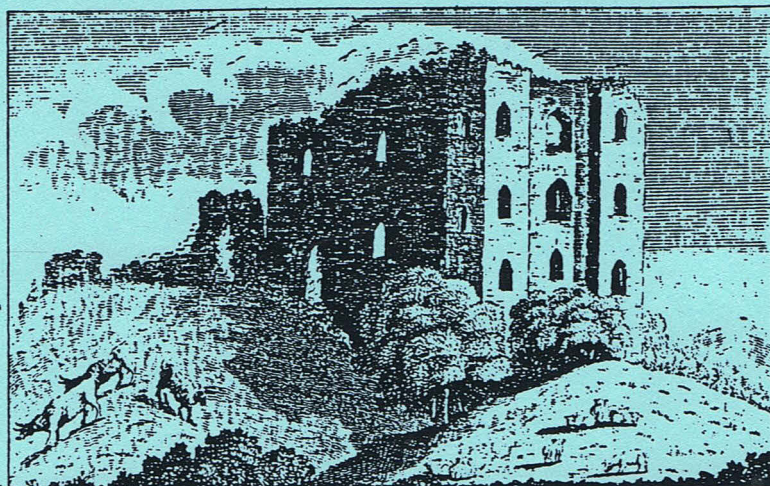


**CLUN CASTLE  
SHROPSHIRE**



*D. Fowler, 11th. July. 1991.*

**RECORDING & EXCAVATION  
WORKS  
1990**

**AN INTERIM REPORT**

**November 1990  
Hereford Archaeology Series 89**



This report is produced by the

CITY OF HEREFORD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT TOWN HALL

HEREFORD

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For

English Heritage Fortress House London

c. English Heritage &

The City of Hereford Archaeology Committee 1990

The City of Hereford Archaeology Committee was founded in 1974 and is a registered charity.

It manages the Archaeology Unit with a permanent staff of six people. Besides dealing with the buried archaeology of Hereford - itself an important Saxon city dating back to the 7th century - the Unit has specialised in recent years in the archaeological recording of historic standing buildings. This work has usually been on a commission basis on behalf of English Heritage or a potential developer and the Unit now has considerable experience in this field.

Cover: Clun Castle in 179

HEREFORD ARCHAEOLOGY SERIES NO 89

CLUN CASTLE, SHROPSHIRE

Grid Ref: SO 299809

Initial Recording and Excavation Works 1990

Interim Report

Introduction

In January 1990, the City of Hereford Archaeology Unit produced an interim 'Outline History' Of Clun Castle, Shropshire (HAS 69) following the decision of English Heritage to take the monument into its guardianship.

The ruins of the castle, once an important border fortress, are in urgent need of consolidation and this major project is scheduled to take place in 1991.

Some preliminary work, including the consolidation of a section of masonry which had suffered collapse during a recent minor earth tremor, was undertaken in 1990, and English Heritage took the opportunity to commission some initial survey, clearance and excavation work to aid in the formulation of an accurate brief for- the main project.

