrew himself.

The heads were illustrated in the section headed 'Some Recent Discoveries' in the 1932 version of the guidebook. Here the form of the crown is taken to 'prove that it, and all the *graffiti* on the walls, were drawn on February 15th, 1306, when Edward I held his court here'.⁴⁰ Even so the identification with Edward I is not as straightforward as was once thought. The implication is that 'the artist took a penny from his pocket and copied the crown from it'.⁴¹ Apart from the obvious observation that pockets were not common until the 15th century, this is possible. The crown is indeed similar, though English coins at this period show the monarch in full-face rather than side-view so something more than simple copying was called for.⁴² However, the crown bears strong resemblance to those on the coins of a number of other contemporary monarchs,⁴³ so that we are asked to accept this as a portrait of the king from life, and a crown copied from the coinage of a very specific date. The story of a retainer 'copying a coin from his pocket' thus becomes somewhat tenuous, putting into question the whole argument for the *graffiti* all being done at the same time. Conversely, the 'lantern jaw' which the head identified with Edward I has been given is likely to have been true to life, and it may simply be that having drawn the king, the artist made sure that the intended likeness was recognized by adding to it a crown which was roughly copied from a coin.⁴⁴

The so-called griffin (Fig. 17), is described in the 1981 guidebook as being 'the variant form which has the head of a lion and the body of a horse'.⁴⁵ A strong oblique light shows that this creature certainly has a rather squashed leonine head, with quadrupedal forelegs, but no distinct feet, and the lines of the body behind seem to fade out. It has wings behind its shoulders, however, and seems more likely to represent the winged lion of St Mark than a griffin in the heraldic sense, which is

⁴⁰ Andrew, *op. cit.* in note 9, 31.

⁴¹ Andrew, *op. cit.* in note 9, 31.

⁴² J. J. North, *English Hammered Coinage*, Vol. 2 (London, 1960), 19–24.

⁴³ John Orna-Ornstein, a curator in the Department of Coins and Medals at the British Museum said that 'there is absolutely nothing that suggests the facial features of the *graffiti* bust are modelled on a representation of Edward I copied from a coin', and that he would be 'extremely surprised if [the crown] could be dated as closely as Edward I, let alone to any part of his reign'. Orna-Ornstein also referred to J. J. North's *English Hammered Coinage*, which tabulates forms of crown for the reign of Edward I. These tables show that the form of crown on the *graffito*, whilst similar to those on the coins of Edward I, is not a direct copy of any, in addition to its resemblance to crowns on the contemporary coins of several other countries.

⁴⁴ See for example, portraits of Edward I in the illustrations to M. Prestwich, *The Three Edwards* (London, 1980), plate 4, 176/7.

⁴⁵ K. Stubbs, *A Guided Tour of King John's House, Romsey* (Romsey, 1981), 6.

