93 71 Exeter City Wall : fabric recording of civil-war-period remodellations adj
Trinity Lane, Exeter.

EXETER CITY WALL
FABRIC RECORDING OF CIVIL-WAR-PERIOD CRENELLATIONS AT TRINITY LANE EXETER, 1992

by

S.R. Blaylock

Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit

Report No. 93.71

November 1993

Contents

List of illustrations

INTRODUCTION

During the fieldwork for a fabric survey of the city wall of Exeter in the summer of 1991 a run of crenellations was observed in the parapet of the first section of wall in Trinity Lane, immediately after the breach in the wall caused by the demolition of the South Gate and associated structures in 1819. The relationships of the parapet to the main fabric of the wall below and to each side; the materials employed (a high proportion of Permian sandstone, a stone which occurs only in Civil-War period work elsewhere in the circuit of the defences), and the position in relation to the South Gate all suggest that this feature was constructed as a part of the improvements to the fortifications of Exeter in the 1640s (Juddery *et al.* 1988, viii-ix; Stoyle 1990, 3-7). The crenellations were blocked by later work and poorly defined (Blaylock 1993(b), 38). Although the features were described in the fabric survey of 1991 and recorded in photographs in the same year (cf. Pls 1 & 2, below), a drawing remained the best means of illustrating the crenellations. Accordingly in 1992, during a phase of work on the city wall in the area of Lower Coombe Street (to the south-west), some time was set aside for the production of an outline elevation of this area.

The work was done in two days in November 1992, using a portable scaffolding tower. A length of about 25m of wall was drawn in an outline style that has proved effective in other, similar, recording projects; at a scale of 1:50. Structural breaks, and features within the masonry were plotted although no details of masonry style or composition can be shown adequately at such a scale. Sufficient of the later wall-builds to either side was also drawn to set the area in context (29m total length). The purpose of the drawing was, primarily, to illustrate the position and extent of the crenellated parapet, and to serve to amplify the photographs of the elevation which, alone, formed an insufficient record of the features (confusing masonry style, pointing and vegetation all combine to reduce the effectiveness of photographs alone).

Context

The stretch of wall, 24.5m in total, is now abutted by a 19th-century boundary wall. This point, the south-west end of the build, lies some 32m from the central axis of the South Gate, as plotted by the Ordnance Survey (1:500 survey of 1876, sheet 6.22). The gate, the length of city wall to the north-east, the medieval church of the Holy Trinity and, presumably, a section of earth rampart to the rear of the wall, were removed in 1819 during the improvement of South Street (Cresswell 1908, 51). A new church of the Holy Trinity was constructed further to the north-east in 1820 (architect Cornish & Sons, built by John Kendall of Exeter; the church is now a social club). The south-east corner of the new church abuts the rear face of the city wall (below). Comparison of the present structures and property boundaries with the situation prior to 1819 (as shown, for example, on the Exeter Chamber Map Book of 1758: DRO/Exeter City Archives/58 fo.14) suggests that the new church may have been built within the limits (at least on the NE-SW axis) of the existing property to the east, identified as a garden belonging to the prison on the Chamber Map Book. This is shown in approximately the same position on the present north-east limit of Holy Trinity yard. Whilst rampart survives behind the wall further to the north-east, it may be that alterations to this garden had already been the cause of its removal by 1758.

DESCRIPTION

Main build of wall

The main build of the wall (external elevation) stands *c.* 4m above the present ground level. No plinth is visible so the original height may have been somewhat greater. It is built of up to 23 courses of well-squared blocks of volcanic trap, vesicular in texture and pale grey to purple in colour. Many of the blocks are weathered. The fabric itself must be of medieval date as it contains putlog holes, a technique which does not appear in the Roman wall; and there are isolated blocks of white Triassic sandstone which is also foreign to the Roman builds. Nevertheless the materials could well be derived from collapsed Roman masonry re-used directly in a medieval rebuilding.

