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**THE OLD SAIL LOFT,
FORMER WHITEHALL SHIPYARD,
WHITBY,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**



**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
BUILDING SURVEY**

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REPORT ON A BUILDING SURVEY

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the outcome of a limited programme of opening-up and investigation work carried out at the Old Sail Loft, Whitehall Shipyard, Whitby, in October 2002.

The work followed on from the historic buildings assessment produced, as a separate report, in summer 2001: the earlier report should be read in conjunction with this one. As a result of the original assessment a method statement was agreed with The Heritage Unit of North Yorkshire County Council for opening-up and further recording of the fabric following clearance and making safe by contractors; that document is appended to this report.

It appeared from the previous assessment that a substantial amount of fabric of probable pre-17th century date survived in the lower levels of the long east-west range. This range, which is demonstrably earlier than the mid-late 18th century sail loft which forms its northern arm, is lit by windows of c.1700-1750 which, as described in the assessment, are themselves insertions into masonry walls; and the masonry of these walls entirely lacks the herringbone tooling of the later work. The early masonry is confined to the eastern half of the east-west range, much of which was barely accessible in 2001; with clearance of the building in the summer of 2002 further investigation became possible. This consisted of the removal of as much of the internal finish as possible combined with a rectified photography survey of the revealed internal elevations. The original phase plan was then amended (Figure 2).

At the same time the fabric of Spital Bridge itself was examined. The bridge ramp, rather than the bridge itself, is the key topographical feature since the east end of the long range is embedded in it: and the question arises as to whether the range or the ramp is the earlier feature. There is now convincing evidence that the range is older than the present bridge ramp. Taken together with the character of the revealed masonry detailing, described below, there is now a strong presumption in favour of a late medieval origin for the long range.

The records of this work are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the Whitby Museum accession number WHITM:2001.12.

2. THE INVESTIGATION OF THE FABRIC

The internal faces of the lower levels of the north, east, and south walls at the east end of the long range were found to be concealed behind modern concrete block work: this was entirely removed except for a narrow band at floor level; the flooring material in this area is modern concrete. Examination of the topmost plaster finishes revealed that they had been carried up to an inserted, but lost, timber stair: this stair, for which a deep cut had been made into the fabric of the east wall, led to an upper door of 19th century date. The very hard, brown, plaster – not particularly amenable to removal with hand tools – was stripped off in a broad band around the full length of the walls. Beneath it there was a thin skim of cream limewash which apparently had only survived in small areas. As far as possible this material was left undisturbed.

The revealed masonry turned out to be rather varied in character: some of this variation may have been due to repair work. In general it consisted of coursed sandstone rubble although in some areas courses of squared rubble were visible. The bonding material was a coarse, creamy, lime mortar; no brick or tile was seen in a primary position although tile fragments, embedded in a later mortar of a different consistency, had been pushed into it as a key for the 19th century

plaster finish. No absolute dating evidence for this walling material was seen although as noted before the herringbone tooling which is characteristic of post-medieval masonry in Whitby was entirely absent from the squared rubble work.

In the south wall a blocked door was revealed. The door opening is 1.25m wide and its centre line lies 4.90m west of the south-east corner of the building. The inner face of the west jamb of the door was further exposed by removal of some of the blocking material; it turned out to be of ashlar finished with fine diagonal tooling made with a bolster chisel. The door passed directly through the wall – that is, there was no splay – but unfortunately could not be opened up as far as the outer opening without risking collapse. In 1740, the date of a survey by Wooler (Figure 1), a short south wing existed beyond the door which might have been entered from this room. The doorway is now below the external ground level; an external ground level which is itself controlled by the level of the bridge ramp to the east, to which it rises. No other Phase I openings, blocked or otherwise, were seen.