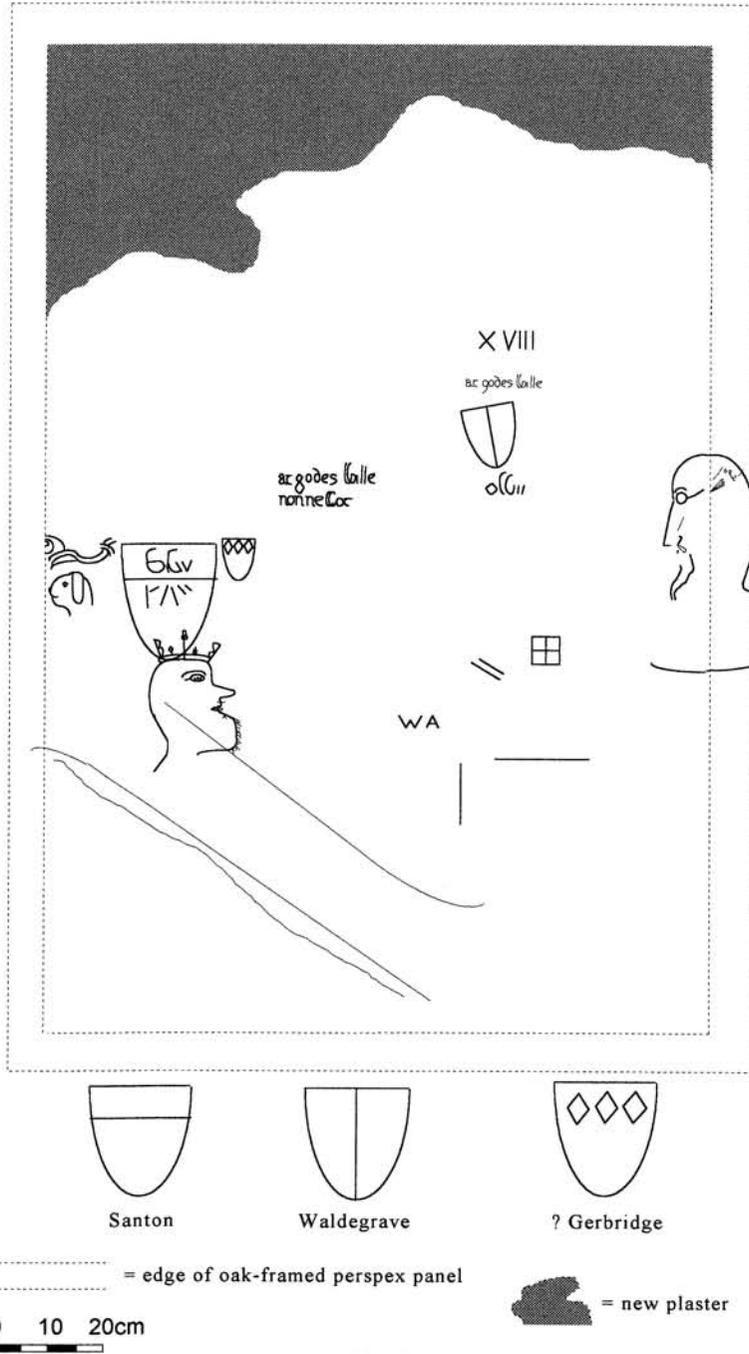


FIG. 16
Sketch of graffiti: south wall, panel II

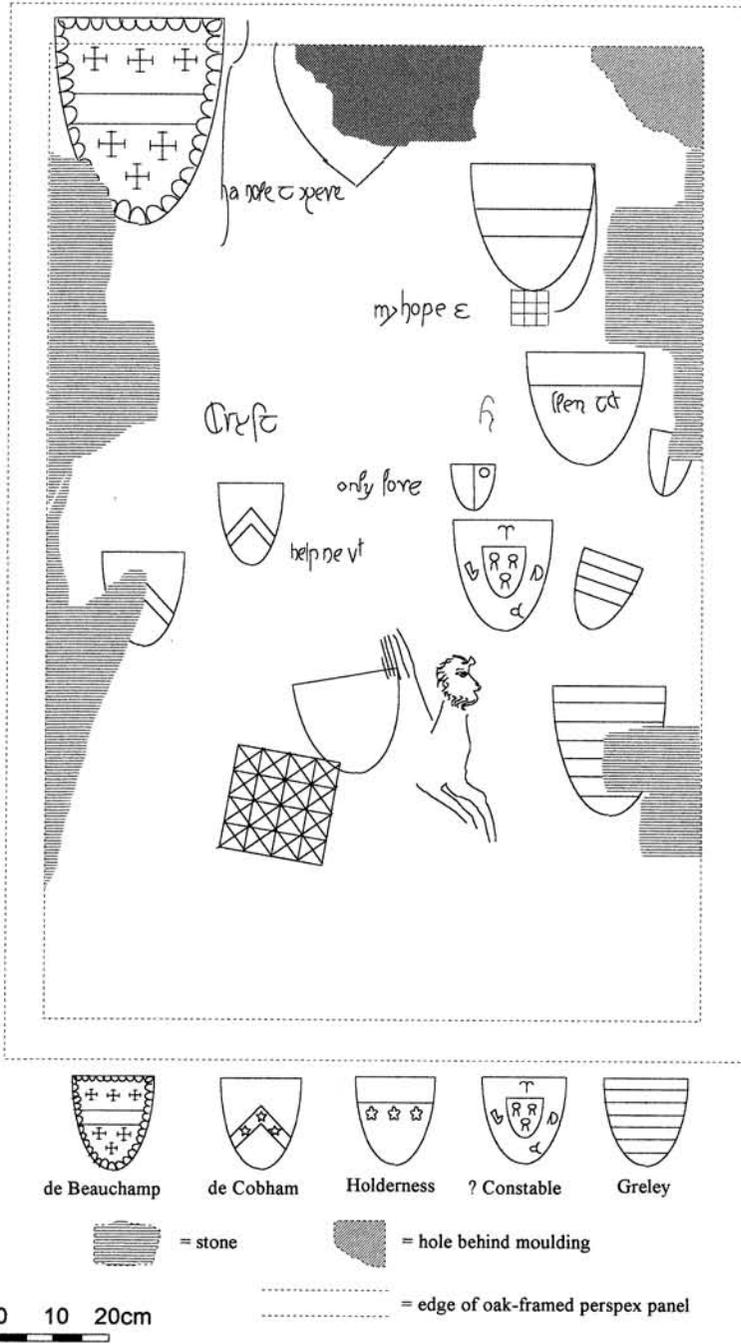


FIG. 17
Sketch of graffiti: west wall, panel III

always described with the hindparts of a lion, and an eagle's head. Even a hippogriff, which has the body of a horse, is defined as having a griffin's, and therefore an eagle's, foreparts. The dog (Fig. 16) is almost certainly intended as a talbot. The boar's head (Fig. 20) is fairly basic, but has recognizable ears and tusks. The dragon is a splendidly depicted creature, with an arrow-shaped tongue and curving body (Fig. 21). The plaster has bulged in this area, but there may have been an earlier version, or another creature, perhaps a bird, underlying the dragon.

Other configurations of lines are more difficult to interpret. The 'fighting stags' (Fig. 19) are particularly difficult to make out, though there is definitely one antlered head deliberately incised. It seems possible that at least some of these lines may have been by another hand, or been applied later. There is no rational argument for dating from their 'primitive' nature.

The inscriptions on the walls are perhaps the most obviously medieval features of the graffiti, and seem to be associated with the shields. The majority appear to be prayers or mottoes, and are in Middle English.⁴⁶ The initials and date in the stone by the S. window (Fig. 15) are thought to have been done by 17th- and 18th-century owners and tenants. The patterns in the ashlar under the King John's House west window were identified by Andrew as 'masons marks' but they seem too large and complicated for that, especially as both are on the same stone.

The graffiti have proved to be rather more of a distraction than a help in dating phases of the building. It is just possible that the heralds of the lords staying in the stone building, or in its ancillary rooms, would have made the record of the occasion on the walls of the courtroom, instead of on a parchment roll, perhaps to commemorate the king sitting in judgement there. Certainly much of the work is of too high quality to be mere drunken scratchings. These may well be the record of an occasion, though perhaps not of Edward I's visit on 15 February 1306. The human heads and the rougher markings are more problematical; further investigations, perhaps including plaster sampling, are necessary to provide answers to some if not all of the questions here raised.