Although the masonry is all of one construction there are two breaks in the fabric: one at *c.* 5.5m into the build (measuring from the south-west limit), where up to eight courses of smaller and more

weathered blocks form a discrete area at the base of the wall (cf. Pl. 1(a)); the second represents a change in the coursing (and, again, in the durability of the material) and occurs at approximately 17m from the beginning of the build (represented by a line on Fig. 1; cf. Pl. 2(a)).

The facework is riddled with inserted features, patches of late masonry, or brick blocking and joist sockets for the lodging of structures against the face of the wall. Although these were recorded on the drawing, and many are visible on the photographs (Pls 1 & 2), no further attempt to describe and interpret these features was made.

The 19th-century boundary wall which abuts the build to the south-west has already been mentioned. This is later than the construction of the church and is presumed to form a part of structures fronting onto Trinity Lane; as seen, for example, in the OS Town Plan of 1876 (1:500 scale). To the north-east the medieval facework and the later parapet are cut away, the breach being filled with a build of small rubble of post-medieval date (Blaylock 1993(b), 38).

Parapet

The parapet build survives for a total length of 21.5m and is clearly cut away at each end (i.e. it formerly continued in both directions). As it survives it is represented by the remains of nine broad merlons (typically 1.5-1.8m wide) and as many embrasures which, characteristically, are narrow in relation to the merlons.

The top of the medieval build below is levelled up with between two and four courses of new masonry (0.6m) before the sill level of the embrasures. The parapet steps up from south-west to north-east, the merlons stepping up in pairs (or a set of three, in the case of the third group). This presumably reflected an incline in the natural ground, and the top of the rampart within the wall.

The parapet is constructed of re-used blocks of volcanic stone and Triassic sandstone with the introduction of Permian sandstone as a new, and predominant, material. No brick is certainly attributable to this build: although there is plentiful brick in the later blocking of the embrasures (the 1640s would be slightly too early for routine construction in brick in Exeter, according to what is known of the use of brick in other buildings in the city). Each merlon is constructed with substantial blocks forming the quoins, and smaller blocks, semi-coursed, filling the remainder of the facework. The greatest height to which a merlon survives above the sill of the adjacent embrasure is 0.7m (in the third 'pair' of crenellations). No coping survives, so the original may have been slightly taller with coping blocks. The first and fourth 'pairs' of merlons do not survive to their full original height.

Blocking of the Parapet

A heightening build of mixed stone, rubble and brick filling the embrasures of the previous build, and levelling up the top of the wall. Some damage had taken place to the crenellations before the construction of this later parapet – see especially the sixth embrasure from the south-west which is broken away down to the top of the medieval wall.

This work is probably contemporary with the construction of Holy Trinity Church, and therefore is early 19th century, although the fabric of the church appears to abut the rear face of the raised parapet. The parapet steps up by 2m at the junction of the yard of Holy Trinity with the adjacent property of the convent (formerly the Archdeacon of Exeter's house). The boundary is joined by the earlier builds although it is also the ward boundary and has been identified as the ancient boundary of the Cathedral Close (Lega-Weekes 1915, 109). The vertical face is formed of large breccia (Heavitree stone) blocks, the parapet slopes down over the next 4m to be replaced with a new build (up to 2m high over the rubble facework to the north-east) of 19th- or 20th-century date.

Rear elevation

The rear elevation (Pl. 2(b)) was not drawn. The face is cut back and is no more than *c.* 0.7m thick (Fig. 1, Section A). The entire rear face post-dates the Civil War work of the exterior (except for two traces of embrasures at the south-west end: below) and is thus probably 18th- or 19th-century in date, most probably a part of the reconstruction of the church in 1820, although that structure abuts the rear face. Some ancient core work survives within the boundary wall with the convent (and is visible there beneath a flight of steps leading to the top of the wall) (Lyster 1913, Fig. 5). Towards the south-west end of the rear face two blocked embrasures survive amongst the later facework, with the same volcanic and Permian sandstone mixture as is seen on the outside; and similar brick infill (Pl. 2(b)). These are probably traces of the first and second embrasures as seen on the exterior.