The archaeological work took place during August and September  
1990



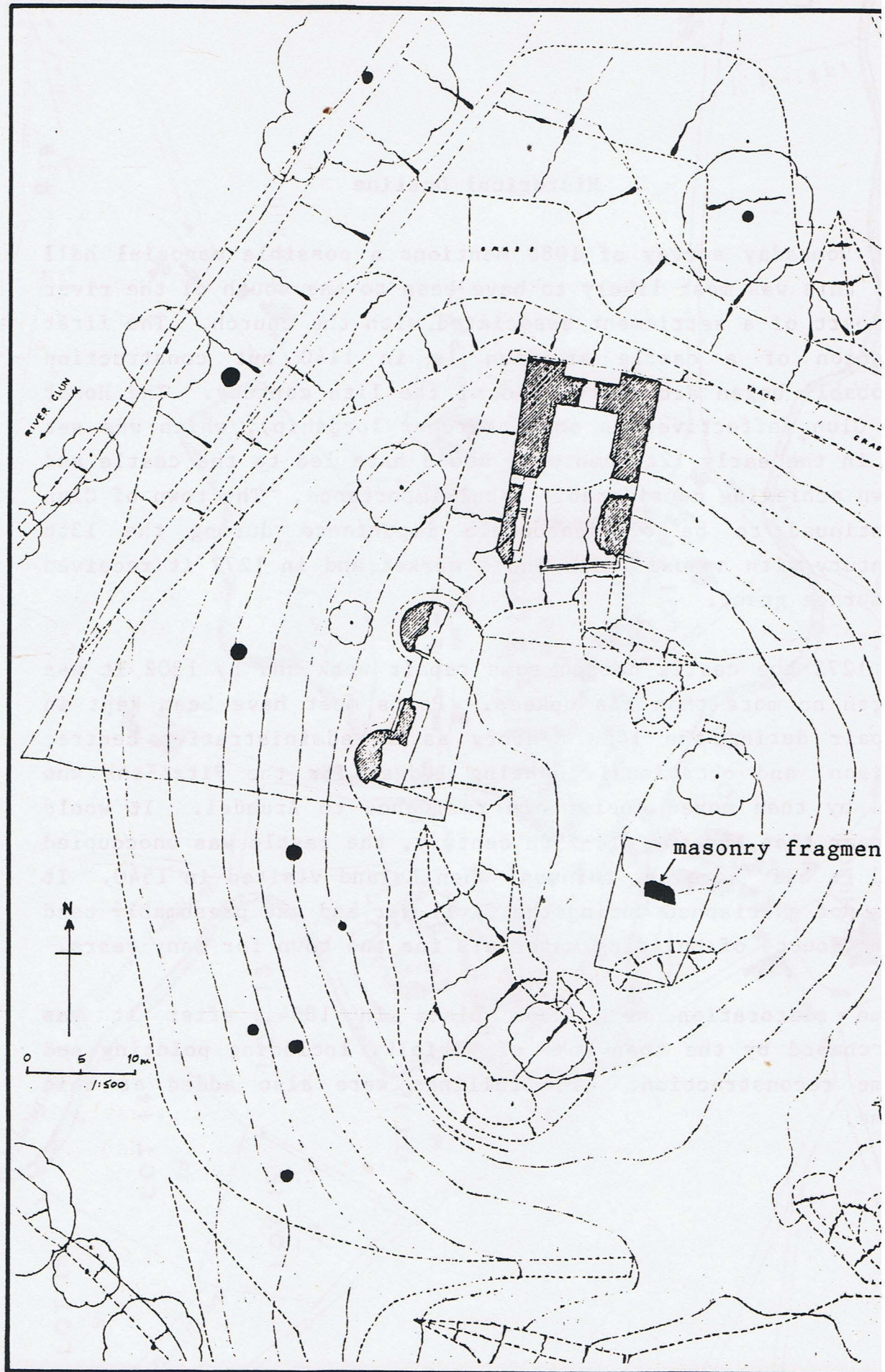


## Historical Outline

The Domesday survey of 1086 mentions a possible manorial hall but this was most likely to have been to the south of the river as part of a settlement associated with the church. The first mention of a castle at Clun is in 1140 but construction probably began around the end of the 11th century. The Honour of Clun (effectively a small Marcher lordship), which was set up in the early 12th century, would have led to the castle and town achieving considerable local importance. The town of Clun continued to be of reasonable importance during the 13th century with annual fairs and a market and in 1277 it received a murage grant.

In 1272 the castle needed some repair work and by 1302 it was worth no more than its upkeep. Parts must have been kept in repair during the 14th century as an administrative centre, prison, and occasional 'hunting lodge' for the FitzAlans who had by then moved their main residence to Arundel. It would appear that, by the mid-15th century, the castle was unoccupied and it was 'somewhat ruinous' when Leland visited in 1540. It was not garrisoned during the Civil War and was presumably used as a source of building materials for the town for many years.

Some restoration work took place in 1894, after it was purchased by the then Duke of Norfolk, including pointing and some reconstruction. The railings were also added at this time.



The location of the masonry fragment



## **The Survey**

There were two sections commissioned in the original survey – first a stone-by-stone record of the isolated piece of masonry (see plan) which was to be consolidated, and secondly a detailed record of the portions of the keep which were within reach from the present ground surface. An outline set of drawings of the rooms built within the north wall of the keep was added to the commission at a later date

### **Masonry Fragment**

This fragment, which stands to the south of the keep surrounded by a post and wire fence, suffered some damage during the earth tremor when several stones fell from the south side - the only side which still has facing stone. Fortunately this face had been photographed and plotted by the Photogrammetric Unit at York previous to the collapse and, using this record, it was possible to identify several of the face stones from amongst the rubble in front of the wall and these were put on one side for replacement. Several of the stones, apparent in the photogrammetric survey, could not be identified, presumably they had been broken during the fall, and their positions were eventually filled with core work.

The consolidation work involved the insertion of a considerable core work and steel rods to support the fragile areas of the upper part of the section of masonry. The fragment was re-surveyed on completion of the consolidation work to identify the new work.

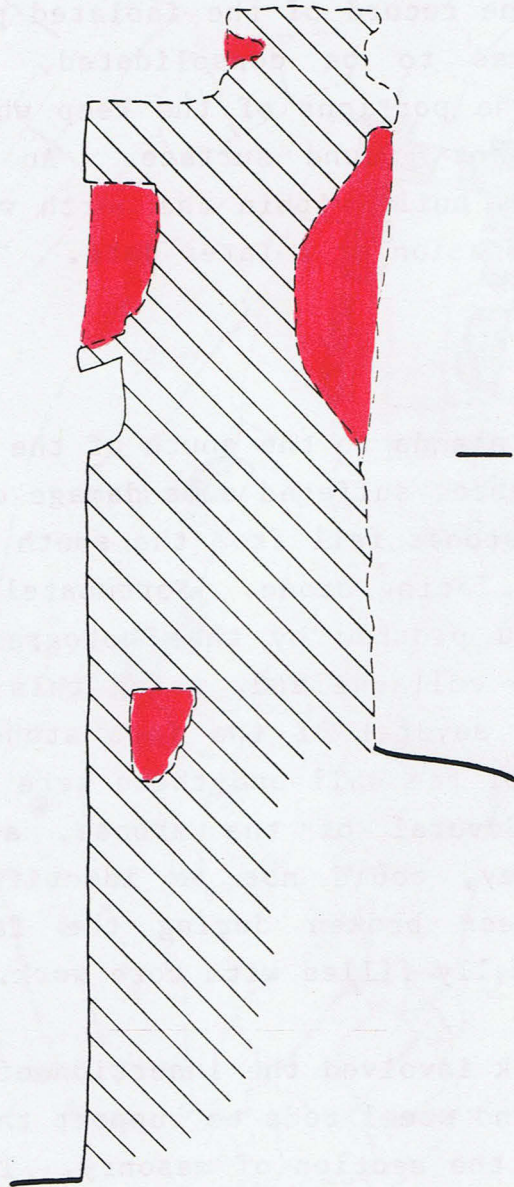
The fragment of masonry is aligned with the north wall of the keep. It is approximately 3m long and has a face 6m high on southern side. The north side consists entirely of core material and, due to a slope in the ground, is only 4m high.

The fragment varies in thickness up to a maximum of 1.5m.

On the face side, at a height of 3.8m above the present ground surface there is a set-back on the face approximately 0.3m high and averaging 0.2m deep. This was apparently designed to take a joist or beam of some description and would suggest that this face was internal to a building.

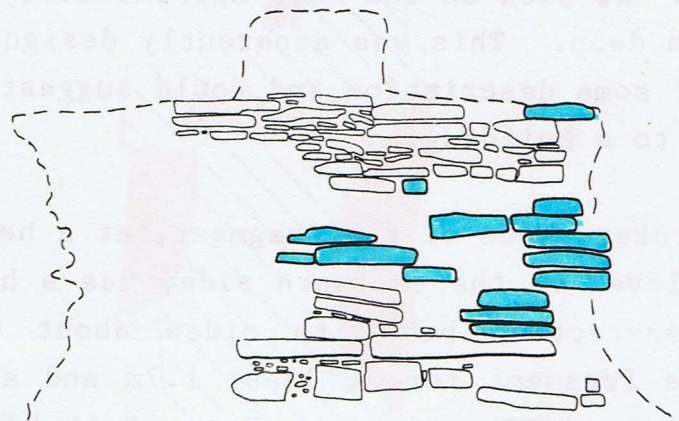
On the eastern, broken, face of the fragment, at a height of 2m re the ground level on the southern side, was a hole rather irregular in cross-section but with sides about 0.5m. It continued into the fragment for at least 1.7m and appeared to be designed to accommodate a timber. Much of it has now been filled with core-work. A hole of this depth would normally accommodate a draw-bar associated with a doorway but, with the total absence of any eastern face and with the hole being rather higher than practicable for such a purpose, this may not be the correct interpretation. It appears on the southern elevation drawing to be in a possibly rebuilt section of wall its western end may be associated with a blocked hole of similar dimensions.