PHASE PLANS AND SPATIAL ANALYSIS

DATING

The mid- to late 13th-century date for the stone building was at one time claimed because of the style of the keeled internal mouldings of the W. and NW. windows, and the way in which the inner orders of the window arches merge on the outer to produce the effect of a stilted arch (Fig. 8). These features have been

⁴⁶ A. W. Goodman, in Andrew, *op. cit.* in note 9, 28–29. A. W. Goodman, Hon. Canon and Hon. Librarian at Winchester Cathedral, identifies the script as that of the early 14th century. In particular, he states that it resembles the script in the register of Henry Woodlock, bishop of Winchester from 1305 until 1316. The use of English at this time is not necessarily surprising. Although French was still the fashionable language, and this was some 50 years earlier than Langland and Chaucer, Bishop Henry's visitation injunctions to the nuns of Hartley Wintney, apparently ended with an order that they be read aloud in chapter four times a year in English or French 'so that all the ladies might have them constantly in mind'. This implies that, though they were written in French, at least some of the ladies might understand English better. The barons surrounding Edward, and their retainers, could therefore as easily be using English mottoes or rallying cries as French ones.

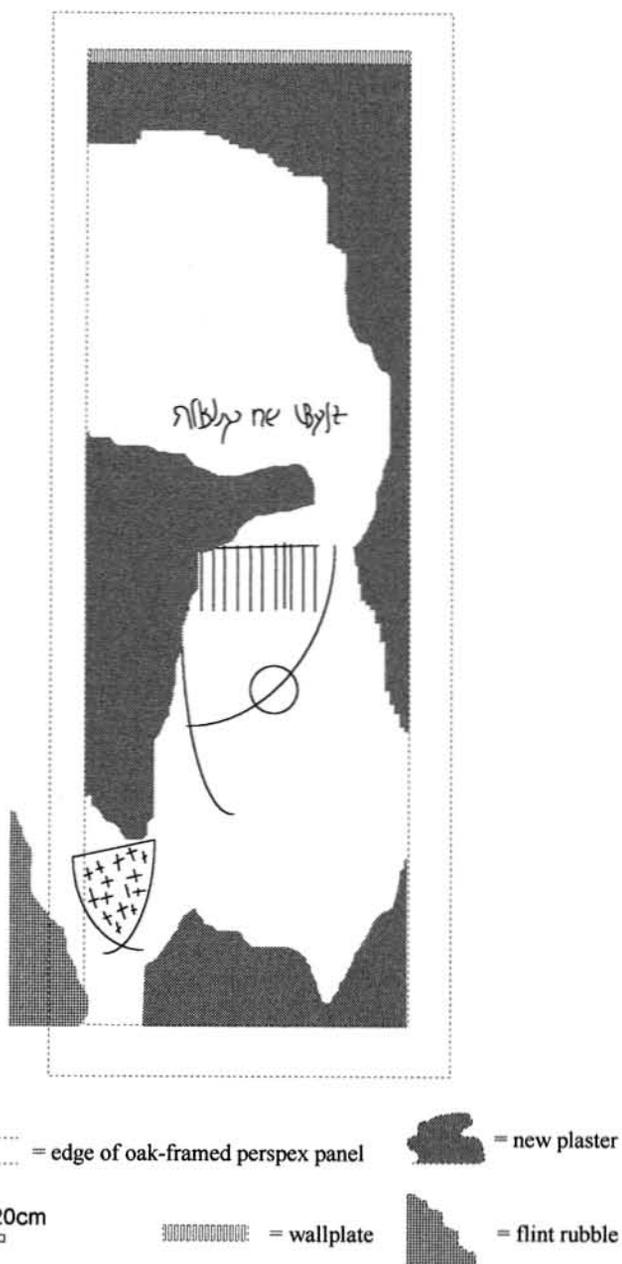


FIG. 18

Sketch of graffiti: north wall, panel IV

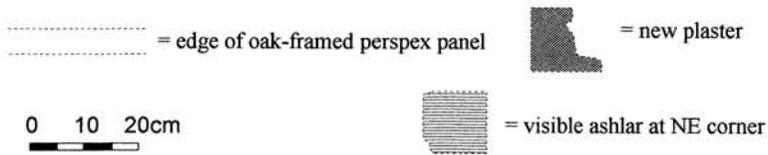
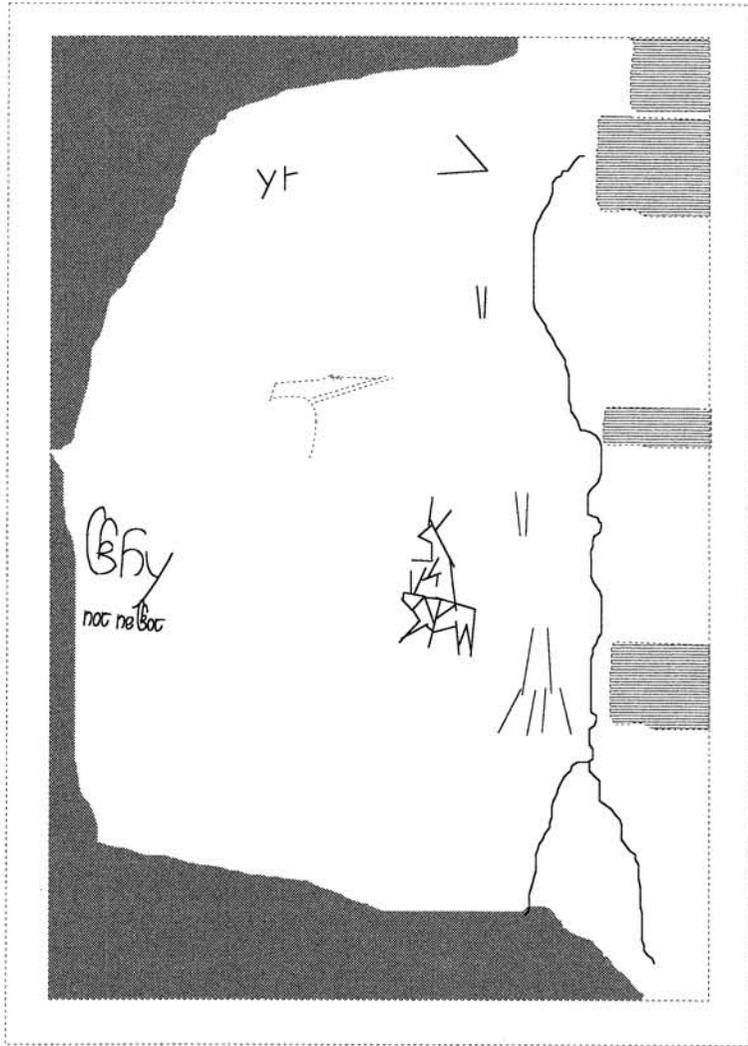
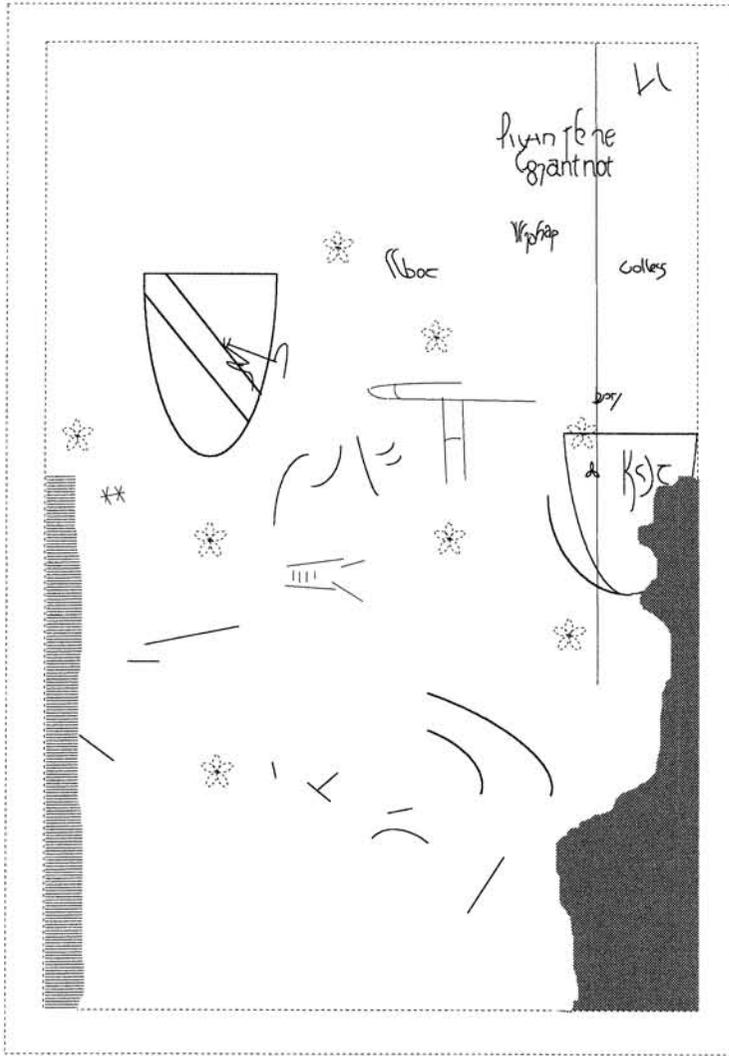