DISCUSSION

The South Gate was the principal entrance to the city; the area between the South and East Gates the easiest of approach and, thus, the most in need of additional defences; especially when threatened by siege and artillery attack. It is entirely to be expected that some traces of additional fortification from the Civil War would survive in this quarter of the defences. That such a survival takes the form of crenellations is of particular interest as few of these features survive on the circuit (recent work has identified further candidates in Rougemont Gardens and, possibly, near the Water Gate: Blaylock 1993(a), 1, 22). A number of smaller features of the period, probably gun loops, have been noted elsewhere, but this is one of the first features in the fabric which is presumably to be identified with artillery defences. Of course much is known of other elements in the very elaborate defences of the city during the Civil War: from documentary sources and from excavation. The medieval bastions were converted for service as artillery platforms by being filled with earth (Burrow 1977, 36); and wholly earth batteries were created at certain points, whose subsequent removal has left no trace (Stoyle 1992, ii-iii and Fig. 4). Excavations have yielded a partial picture of the elaborate and extensive system of earthwork defences between the South and East Gates of Exeter (Egan 1989, 29-32; *idem* 1990, 161-3). All these activities form a part of the intensive efforts put into the defence of the city, on which very large sums of money were laid out, more than £4,300 in 1642-3 alone (Juddery *et al.* 1988, ix).

Nevertheless this small exercise in observation and recording has yielded new information, showing that new work was added to the walls. As such this adds a little to the overall picture of the nature of the Civil-War defences of Exeter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work was carried out in November 1992 by Paul Pearce and Aidan Matthews, funded by Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit. Description and photography had already been done by the author in 1991. The inked drawing was made by Paul Pearce. The report has been produced by Pam Wakeham (word processing), Gary Young (photography) and Tom Dixon (production).

Thanks are due to Mark Stoyle, Tony Collings and Chris Henderson for discussion arising from this work. I am also grateful to the management of the White Ensign Club (the present occupiers of Holy Trinity Church) for granting access to the rear of the wall on several occasions.

This report has been prepared in the context of an English Heritage and Exeter City Council-sponsored project on Exeter's city wall.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blaylock, S.R. 1993 (a) *Exeter City Defences A Fabric Survey of the City Wall Part II The Interior* Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit Report No. 93.65.

------ 1993 (b) *Exeter City Defences A Fabric Survey of the City Wall Part I The Exterior.* Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit Report No. 93.66.

Burrow, I. 1977 'The Town Defences of Exeter' *Rep. Trans. Devonshire Ass.* **109**, 13-40.

Cresswell, B.F. 1908 *Exeter Churches Notes on the History, Fabric and Features of Interest in the Churches of the Deanery of Christianity, Devon.*

Egan, G. 1989 'Post Medieval Britain in 1988, 2. Military and Naval Earthworks and Structures' *Post Medieval Archaeol.* **23**, 29-38.

------ 1990 'Post Medieval Britain in 1989. 2. Military and Naval Earthworks and Structures' *Post Medieval Archaeol.* **24**, 160-171.

Juddery, J.Z, Stoyle, M.J. & Thomas, P. 1988 *Exeter City Defences Expenditure on the Walls and Gates Recorded in the Receivers' Accounts 1600-1650.* Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit Report No. 88.15.

Lega-Weekes, E. 1915 *Some Studies in the Topography of the Cathedral Close, Exeter.*

Lyster, C.B. 1913 'Exeter City Wall as it was originally built', *Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries* **7**, 161-71.

Stoyle, M.J. 1990 *The Civil War Defences of Exeter and the Great Parliamentary Siege of 1645-46* Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit Report No. 90.26.