The photographic record of this section of masonry is not complete as would normally be the case. (The film taken before work started was totally ruined during processing). Fortunately the photographs taken by the York Photogrammetric Unit give a reasonable impression of the extent and condition consolidation work commenced.



Section A-A of the masonry fragment





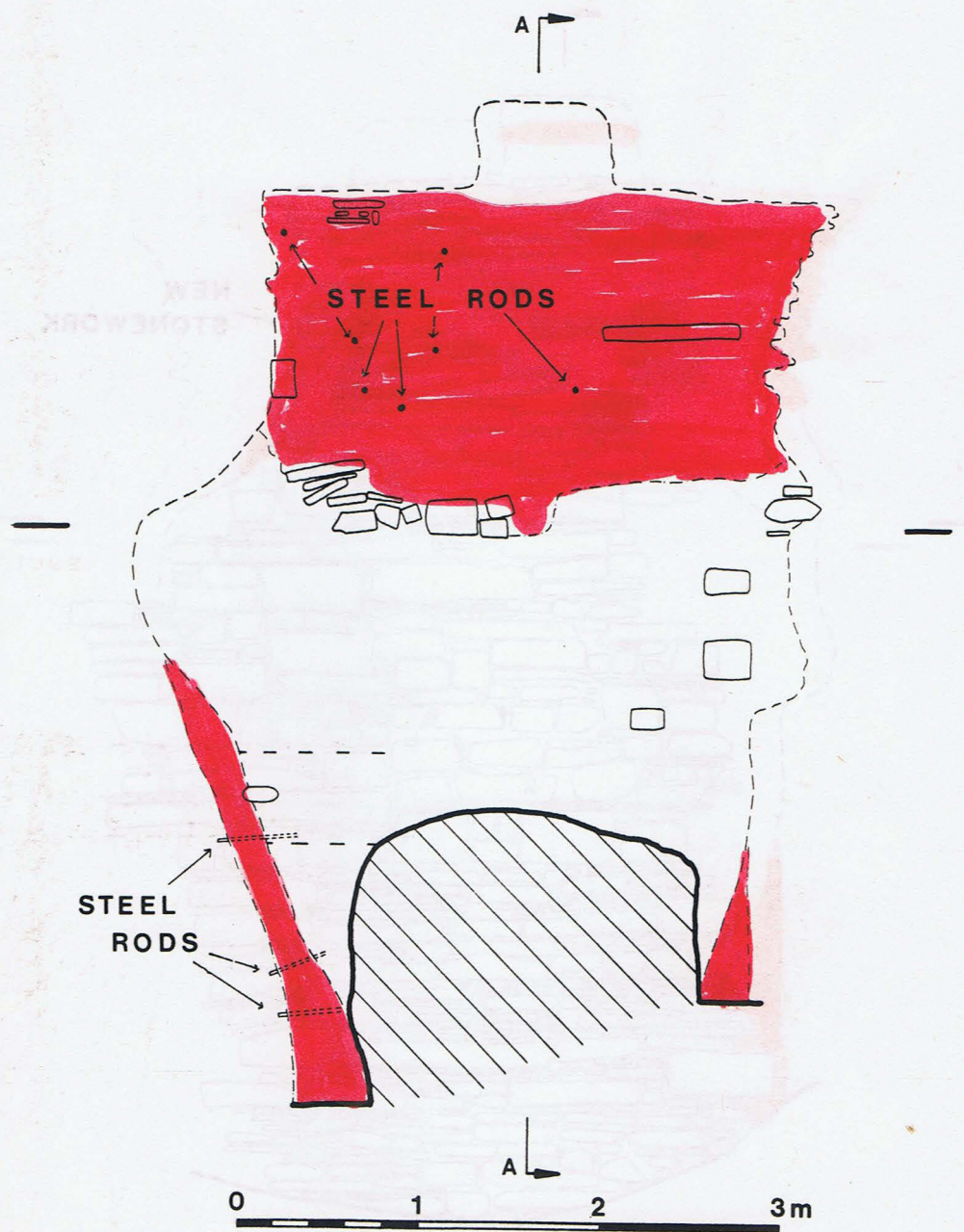
0 1 2 3m

The upper part of the south face before consolidation  
showing recommended positions  
of the stones to be replaced