The blocking material is of massive squared rubble finished with deeply incised herringbone tooling. The head of the door was removed and an internal timber lintel and an external segmental brick arch constructed when the upper storey of the range was replaced in brick: probably in the late 17th or early 18th century. The blocking itself presumably post-dates the demolition of the south wing shown on the 1740 survey. Subsequently a hearth and a flue had been made against the base of the blocked door: a few surviving courses of the flue are suspended, rather perilously, at eaves level but all other traces have been removed. The fire was evidently an intense one as the sandstone blocks have been severely reddened and eroded. It may have been an industrial furnace; perhaps for metalworking. The flue and the uppermost three courses of the south wall are of herring-bone tooled masonry very similar in character to that of the mid-18th century north range of the sail loft.

Examination of Spital Bridge revealed an interesting situation. The bridge consists of a round-headed masonry arch under a hoodmould; the inner faces of the bridge are constructed in long, low, courses of masonry showing clear signs of herringbone tooling. Further masonry, revetting the banks of Spital Beck, and identical in character to that of the mid-late 18th century sail loft which forms a north range to the building, makes a very definite butt joint against the south side of the east elevation of Spital Bridge. Since, as already described, the construction of the ramp to this bridge led eventually to the blocking of a doorway of possible pre-Dissolution date, the sequence of events appears to be as follows:

Phase I	<i>Late medieval ?</i>	<i>Construction of the ground floor of the east end of the long east-west range; and perhaps of a short south wing shown in the Wooler survey of 1740</i>
Phase II	<i>Late 17th - mid 18th century</i>	<i>Construction of Spital Bridge; raising, or replacement, in brick, of upper storey of range</i>
Phase III	<i>before 1778</i>	<i>Construction of the sail loft to form a north range to the earlier building; demolition of south wing, blocking of Phase I south doorway, and sealing of blocked doorway by extension to bridge ramp; construction of hearth and flue against blocking of doorway; revetting of south bank of Spital Beck to make a butt joint against Spital Bridge</i>