FIG. 19
Sketch of graffiti: north wall, panel V



 = Visible remains of flowers from black/yellow medieval painted decoration

 = edge of oak-framed perspex panel

 = new plaster

0 10 20cm

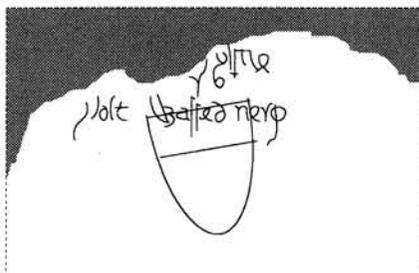


= visible ashlar at NE corner

FIG. 20

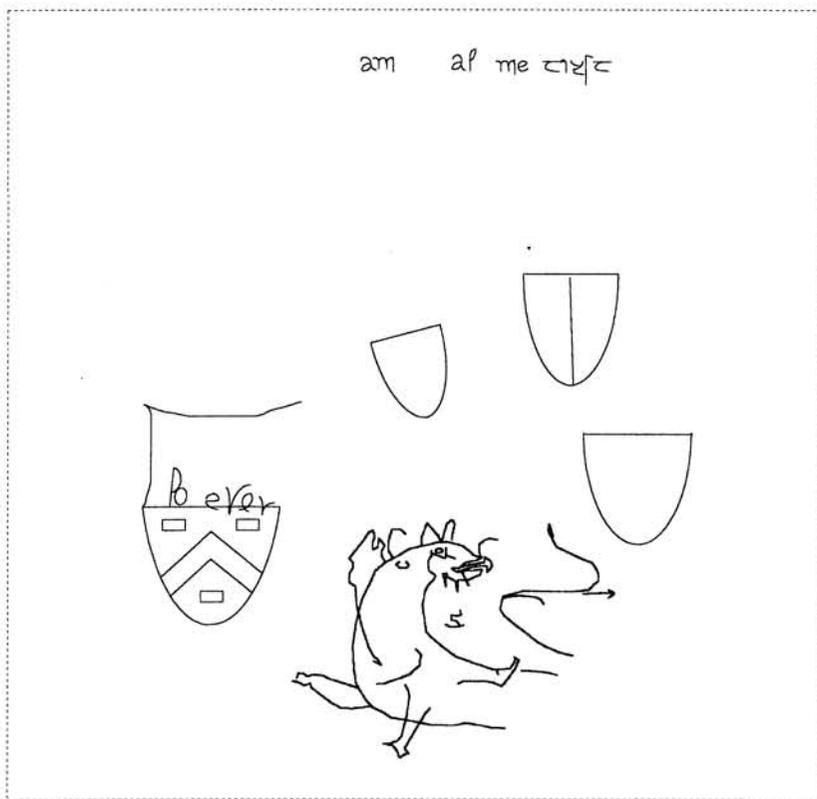
Sketch of graffiti: east wall, panel VI

Area A: Above Fireplace, North Wall



 = new plaster

Area B: Above Stairwell, East Wall



0 10 20cm


 = areas of wall shown A & B on schematic diagram

FIG. 21
Sketch of graffiti: areas A and B

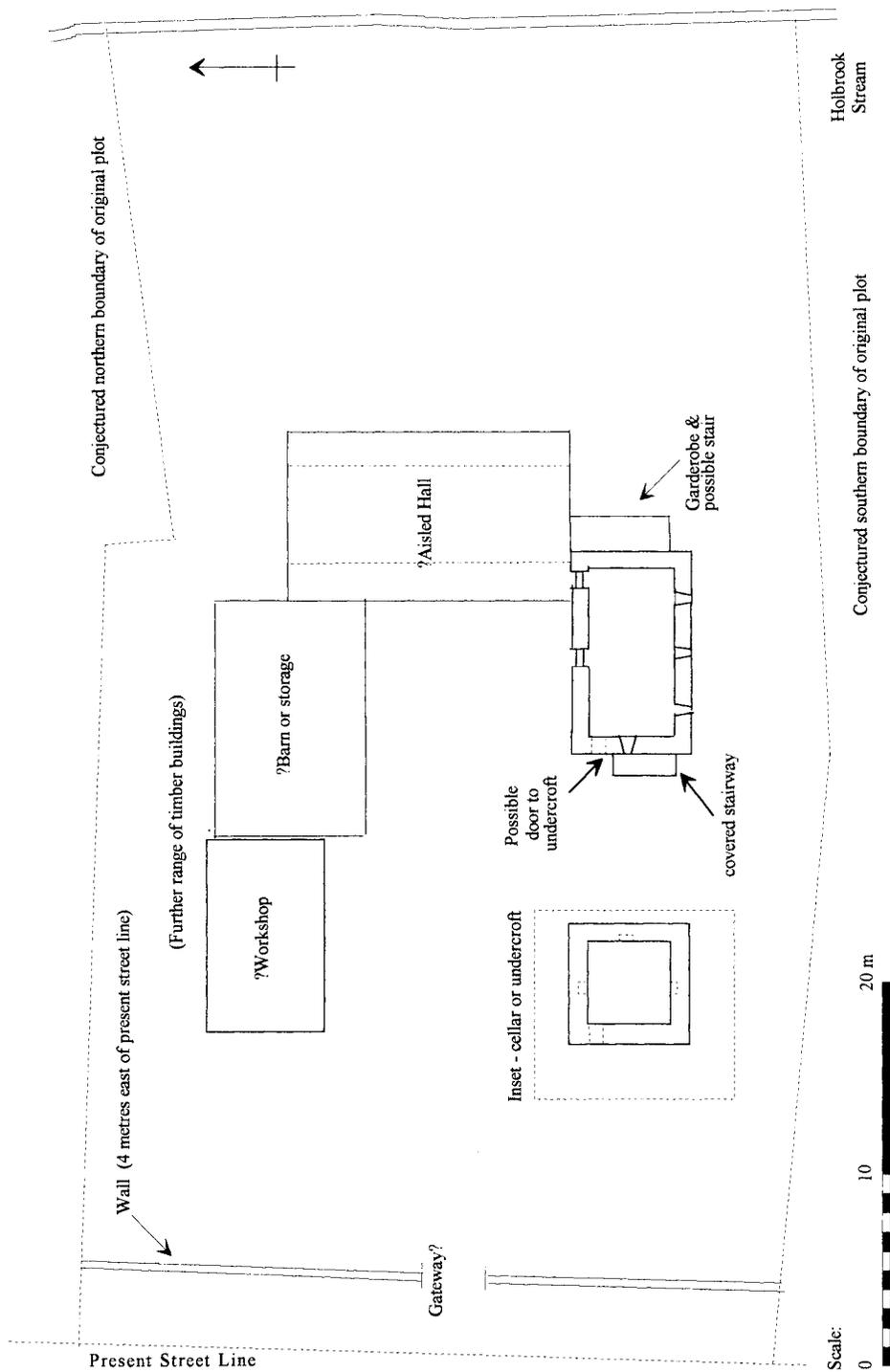


FIG. 22
Phase plan: medieval

likened to 'other southern Hampshire buildings of the time' notably the chancel arch of St Mary's Church, Eling, in Totton,⁴⁷ though here the three orders do not merge, and the arch springs from an impost moulding, a feature not encountered at King John's House. In terms of visual effect, the differences are more apparent than the similarities.

Keeled mouldings with more obvious similarities may be seen on the external mouldings of the north-western windows of the nave of Romsey Abbey. The building works of which they form part date from the 13th century. The grants by Henry III of 38 oak trees from the New Forest during the years 1251-53, sixteen of which were specifically 'for the building of the church',⁴⁸ indicate that the western end of the nave roof of the Abbey was being constructed at about that time, suggesting a date in the late 1240s for the stonework of this section. The N. doorway of the abbey has dogtooth-decorated moulding, giving another similarity between the style of that part of the abbey and King John's House. It is not possible with the scant documentary evidence to hand to get any closer than the early 1250s for the date of the King John's House building. This does, however, tie in well with the date of 1256 from dendrochronology.