The south face of the masonry after consolidation





The north face of the masonry fragment after consolidation



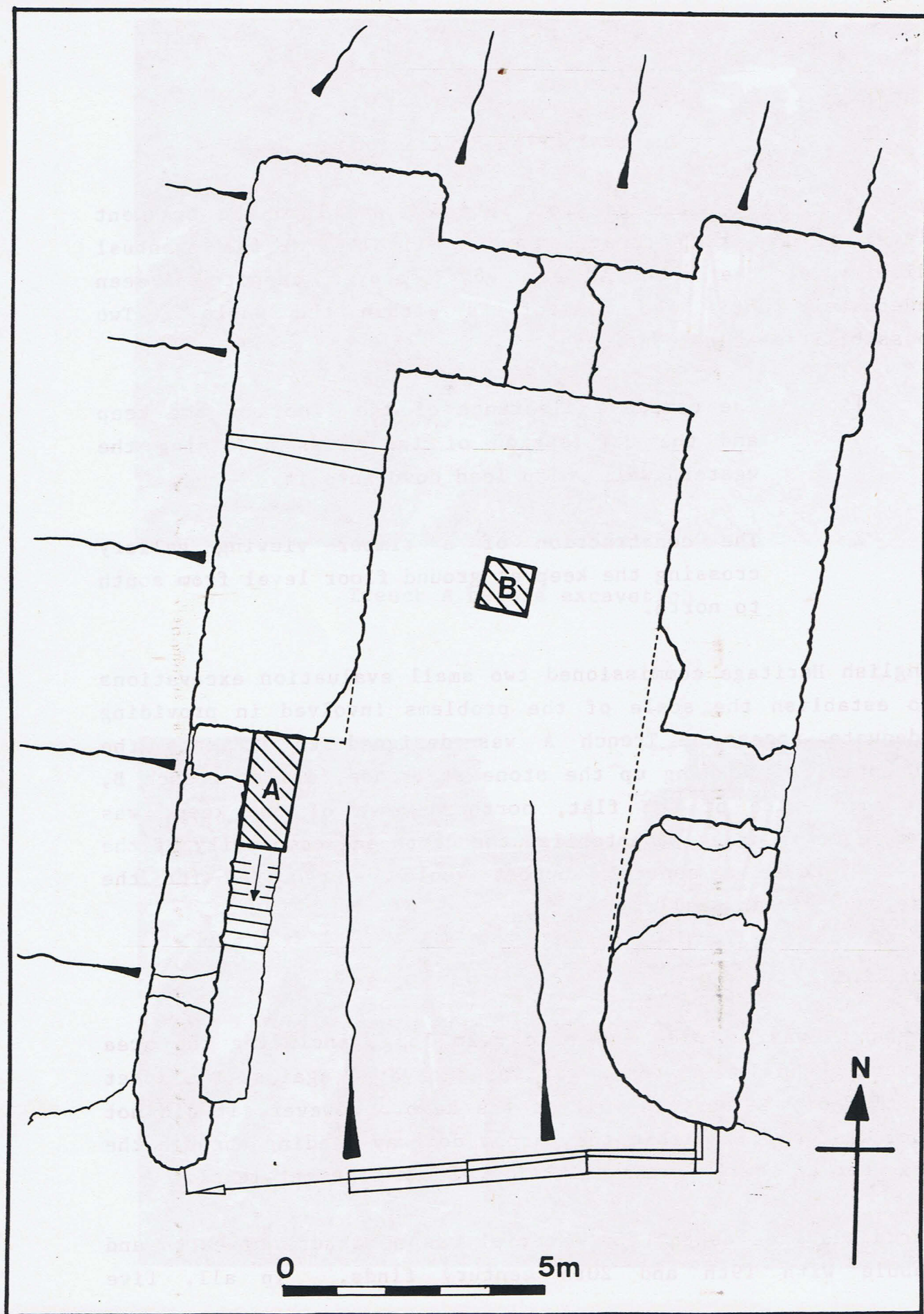


The upper part of the masonry fragment from the south-west  
showing the new core-work



The lower part of the masonry fragment from the south-west





The keep showing the location of the two evaluation trenches

## **The Clearance Work**

The internal area of the keep consists of two parts - the half to the north where the ground is almost flat, and the half which slopes upwards to the south. In effect northern half reflects the basement level of the keep in a thick layer of collapsed and relatively well consolidated debris, whilst the southern half is assumed to include collapsed debris from the presumed south wall of the buried remains of vaulting -which would have suppl ground floor in this area. It is apparent from the features that the ground floor in the northern half of was of timber.

The reason for- the change from timber floor to the stone vaulting to the south was a constructional solution to building the keep on, and partly cut into, the steeply sloping sides of the mound. In the northern half the pressures on the walls were even on both sides and a timber floor was simple and appropriate. In the southern half, the keep was cut into the material of the mound and the basement level was thus below the ground level on the outside of the walls. A vault or or series of vaults within this part of the basement would serve to relieve the pressure of the earth on the outside. It is presumed that the consolidated material now in this section of the keep has a similar effect to the original vaulting.

The whole of the internal area of the keep was covered by rubble stone debris from recent minor collapses from the walls. Through this grew scrub vegetation, bushes and small trees.



As part of his work on the site the contractor had to clear out the debris and vegetation in the keep under archaeological supervision and down to a reduced level to be established as the work proceeded, but assumed to be approximately 450mm below the existing level. All sound and useable stone of 'fist-size' and above was to be sorted and kept for use as core material in the consolidation works. The unwanted debris was to be removed from the site.

In the event it was found that it was not necessary to remove a full 450mm from the area as a relatively smooth surface was achieved by the removal of the loose debris and vegetation cover. Exploration on the slope was abandoned as soon as it was realised that much of the buried stonework comprised articulated fragments of masonry which would require detailed investigation before they could be dismantled and removed.

Apart from one very eroded fragment of window moulding, no stones were found for which an exact location could be established in the surrounding walls.