------ 1992 *Documentary Evidence for the Civil War Defence of Exeter, 1642-43* Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit Report No. 92.10

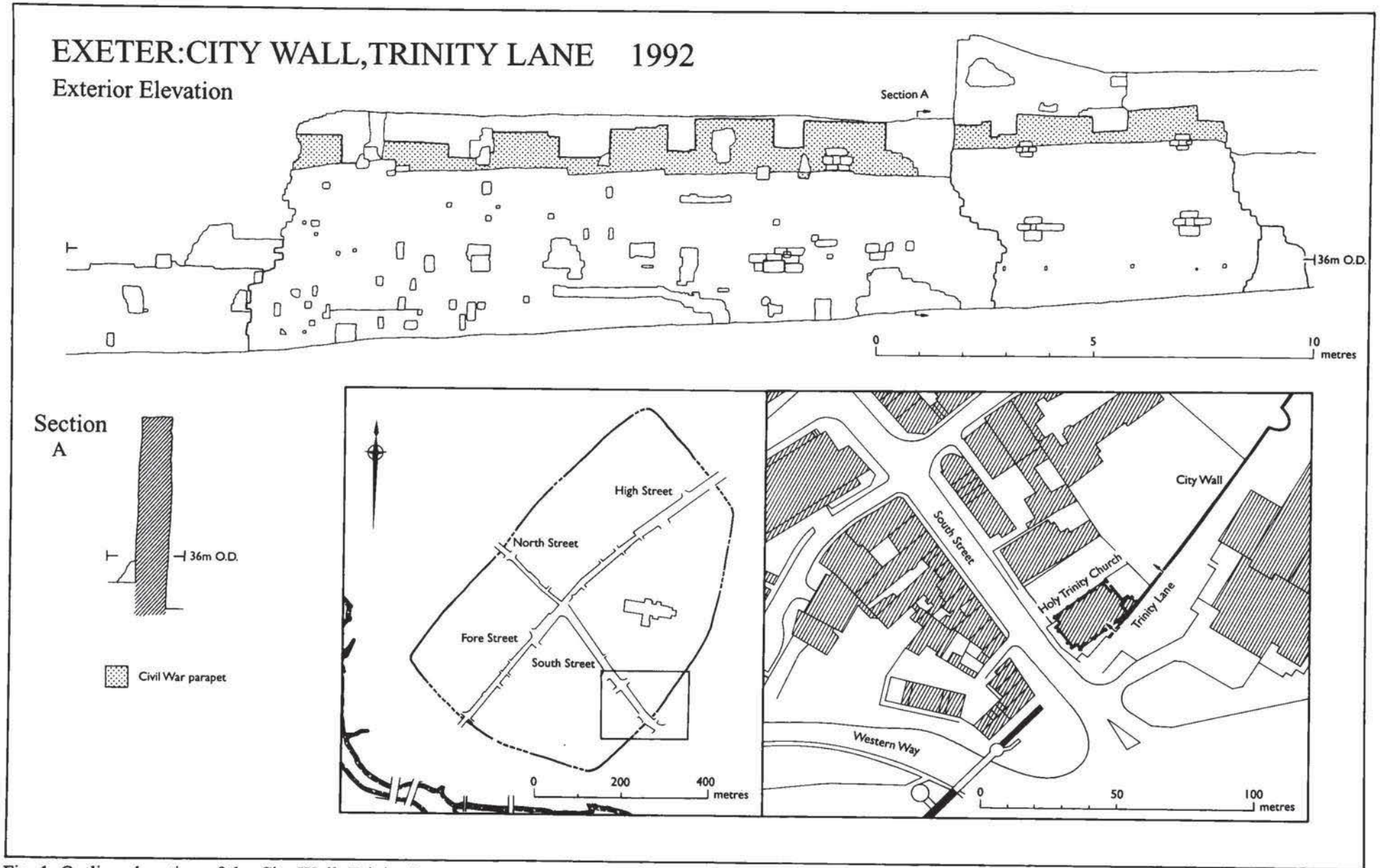

Fig. 1 Outline elevation of the City Wall, Trinity Lane.

Fig. 1.

Plate 1(a) External elevation, south-west.