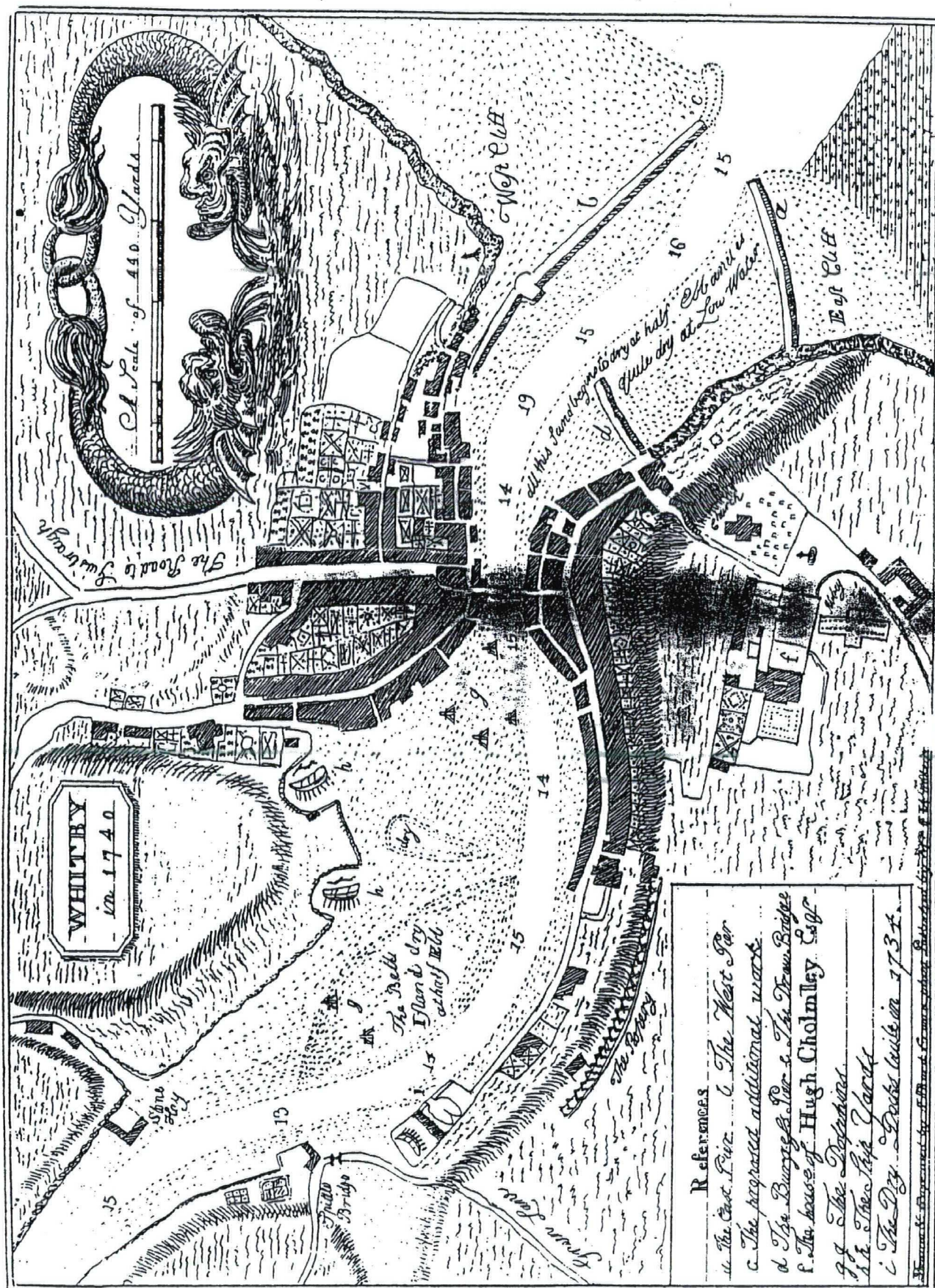


Figure 1. Wooller's plan of Whitby c.1740



Figure 2 Sketch plan showing phasing of ground plan of Old Sail Loft



Plate 1. **North wall, eastern end, interior, 1:20**

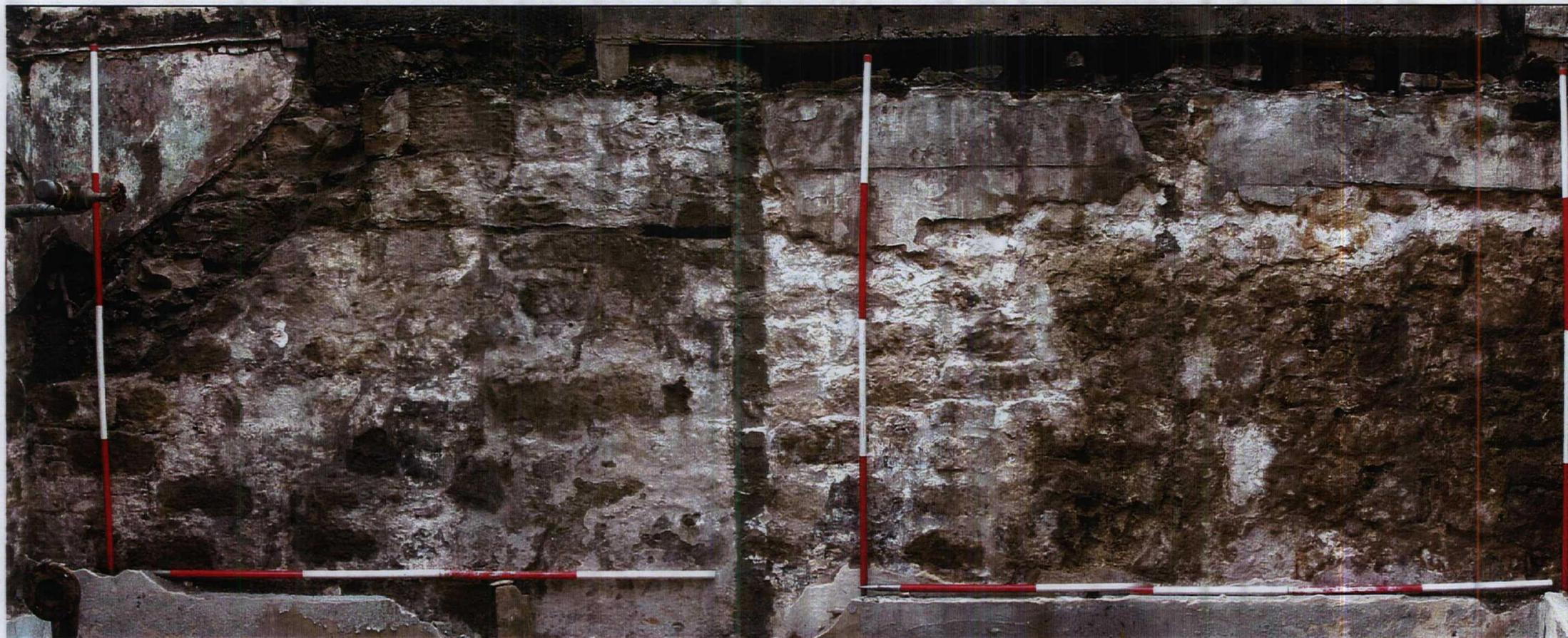


Plate 2. **East wall, interior, 1:20**

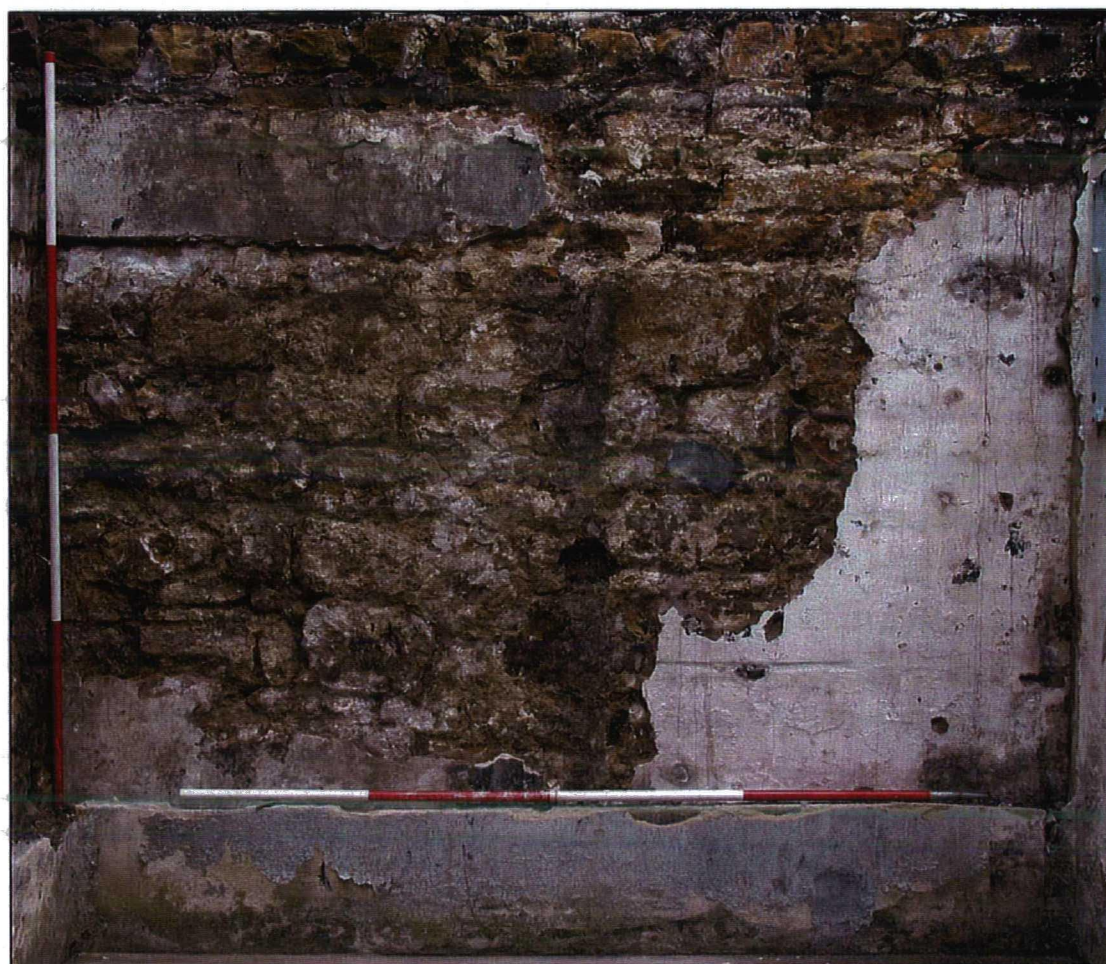


Plate 3. **South wall, bay 1, interior, 1:20**



Plate 4. **South wall, bay 2, interior, 1:20**

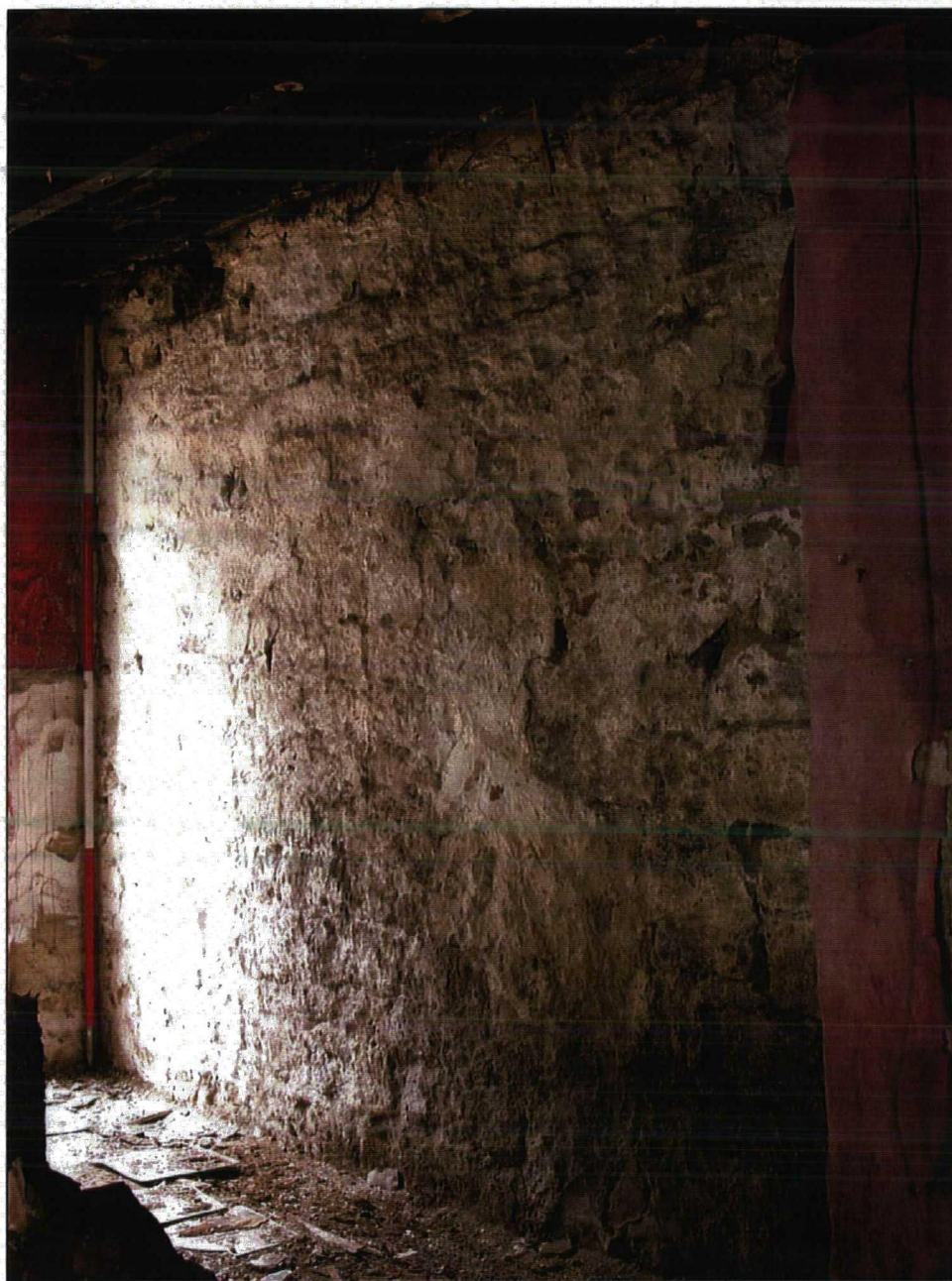


Plate 5. South wall, bay 3, interior, not to scale



Plate 6. South wall, bay 4, interior, 1:20

3. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that a *certain* identification of the earliest part of the Old Sail Loft with the Hospital of St John the Baptist cannot be made: nevertheless the combination of fabric of probable late medieval date with reasonably secure documentary evidence which places the hospital on this site is a telling one. The absence of other openings in the south wall of the range at ground floor level is interesting, and surely implies the existence of an upper storey – probably in timber frame – over what may have been a storeroom. The former extent of the range in a westward direction cannot now