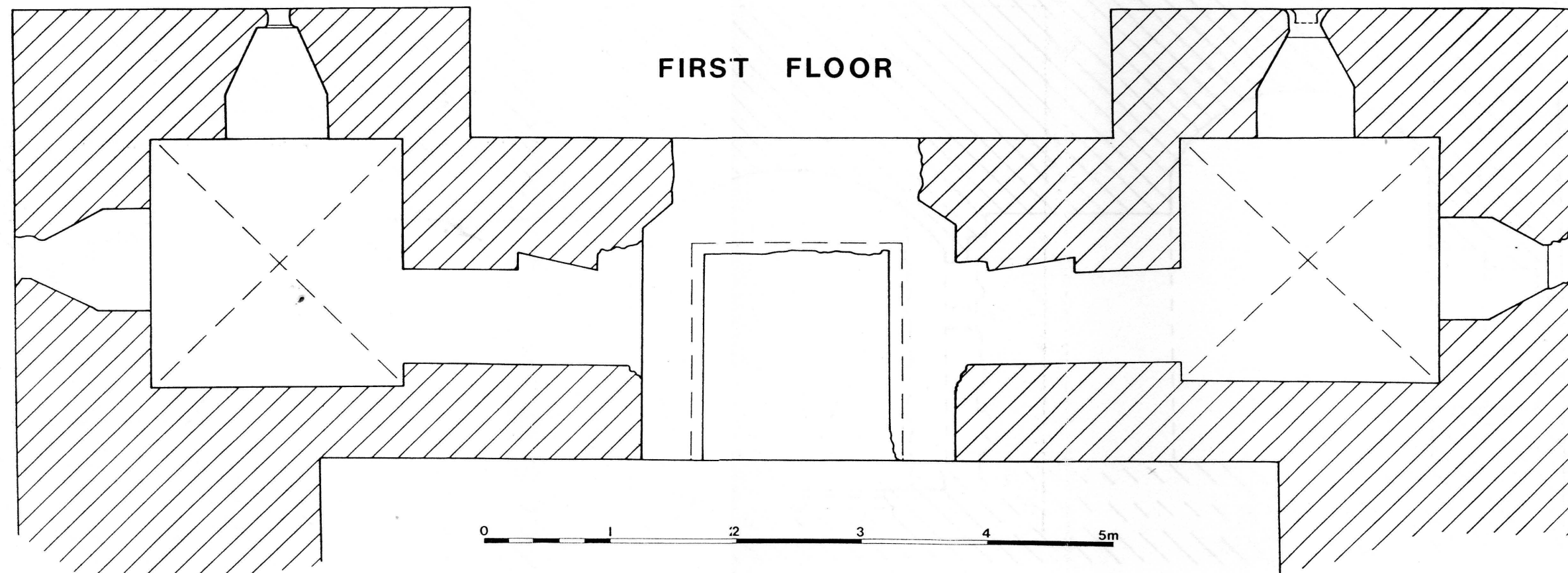
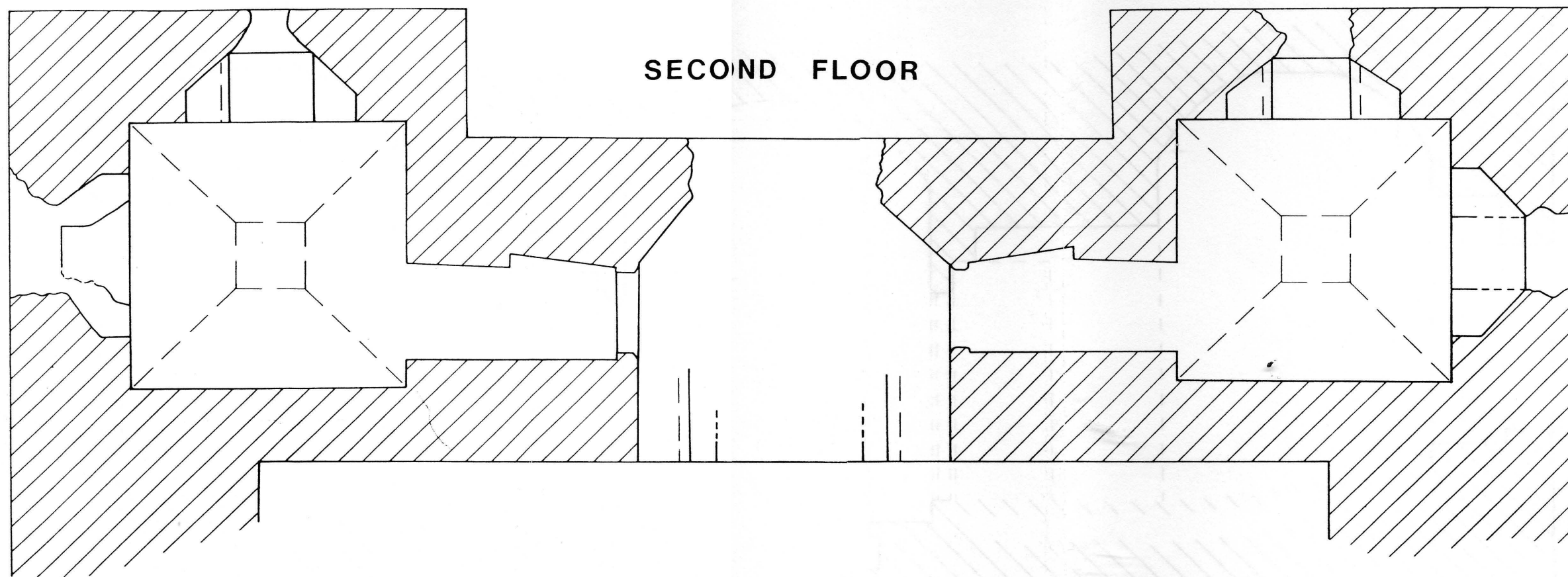
## The Rooms Within The North Wall

A scaffold tower was erected within the keep for a short period of time to allow access to the rooms at first and second floor levels which had been built within the thickness of the north wall of the keep.