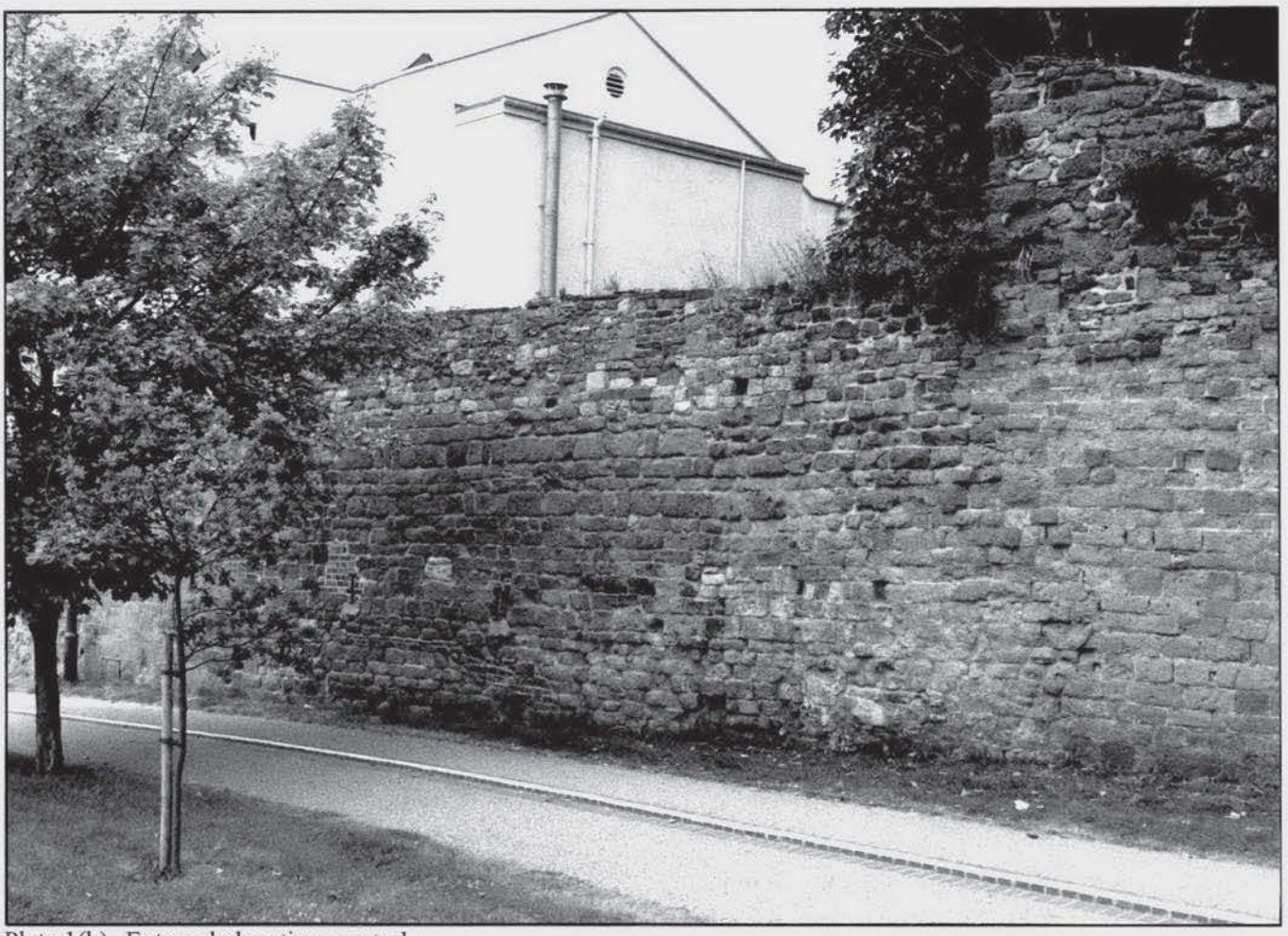

Plate 1(b) External elevation, central.