If the original dating of the stone building to 1206 was a product of over-enthusiasm and a too-ready acceptance of coincidence rather than evidence, the buildings at each side are similarly assigned to inappropriately early dates. Thus 'Tudor Cottage' the timber-framed building adjoining King John's House to the W. is, stylistically, more likely to be a 17th-century building, and 'Queen Anne Cottages' to the east more probably date from later in the 18th century than 1714, and certainly are not as early as the date of 1697 claimed for them.

Phase I Medieval: c. 1250 to c. 1540

The medieval phase is necessarily conjectural and four buildings are postulated around an irregular courtyard (Fig. 22). Of these only one now remains, the stone block now known as King John's House, and the most obvious interpretation is that this was a chamber-block. It is unusual but not unknown to find the main entrance positioned at the W. gable end of the building rather than towards one end of a long wall. The chamber block at Stokesay Castle, Shropshire, (built 1285) has a similar configuration, for example, as has the much earlier Hemingford Gray (built c. 1150).⁴⁹ It may simply be that in each case the site was such that this was the only arrangement viable. It is logical that those coming from the street would come directly into the chamber block at the western end (Fig. 23). This, however, poses the question of why people would be coming in. Visitors to a normal domestic building would surely enter its courtyard area and proceed to the hall or chamber by a doorway leading from that courtyard. In any case a chamber in such a house would normally be a 'deep space': certainly at least one remove

⁴⁷ N. Pevsner and D. Lloyd, *The Buildings of England; Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (London, 1967), 208.

⁴⁸ J. Walker, *Romsey Abbey Through the Centuries* (Lymington, 1993), 26, quoting Henry III, Close Rolls, 1251-53, 295.

⁴⁹ N. Saul, *Batsford Companion to Medieval England* (London, 1983), 23 and plate 10a; J. Grenville, *Medieval Housing* (London, 1997), 195 and Figure 3.2.

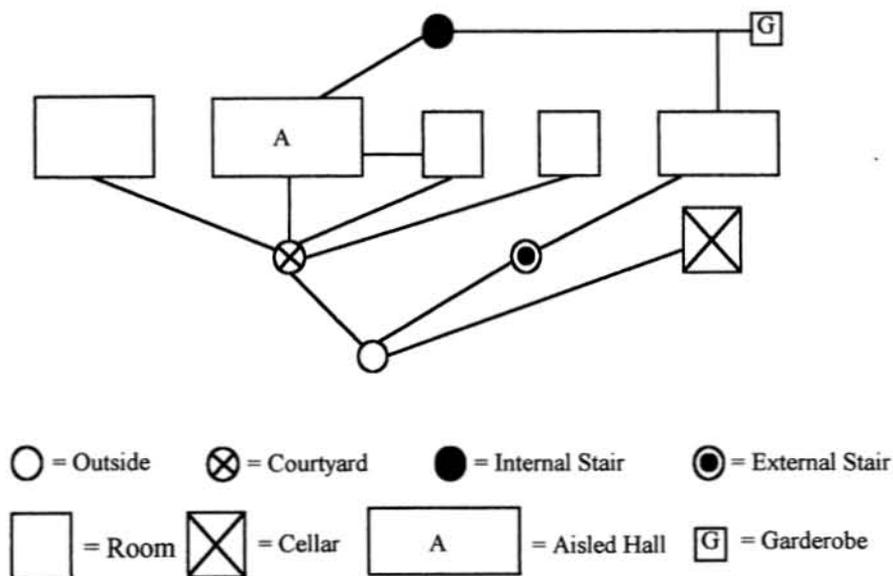


FIG. 23

Spatial Analysis Diagram: Phase I, medieval

from the area immediately entered by a visitor. If people were coming into the building directly into the upper room by the W. door, this suggests that the room had an official use; perhaps a courtroom.⁵⁰ Logically such a function might be linked to the Benedictine Nunnery only a hundred metres away; possibly the Abbey steward's court. If this were so, the view of the Abbey from the W. window, visible only to the officials sitting at the E. end to receive those who came into the upper room for Abbey business, would serve as a constant reminder of the proximity and power of the institution of which they were the functionaries. It is open to question whether the name of Church Court, which was in use in the 18th century for both the complex and the lane leading to the houses therein, could bear the direct memory of the medieval use of the stone block.⁵¹

At the E. end of that building stood a garderobe tower. The evidence for this is both architectural and archaeological: first, the jambs of the door at the E. end of the upper room opened outwards from the present room, the diagonal line of ashlar at the eastern end of the N. wall providing evidence for a roof keyed in to the original fabric and, secondly, a garderobe pit has been found at the base. The likelihood of something more substantial at the E. end of the stone block is

⁵⁰ Cf. the courthouse at Furness Abbey at Hawkshead in Cumbria. This is also a stone building, with rubble walls and sandstone dressings, with a window with cinquefoil tracery in the S. end wall, and holes for bars and grooves for glazing. Downstairs in both buildings were two separate entrance doors to rooms underneath the main upper room, which occupied the whole of the first floor. The internal proportions, of approximately 2:1, are the same for Hawkshead courtroom and the King John's House upper room.

⁵¹ Green, *op. cit.* in note 26, 18.

indicated by the lack of surviving external corner ashlar. If, as appears, such a building had a roof which extended down beyond the first-floor level, an aisled hall would be a reasonable conjecture. By analogy with other complexes with stone blocks and timber halls, the size of this aisled hall is postulated at 14 m by 9 m.⁵² On a similar analogy, a N. range is also suggested. This would probably have contained barns and storage areas. The whole complex may have been walled. A 'substantial wall' discovered in the 1930s, 4 m in from the present street line, was identified at the time as 'medieval' and may be the original western boundary of the site.