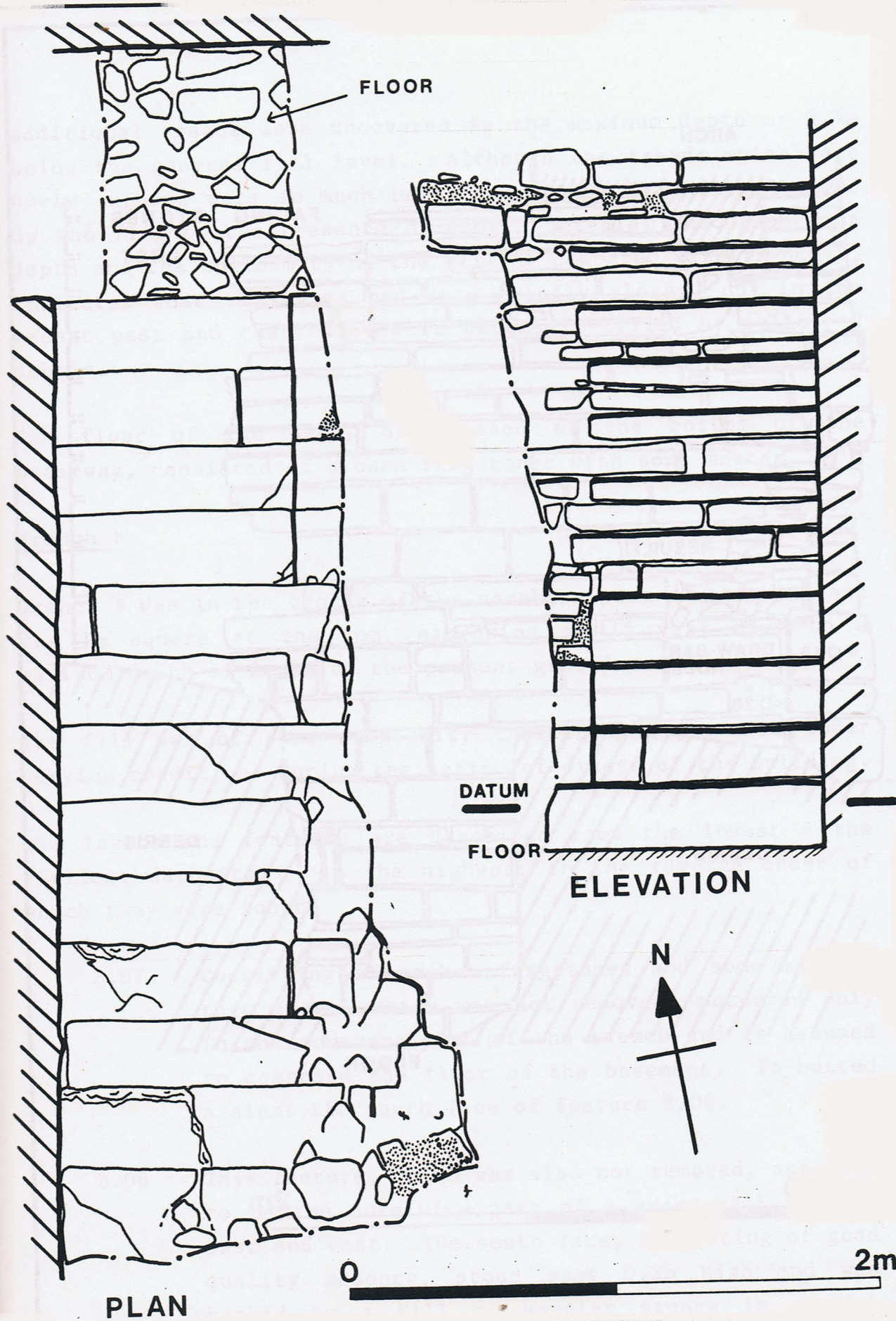
As an addition to the original commission, the Unit produced a set of plans at each level and a composite east-west cross-section through all four rooms. These were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and reduced copies are included in this report.

A detailed description of these rooms will be undertaken when the debris is cleared out during in 1991.