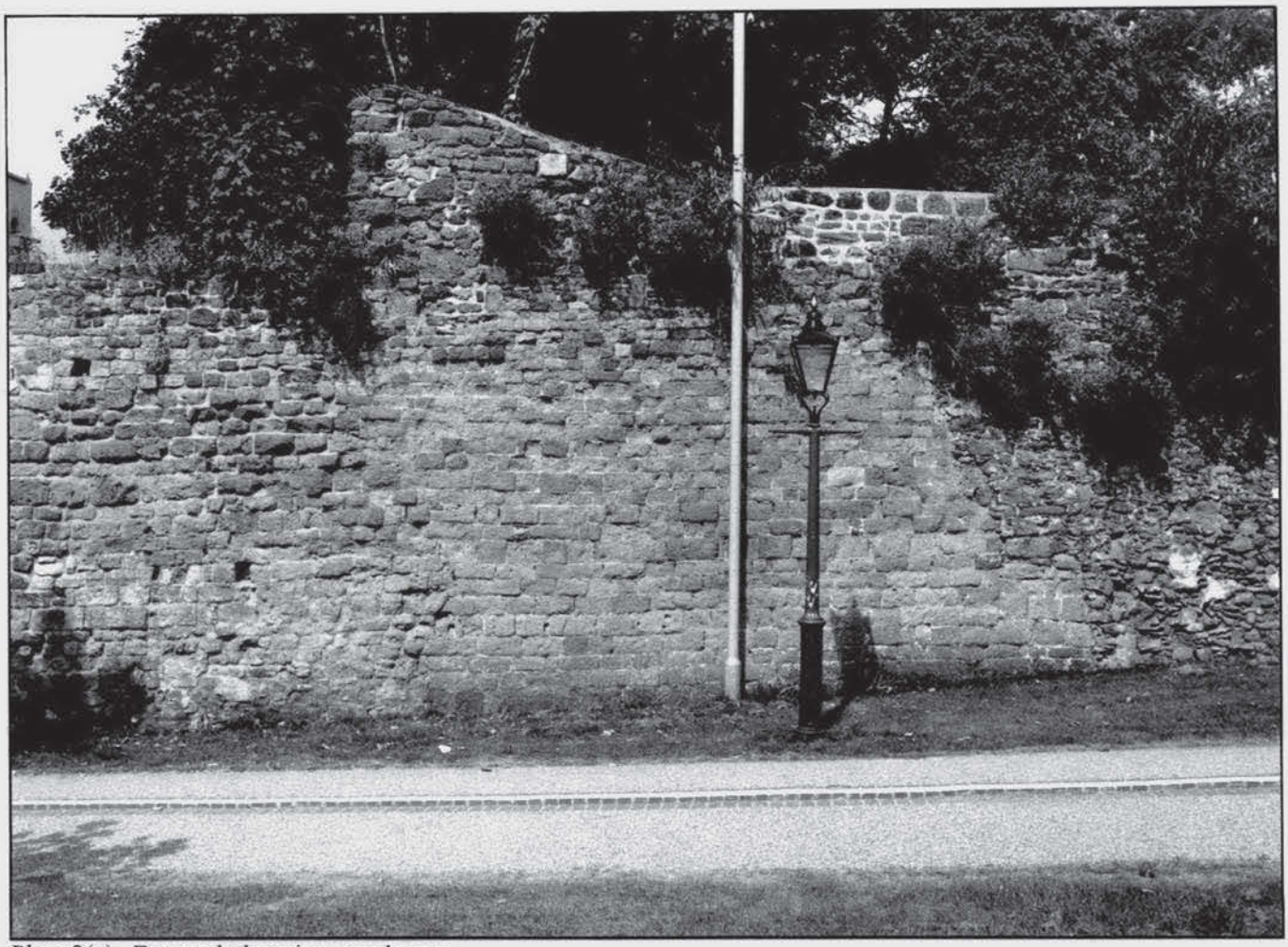

Plate 2(a) External elevation, north-east.