be ascertained as the two bays at that end are evidently of Phase III date (Figure 2); as noted in the earlier report this may in fact represent a shortening of the Phase I structure. The Wooler map certainly implies a long building reaching to the tidal foreshore from which it was presumably protected by a retaining wall; a building on the same line as the long range was revealed in Trench 5 of the 2001 excavations, placed to the west of the present gable end, and turned out to have precisely the footprint of the structure shown in the 1740 survey (Figure 3). Interestingly it incorporated a re-used moulded stone of late medieval date.

The relative dating of the long range, of the bridge ramp (and presumably of the bridge itself), and of the late 18th century sail loft is more definite although it does rest largely upon an examination of masonry tooling techniques. More information about the relationship of the bridge ramp to the long range would be welcome. Refurbishment of this interesting building may in time reveal further evidence which will help to refine the dating and function of its various phases.

4. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Building survey and report	Colin Briden
Photography	Graham Moore
Plan	Russell Marwood
Editor	David Brinklow

APPENDIX

THE OLD SAIL LOFT SPITAL BRIDGE

WHITBY

Brief and Method Statement for opening-up and building recording work

1. This document sets out the work necessary to fulfil a planning condition on development by Harrison Construction of the former Whitehall Shipyard, Whitby, North Yorkshire.
2. The archaeological work is to be confined to the Old Sail Loft, a Grade II listed building. This structure lies on the south side of the Spital Beck and overlooks the Upper Harbour.
3. The Old Sail Loft is the subject of a previous report which identified it, in part, as an early 18th century remodelling of older fabric and in part as new build of the later 18th century. It was considered at the time of this previous investigation that elements of the mediaeval hospital of St John the Baptist, which is known to have occupied this site, may have survived in the lower levels of the east-west range. Following recent clearance of the fire damaged roof and floor structures a brief investigation was carried out in September 2002 and the evidence for pre-17th century masonry confirmed.
4. It is proposed to confine further investigation to the inner faces of the external walls at the east end of the east-west range: here, early masonry, apparently in good condition, is preserved behind modern cavity walls, timber cladding, and plaster finishes. This is a relatively safe area of the Old Sail Loft: relevant health and safety issues are dealt with in the accompanying Risk Assessment.
5. All 20th century concrete block skins, claddings, and earlier plaster finishes will be removed by hand: no power tools will be used. The rubble will be cleared away from the immediate vicinity of the external walls to reveal as much as possible of the elevations.
6. The walls will be cleaned down with brushes and other tools, where appropriate, and photographed with standard metric scales. If practicable rectified photography at a scale of 1:20 will be used. Selected details such as blocked window and door openings will be drawn by hand.
7. The phase plan reproduced in the earlier report will be amended if necessary.
8. A short written report, expanding the conclusions of the earlier document, will be produced.
9. The final report, photographs, and any drawings will be submitted to NYCC Heritage Unit within six weeks of the conclusion of the fieldwork.