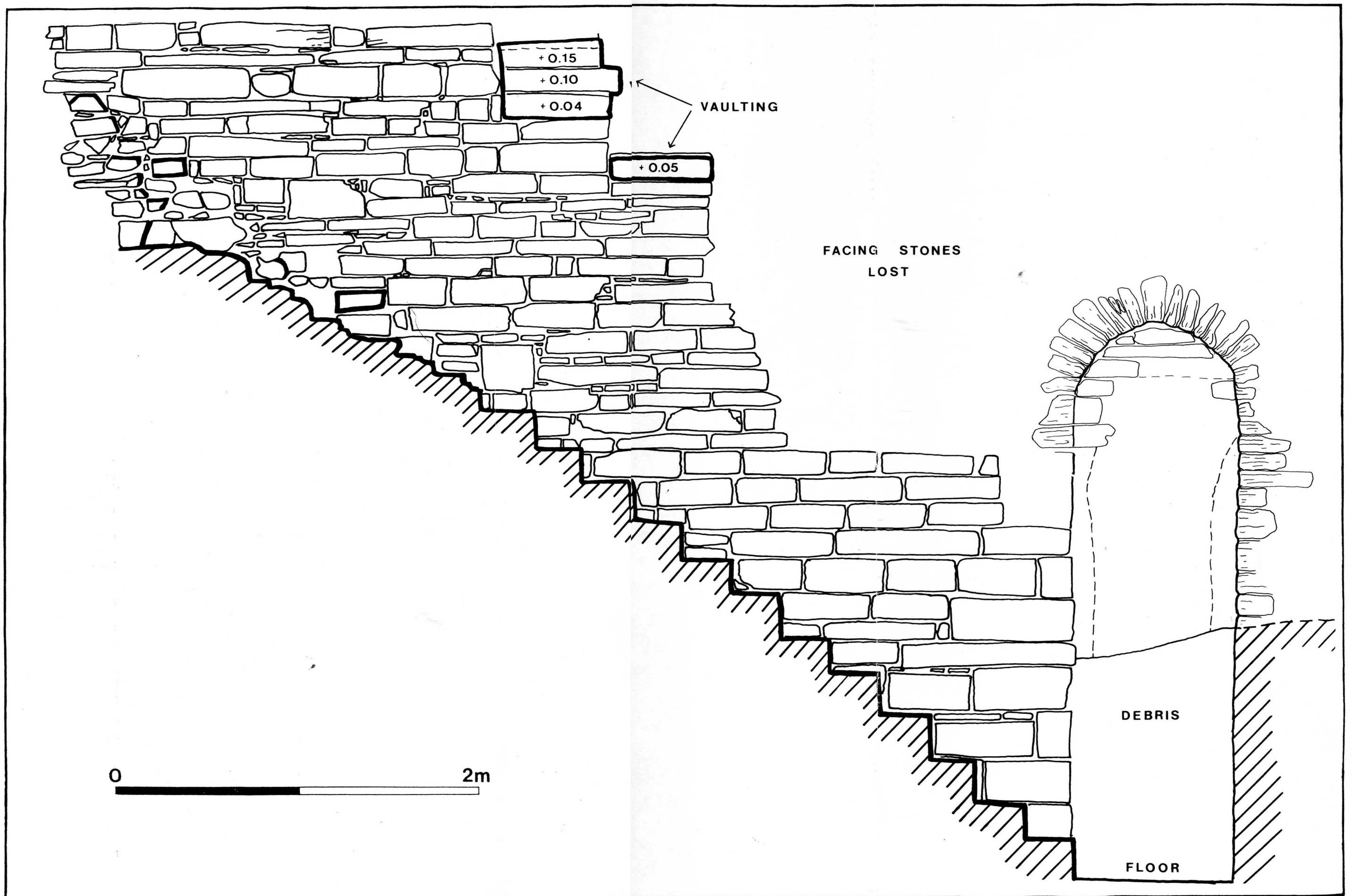


The rooms built in the thickness of the north wall of

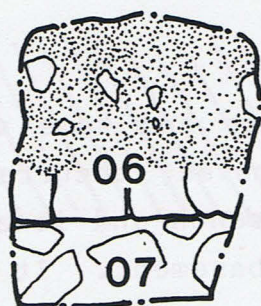
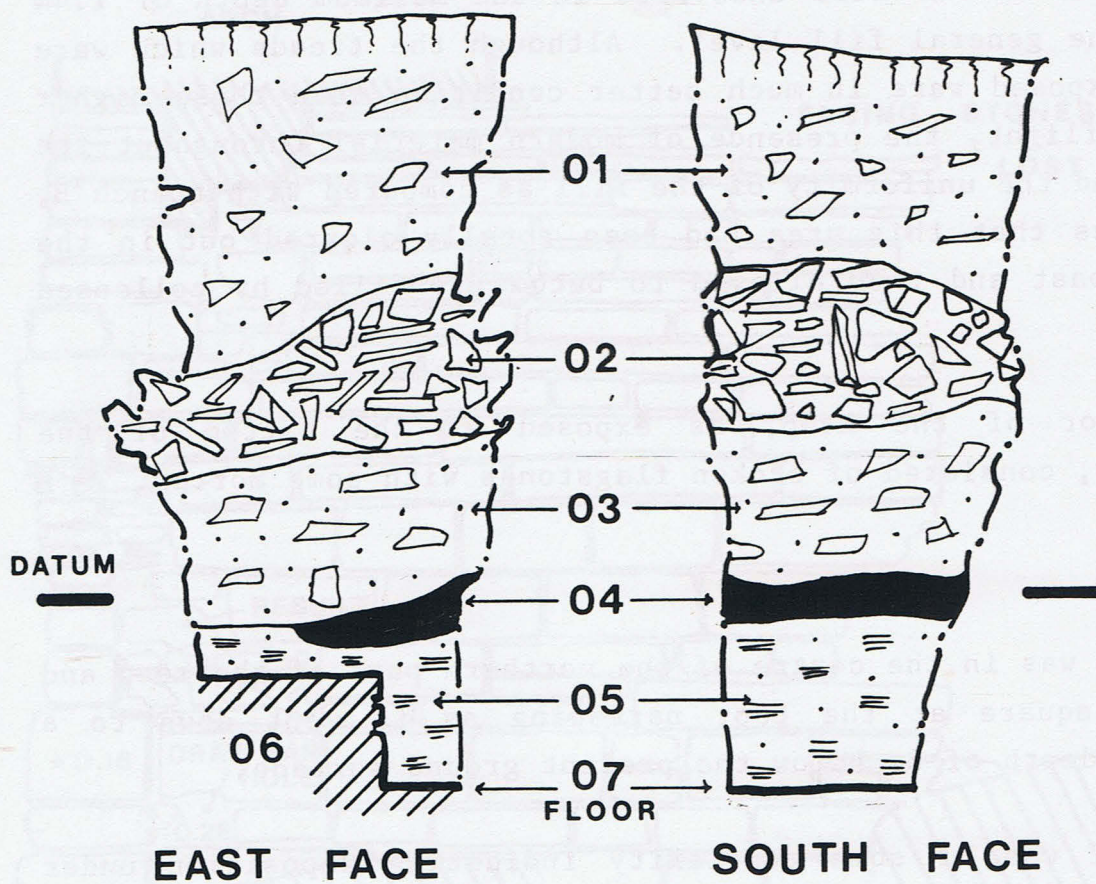