Phase II Early Modern: c. 1550 to c. 1750

The first deed, dating from 1571, lists 'two messuages or tenements, two gardens, and all houses buildings shops land and ground with appurtenances.'⁵³ This suggests a large site on which many of the buildings would by this time have been replacements for those of the medieval phase (Fig. 24). The present Oasis Christian Centre, where late-medieval timbers are visible, is sited at the NW. corner of the original plot, and would almost certainly have been one of the 'shops' mentioned. It seems likely that there were several other shops here; it would be strange if the farthest corner of the plot from the market-place were occupied first, so a row of shops is postulated along the street line. This would account for the demolition of the western boundary wall. All the shops except the surviving 'Oasis' building were replaced in the 18th and 19th centuries.

An important area of the early modern phase plan is based on the records of the 1992 and 1993 excavations in the area to the east of King John's House. These excavations found several hearths and suggested a metalworking 'lodge' in a lean-to at the E. end of the stone block.

There is mention in the Poor Rate books as late as 1745 of 'Mr. Gass's Barn'. It seems quite possible that this was a medieval timber building still on the site, as Daniel Gass owned the property in the middle of the 18th century. One of the N. range of buildings from Phase I has therefore been shown as still standing in this plan.

The building shown attached to the west of King John's House is 'Tudor Cottage' more or less as it exists today; the fireplace and external walls have not altered position, and the internal partitioning is to a large extent constrained by these features. This building is of two principal storeys with loft space, and measures some 10 m by 6 m.

It is not certain at what date partitioning was first put into the upper room of King John's House. The partitions removed soon after the rediscovery were described simply as 'Georgian' in Walter Andrew's guidebook.⁵⁴ A single upper room has therefore been assumed for the early modern phase. As a consequence,

⁵² For example, Sutton Courtenay Manor House, described in C. R. J. Currie, 'Larger Medieval Houses in the Vale of White Horse', *Oxonensia*, LVII, 214-22.

⁵³ Deed IX.

⁵⁴ Andrew, *op. cit.* in note 9, 3.

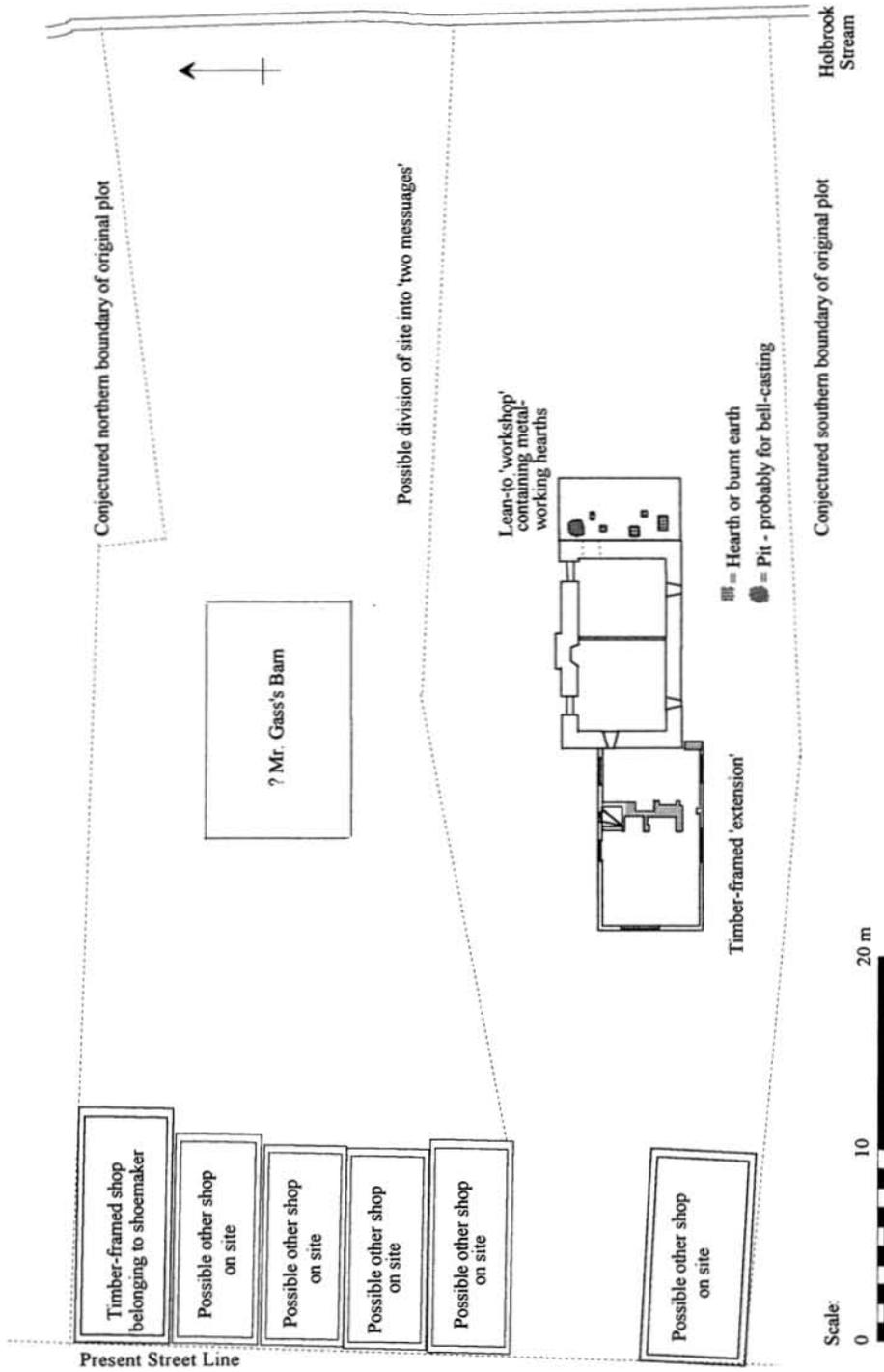


FIG. 22

Phase plan: medieval

of wood during the various processes necessary to make the barrels, or for the completed barrels themselves.