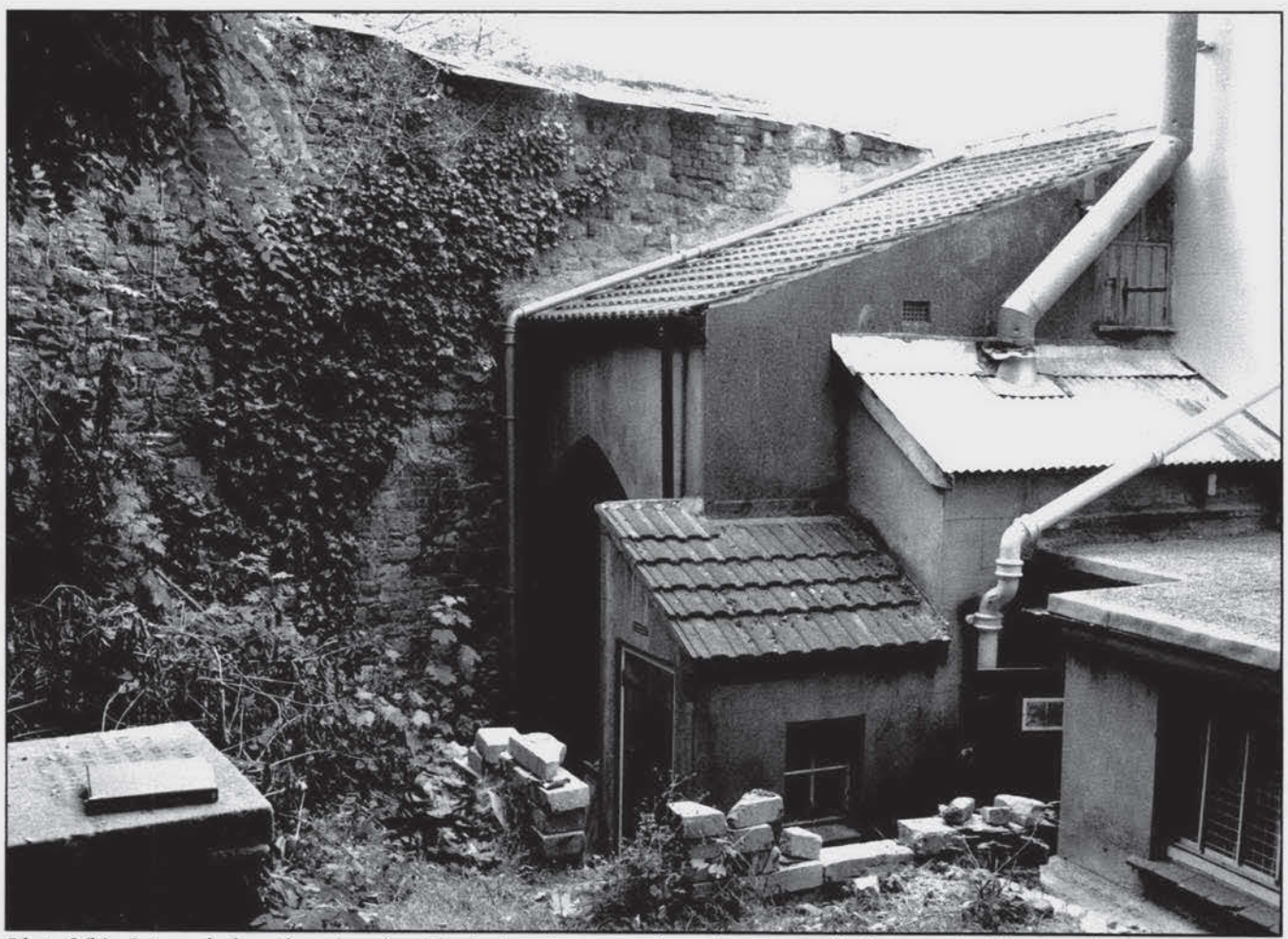

Plate 2(b) Internal elevation showing blocked embrasures above lean-to roof of vestry, looking south.