Plan & elevations of steps  
Trench A - Plan & elevation of steps

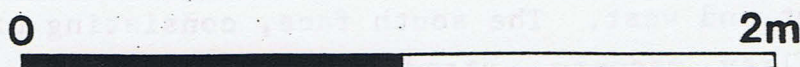




Trench A - West face & steps above

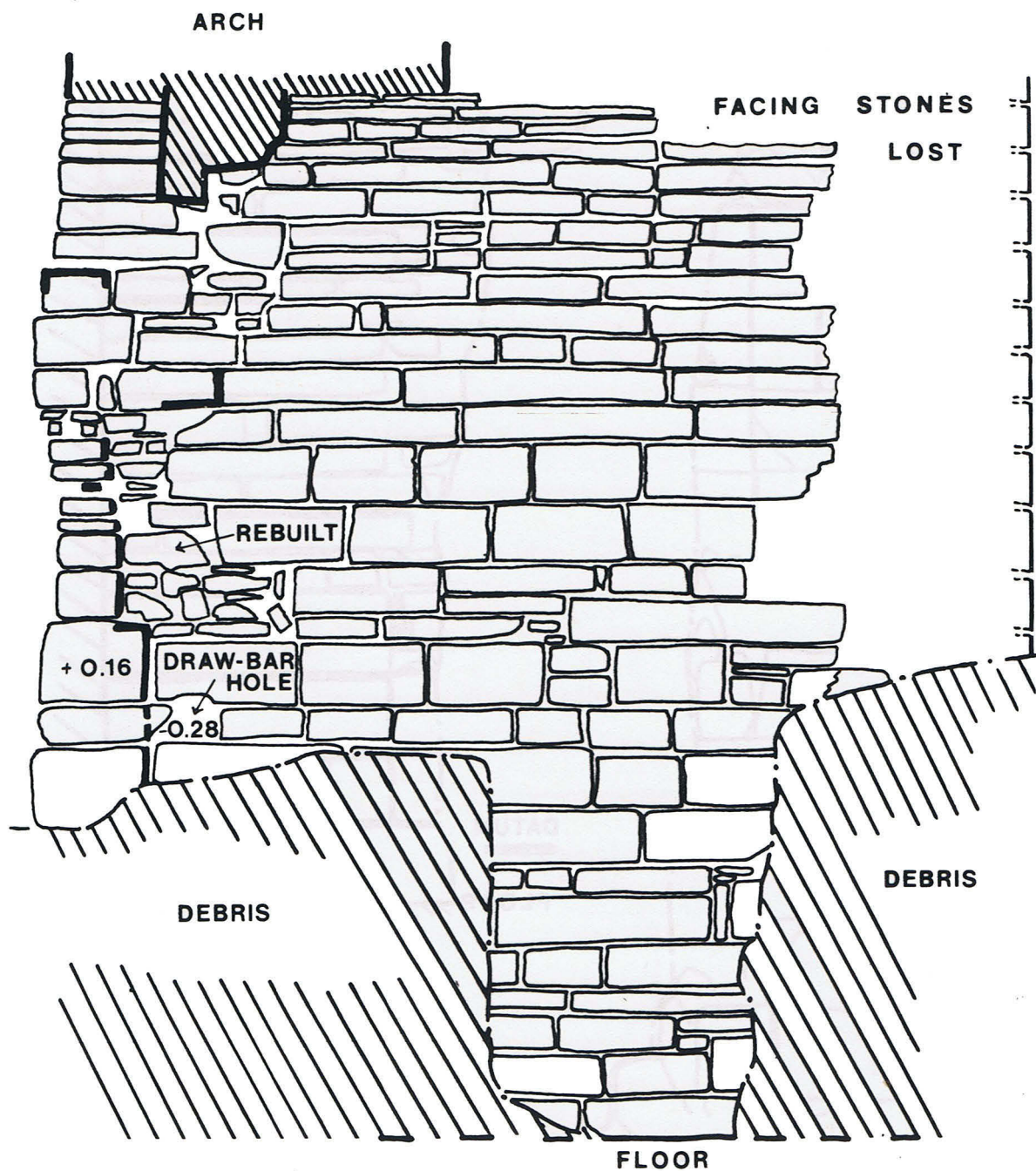


PLAN



Trench B plan & section





0

2m

Trench A - North face & doorway above



### The Evaluation Excavations

The steep slope from the top of the mound into the basement level of the keep creates some difficulty in the eventual display of the monument as many features cannot be seen adequately until the visitor is within the walls. Two possibilities were considered:

- 1        The complete clearance of the floor of the keep and the utilisation of the steps adjoining the western wall which lead down into it.
- 2        The construction of a timber viewing gallery crossing the keep at ground floor level from south to north.

English Heritage commissioned two small evaluation excavations to establish the scale of the problems involved in providing adequate access. Trench A was designed to indicate the potential of opening up the stone staircase, whilst trench B, in the centre of the flat, northern area of the keep, was excavated in order to establish the depth and complexity of the fill in case a central support would be required for the proposed viewing gallery.

#### Trench A

Trench A was 1m wide and some 2.2m long, including the area covering the lower steps. It was excavated against the inset portion of the western wall of the keep. However, it did not include the fill within the narrow doorway leading through the wall nor any part of the main fill of the basement level.

Throughout the depth, the material was a mixture of earth and rubble with 19th and 20th century finds. In all, five



additional treads were uncovered in the maximum depth of 1.4m below the general fill level. Although the treads which were newly exposed were in much better condition than those higher up the flight, the presence of modern material throughout the depth and the uniformity of the fill as compared with trench B, indicates that this area had been totally cleared out in the recent past and then allowed to become re-filled by collapsed debris.

The floor of the keep, as exposed at the bottom of the stairway consisted of broken flagstones with some mortar.

#### Trench B

Trench B was in the centre of the northern part of the keep and was 1m square at the top, narrowing as it went down to a maximum depth of 2m below the present ground surface.

The fill was of some complexity indicating deposition under varying conditions during the period of disuse of the building.

The layers and features are described from the lowest - the earliest deposited - to the highest; in the reverse order of which they were found.

#### B.07

Consisting of broken flagstones and some mortar, this layer, which was not removed, occurred only in the southern part of the trench and is assumed to comprise the floor of the basement. It butted against the south face of feature B.06. This feature, which was also not removed, appeared to be the surviving part of a cross-wall running east and west. The south face, consisting of good quality masonry, stood some 0.3m high and was backed by a fill of angular stones in a rich

mortar fill. The full thickness of this presumed wall could not be established in the confines of this small trench but it is in excess of 0.5m.

B.05 Filling the area between the face of B.06 and the southern edge of the trench and sealing the top of the presumed wall, layer B.05 was a compact light orange clay loam which included some pea-sized gravel.

B.04 The southern part of the flat surface of B.05 was covered with a layer of burnt material with a maximum thickness of 0.1m. Apart from the charcoal, this layer contained several animal bones which did not exhibit signs of being burnt. There were few stones within this layer.

B.03 This was a thick (0.4m), approximately level layer of earth and large angular rubble.

B.02 Above B.03 was a layer of very loose angular rubble with no earth and consequently liable to collapse. The surface sloped downwards to the north and east and the layer varied in thickness from 0.45m to 0.3m.

B.01 The uppermost layer excavated within the trench consisted of relatively small fragments of stone in an earth matrix and varied in thickness from 0.6m to 0.8m.



### Interim Conclusions

It is evident from the limited survey work which has been so far carried out at Clun that , when the Duke of Norfolk purchased the castle in the late 19th century, he spent a fair amount of time and money in refurbishing the ruins and making them safe. The work was carried out by James Anthony of Clun under the general supervision of Mr R Parry of Lydbury North during 1894 and 1895. The extent of the work at higher level] will become apparent as the survey continues in 1991 but the extent of the fill within the rooms in the north wall may well indicate that Mr Anthony did not do a lot of work at this level.

The evaluation excavations have provided a firm indication that much of the basement level of the keep has not been cleared out since the castle was abandoned and that this fill is thus of high archaeological importance. However, it is evident that some clearance has taken place at the bottom of the stairwell. This area was apparently open when visited by G T Clark in preparation for Vol. I of 'Medieval Military Architecture England' (1884) for - he describes the entry from the doorway in the west wall as leading 'into a passage 3ft 6ins broad, which entered the chamber, but had on its left a mural staircase of sixteen steps, which led to the first (ground) floor. Many of the steps remain, but the inner wall, and most of the hanging arches of the vault , are gone'.

An inventory of 1272, on the death of John FitzAlan III, refers to problems associated with the roof of the tower which apparently needed re-covering. Several versions occur , one suggesting that it 'wanted covering in lead' (Anderson, 465 This reference and the lack of any quantity of stone roofing material in the initial debris layers (only one fragment was

found and this in the latest level B.01) may indicate that the roof was timber covered in lead.

### **References**

Anderson, JC, Shropshire: It's Early History and Antiquities.  
(London 1864)

Clark, GT, Medieval Military Architecture in England Volume 1  
(London 1884)

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