CONCLUSION

THE KING JOHN'S HOUSE COMPLEX

Romsey is unique in Wessex for the survival of the bulk of its Abbey church, the only one of the nine pre-conquest nunneries whose church still stands in anything like its medieval form. Similarly, it may have an almost equally rare survival in the King John's House building, probably an ancillary building to the Abbey. The undoubted high quality of its workmanship and decoration, together with the proximity to the Abbey Church, and thus the precinct of the nunnery, suggests a connection.

More work is necessary to establish the date, contemporaneity and sequence of the wall features: the red line-work; the inscriptions, shields, heraldic beasts and heads. It may require the 'excavation' of part of the walls, for plaster analysis and chromatographic tests to see whether any pigment was ever added to the shield incisions or to other decorative elements. The Test Valley Archaeological Trust has already begun the process of plaster analysis on the E. internal wall, where the limewash applied in the 1970s was flaking off.

More investigations, too, are needed to establish whether the cellar is part of the original construction, which will at the very least require the removal of the concrete flooring to look at any earlier floor levels and signs of construction methods. Others are equally anxious that this be done, from the practical considerations of damp, as well as for investigative purposes, so that future work in this area is likely.

Recently, the gun shop, and its land adjacent to the King John's House block, have become available and archaeological work is being undertaken. Eventually, if best intentions come to fruition, the whole site could be reconstructed on paper or computer screen, giving a fuller picture of this area of the town through the various periods of time that it has been occupied.

It seems, in conclusion, that the picturesque names for the two surviving buildings of the complex, 'King John's House' and 'Tudor Cottage', and for the traceable but now demolished third element, 'Queen Anne Cottages', must be discounted as historical descriptions, and only used colloquially. The stylistic evidence of the stonework of King John's House, together with the result from the dendrochronology, place the construction of the stone block firmly in the third quarter of the 13th century. Alterations to this stone block and a succession of different buildings around it on the site, chart the changes in status and type of use for both King John's House itself and the people living and working in it. These changes in turn reflect the development of Romsey from a town dominated in the Middle Ages by one of the richest of the nunneries in England, through its economic growth and its industrial and agricultural successes and failures until the brink of the 1930s depression.

HISTORICAL ATTITUDES

The early years of the 20th century show the beginning of a shift in historiography, which would eventually allow academic recognition to the 'history' of all types and levels of people and places. Local history in particular has developed immensely since the days when the greatest concern of all local historians was to link their locality to some event or figure of national importance. The sterling efforts of Walter Andrew and the Misses Moody to capitalize on the royal connections they reckoned to have discovered in 'King John's House' are understandable in the light of their time; nor should they be castigated for them. In the 1920s and 1930s an overtly 'romantic' view was taken both of royalty and of a form of medievalism which was partly a remnant of the 'Alfredism' of the turn of the century, and partly linked to the post-Great War folk revival. It was inevitable that local discoveries would be given their importance by attempts to link them to external factors. More than 70 years on, historians and archaeologists see a different importance for the King John's House complex, and would be just as excited at discovering a medieval building for its intrinsic interest, without feeling the need to look for external reasons to justify its importance. The evidence of continued and continuous use at King John's House during 700 years is as exciting to the modern historian and archaeologist as the 'royal' connection was to the antiquarian Andrew.

The view of history as a 'pageant' is evidenced in many places during the period from the late 19th century until the 1960s. Pageants themselves were particularly popular in the inter-war years as well as the early years of the 20th century. Romsey had its own pageant in 1907, in which the invading Danes were christianized, and St Ethelflæda showed her luminous hand. Each age, each generation, brings a new view and a different perspective to the study of its past. The pageant was an ideograph of the Whig 'progression of history', triumphing in the satisfactory conclusion that everything is getting better. The cynical view, which began to creep in when the soldiers returning from the Great War did not find 'homes fit for heroes' waiting for them, and the deepening gloom of the Great Depression (and later the Cold War and fear of 'The Bomb') probably did not even begin to reach the upper levels of society in a small country town such as Romsey until much later than 1927, when King John's House was first recognized as medieval. The fact that the building had become a slum would almost certainly have increased the perceived need to find a 'respectable' antecedent for it.

These changing attitudes to the past are as interesting and important to present-day study as the artefacts that earlier historians and archaeologists discovered were to them. The example here examined shows not only the changes to a building through 700 years, but the changing perceptions of the past over the course of the 20th century. The present author does not consider herself immune to these developments, and acknowledges that her revisionist view is as much a product of her time as the opinions of those who have studied the King John complex earlier in the century were of theirs. In attempting to separate rich empirical description from interpretation, the author is following tenets promulgated in the 1990s. This in itself

might be criticized by some authors, who would see subjectivity built into the building recording process itself, and impossible to separate out.⁵⁵ Current theorizing on this contentious subject will no doubt ensure that the debate is continued elsewhere.

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⁵⁵ See, for example, the discussions in R. W. Preucel and I. Hodder, *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory* (Oxford, 1996), in particular the anonymous dialogue 'Theoretical Archaeological Discourse', 667–77.